Growing Connections:
Fundraising and Grant Writing Resource Guide

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A Northwest Harvest Resource
Growing Connections
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OVERVIEW Whether you’re a staff member who’s new to the fundraising world, or a dedicated volunteer who has been thrown into the fundraising hustle, this guide will bolster your money seeking strategies by giving an overview of different fundraising and grant writing techniques. We’ll review everything from where most U.S. charitable donations come from to how to plan a smashing fundraising event. Use the below Table of Contents to guide your educational exploration.

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Fundraising 101 – Starting Your Giving Program

**Mission Minded:** At the core of every giving program is a strong mission and a dedicated staff. For your organization, this could look like three part-time volunteers or it could look like a full-time staff of 20. In either scenario, when applying for funding you must keep in mind why your organization does what it does: What is your story? If you’re just beginning, start keeping track of stories you hear from your clients, volunteers, and staff. If you’ve been around for a while and don’t track stories, start now! These will come in handy when you’re putting together Letters of Inquiry (LOI), proposals, and Cases for Support. Featuring one or a couple of clients whose lives your organization has impacted can help paint a tangible, human picture around the quantitative data you’ll use in your fundraising materials. Keeping these stories and your mission in mind will also ensure that you’re seeking funding from appropriate sources. For example, as a hunger relief organization that focuses on promoting healthy choices for their clients, you might want to think about the implications of accepting funding from a local fast food chain. What might this say to your clients and to the community about your values and your priorities?

**Ethically Oriented:** Make sure that your organization’s grant writer is aware of the *Code of Ethical Principles and Standards* published by the Association of Fundraising Professionals. If you don’t have a full-time grant writer on your staff, ask whomever is preparing your fundraising materials to do a quick Google search for the “Donor Bill of Rights.” This document, also published by the Association of Fundraising Professionals, will orient them towards some basic ethical principles with which they should be familiar while fundraising. Both documents provide guidelines that are applicable whether you’re doing a local fundraiser in your community or applying for a federal grant.

**Data Based:** Most grant applications will ask you for some tangible evidence about the success of the work that you’ve been doing. From an emergency food perspective, this might look like how many clients or families you’ve served in the last month, the quantity of food you’ve distributed, or the number of volunteer hours you’ve logged. Having this data will allow you to present a fuller picture of your program, express the need present within your community, and demonstrate what could be done with additional funding. Again, whether you’re a volunteer-run organization or you have paid staff, keeping detailed logs of what you do is extremely important when attracting and retaining donors.

**Responsibly Reflective:** Do you have formalized evaluation measures for your program? Are you able to tangibly measure your achievements? To successfully apply for a grant, you should know your strengths and weakness as an organization. You should also be in the habit of tracking and celebrating your successes as an organization. In order to do this, you must have a reliable evaluation process that allows you and your fellow staff or volunteers to see where you’re excelling and where you could use some work. This will help you in two ways: firstly, it will allow you to see what you’re doing well; secondly, it will allow you to see where you’re falling short and if these shortcomings are related to limited financial resources.
Funding Sources

When thinking about charitable giving sources, it’s easy to believe that most of the money on the money tree comes from big foundations and corporate grants. This, however, is not true: the majority of charitable giving in this country actually comes from individuals. In fact, a study done by Education Northwest illustrates that approximately 71% of charitable giving in 2015 came from individuals. So, what does this mean to you? This demonstrates that while it’s important to secure funding from grants, it’s also helpful to keep in mind the larger funding web and the extent of support that your community might be able to offer your organization. This also highlights the importance of broadcasting your message to a wide audience, and of marketing your program throughout your community.

You might be thinking, “I live in a small, resource depleted town in Central Washington – I’ve tried to get money from my local community, I’ve cast a broad net!” Have you thought about expanding what “community” means to you and how this could help secure additional donations at your next fundraiser? Have you tried talking to the town across the river, or a larger metropolitan area near your community? Have you attended Chamber of Commerce meetings in and around your area? All that aside, there are many places where you can look for funding, this list below covers a range of available sources and techniques:

- Email Campaigns / Fundraising Letters
- Online Campaigns
- Phone and Door-to-Door Canvassing
- Bequests
- Special Events
- Foundation Funding
  - Family Foundations
  - Community Foundations
  - Corporate Foundations
- Government Funding
  - Local Government Funding
  - State Government Funding
  - Federal Government Funding

For more information on how to harness a handful of these strategies, and to see which ones might work best for your organization, see the below two sections on “Fundraising” and “Grant Writing.”

