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Creating Programmatic Change Through Grant Development

How grants can lead the way to programmatic change

By Jeremy Riley, MA, Grants Development Coordinator at CHI Memorial Hospital



Productivity guru Stephen R. Covey made famous the concept that we ought to “begin with the end in mind.” Meaning, prior to the launch of any day, task, or project, we ought to relay a clear vision for our desired outcome. In healthcare philanthropy, stewarding the trust of donors and serving the patients who benefit from philanthropic giving is our end in mind. In philanthropy in general, the intentions and desires of the donor rightfully take center stage. Grant writing is certainly no different from the stewardship of annual or major gifts. The process of how to effectively pursue grant funding is what separates this vital fundraising resource from other avenues of funding.

Ask any grant professional, and they will likely have a story to share where a programmatic leader generally asks for grant funding for a project. Whether it is new carpet, new equipment, or funding to cover an operational deficit, grants are often little understood tools within the toolbox of philanthropy. As someone who entered into the grant writing role closer to serendipity than purpose, I wish to share a roadmap that ought to help provide a bit of clarity on the grantwriters’ role within the fundraising team.

As finances tighten across industries like nonprofit healthcare, resourcefulness allows

for programs to move beyond stabilization to effectiveness. Grant funding is an excellent avenue to begin the process of advancing new and innovative programs and projects through a few practical manners. Grants can elevate a program, moving a particular program or service from ordinary to extraordinary. They can cover the operational cost of a vital, new staff member or pay for the expansion of a new medical procedure. Before the dreams of an overworked and underfunded philanthropy staff can be made reality, it's best to begin with the end in mind—your long-term goal—and then plan for it.

Develop a Plan

When an opportunity presents itself in a government or private foundation grant solicitation, it requires philanthropy and program leadership to meet together and process a pathway for a project. Just as in any relationship, setting boundaries is healthy and good for both parties. Similarly, having this important conversation with curiosity and a copy of the request for proposal will certainly help as you aim to set forth clear expectations, assignments, and a workable timeline. Ensuring the project fits within the scope of the mission and is indeed a priority of the organization will save a tremendous amount of frustration down the road. Seeking funding for a major pediatric project when there is no operational support to sustain the project after the end of the grant lifecycle will lead to the project's inevitable demise. Grant funding helps to move an organization in the direction they want to go as the icing on the proverbial cake, instead of the only driver and sustainer of a project.

When developing a grant proposal, it is important to get the right people involved. This includes relevant leadership in administration, finance, legal and compliance, and subject matter experts in the field. Having the right people will allow multifaceted perspectives to consider the full scope of the proposal and the inevitable reporting requirements. Some private or corporate foundations might

require minimal reporting while other grantor organizations might require more detailed reports. Looking at the reporting requirements ahead of a submission will sometimes warrant a broader discussion within the organization to discuss whether it is worth pursuing a large funding opportunity. I can personally attest that sometimes it's just not worth the pursuit of funding when there are meticulous demands tied to a grant. We all make mistakes; however, the returning of grant money is not a pleasant one to make.

Stay Organized to Avoid Last Minute Stress

As every hero has a nemesis and every sports team has a main rival, the potential foe for anyone who pursues a grant is the looming deadline. While major gift solicitations and annual gift appeals might have more flexible deadlines, a June 15 deadline comes to a close at 5 pm whether you have an itemized budget or not. For many organizations, a sprint to the finish can become a likely scenario.

In order to minimize the risk of the preventable mad rush to the end, allowing for enough time to develop a cohesive strategy, a compelling case statement, thoughtful logic model, and a viable budget, it is necessary to identify your team who will help bring you over the finish line.

Submit Well-Written, Data-Driven Proposals

Within my work in healthcare fundraising, my organization has compelling projects that are effective in its scope of work complete with knowledgeable project leads. Not every project or nonprofit has this on demand, that is why it is important to create case statements for your project(s). This particular tactic will help inform the strategy to further the effectiveness of a nonprofit's reach, as all the necessary pieces for soliciting gifts can be housed in one central document. This includes demographics for a program, budget, implementation timelines, logic models, and other vital pieces of information that can be readily used for grant applications. The benefit of this approach is that

most grant application questions will require information that has already been considered, thus reducing one less barrier for grant submissions. Not only will grant writers benefit, but major gift officers, annual fund coordinators, and planned giving staff will all benefit from a case statement with stats, throughout needs, and plenty of information for most donor related questions.

Pursuing and securing grants is best for an organization when it is considered as an avenue for furthering the expansion of a program. In my experience, grant funds can be viewed as offsetting the cost of the effort, whether it is a small purchase of diapers for the parents of NICU patients or the enormous reimbursement of a mobile screening bus. Grant funding can take the organization to where it wants to be with well-timed proposals that provide clear direction for the program. It also can provide an opportunity for stakeholders to plan out the future direction of the organization or program, large or small.

Beginning with the end in mind is a good place to start in a grant proposal. Envisioning what can best assist your clients, patients, participants, or demographics you serve and then moving backwards with your programmatic activities. With enough deliberate thought and crucial conversation followed with action, an effective grant program can bring lasting change to an organization and truly elevate a program. ■

Jeremy Riley is the Grants Development Coordinator at CHI Memorial in Chattanooga, TN. In his role he oversees the pre- and post-award management for governmental and private foundations, working with clinical leaders to advance health equity in the greater Chattanooga region. He has been with CommonSpirit Health, CHI Memorial's parent company for more than seven years, with five years overseeing the grant portfolio for Dignity Health hospitals for the California Central Coast, including Arroyo Grande Community Hospital Foundation, French Hospital Medical Center Foundation, Marian Regional Medical Center Foundation, and St. John's Healthcare Foundation. Prior to joining Dignity Health, Jeremy was the founding Area Director for Fellowship of Christians in Universities and Schools (FOCUS) in San Francisco where he worked with high school and middle school students in private, independent boarding and day schools. He was also a District Representative for (retired) US Representative John Campbell where he assisted and advocated for immigrants and veterans in Orange County, CA. He holds a BA in Political Science and History from Vanguard University of Southern California and an MA in Theology from Fuller Theological Seminary. He is an avid runner, reader, painter, and a suffering San Diego sports fan.