Fundraising

Creating a Case for Support

Before beginning any significant fundraising campaign, your organization should come up with a “Case for Support.” A Case for Support is usually a printed document that synthesizes your mission and strongly outlines why possible donors should be supporting your cause. When approaching your Case for Support, you and your organization should ask yourselves the following questions:
Who are we as an organization? (go beyond your mission statement, who do you represent and what are you actually doing?)

Who are we targeting during this fundraising campaign?

What program(s) are we trying to raise money for?

What stories can we tell to illustrate our need, and spotlight the success of our organization?

- Are we sharing these stories responsibly? Have we asked permission to share these stories for this particular purpose?

How, and at what point in our materials, are we asking for money?

Your Case for Support could range from a letter or email campaign that outlines the above questions and ends with an ask, to targeted materials that you put together with an outside marketing firm. Either way, you need to present a clear, specific, and compelling story that outlines why potential donors should support your organization. In crafting your Case for Support, try and use images and narratives that will speak to your audience. Allow these stories to bolster your statistics and paint a picture for potential donors of what their contributions could do.

Regardless of the delivery method of your Case for Support, always include information on how donors can give. For example, in digital cases for support, include a link to an online donation page or provide an email address and a phone number of someone they can connect with to ask questions. If your materials are going out by good ole snail mail, provide the necessary information for individuals to write and submit a check (possibly include a self-address envelope) in addition to the information you include in your digital campaign.

When thinking about how you’d like to prepare you Case for Support materials, keep in mind your intended audience and the purpose of the materials. They might look different if you’re creating them for a specific, targeted campaign than if you’re creating general promotional materials. Your Case for Support may also take on a different form if you plan to use it in the context of in-person meetings with potential donors.

Successful Letter & Email Campaigns

Since email allows us to reach a broad audience with limited effort and cost, email fundraising campaigns are a great way to dip your toe into the fundraising world. Creating a successful email campaign, however, takes a little extra time and thought than crafting a regular email.

While structuring your email campaign, try to keep the following guidelines in mind:

$ Hook them with a subject – create a compelling subject line that will make readers want to open your email.

$ Create a compelling story – engage the reader in an interesting and data supported narrative. Include quotes from your guests.

$ Highlight the important stuff – don’t be afraid of underlining or bolding critical information that will stand out to the readers. Don’t overdo it, but feel free to bold one line per paragraph that captures the most significant portion of information.

$ Build urgency – show the reader why it’s important that they donate today.

$ Include graphics – use photos that appeal to your reader’s emotions.
$ Make it personal – speak directly to the reader as you, use “I” instead of “we” or “our organization.”
$ Be brief – try to limit your email to five paragraphs that are each no longer than seven lines.
$ Include donation resources – make it as simple as possible for the reader to donate. Include a link to an online Kickstarter campaign, commerce page, or include your address and details about how to mail in a check.

Of course, this might not be the best idea for all communities. I know that there are still many areas in Washington that don’t have reliable internet access, and where food banks themselves may not be connected to the world wide web. If that’s the case for your organization, use the above guidelines and translate them into a letter format. One additional step you can take with letter campaigns is to include a pre-addressed and stamped envelope in with your letter. This will make it very easy for your reader to donate on the spot.

Special Events

Has your organization been thinking about throwing a fundraiser, but hasn’t been sure how to start planning it? Unlike letter campaigns, events take more time and resources to put together, but they also have the potential for a large payoff. If it is the first time your organization is hosting an event, be frugal with your budget and preparations. Throw a miniature version of your ideal event and see how it goes. Then, next year or next month, you’ll be able to throw a larger, more successful event with fewer hiccups.

When thinking about planning your ideal fundraiser, decide if it would make more sense to host multiple small events, or one larger event. There are benefits to both, so you should decide which strategy will work best for your organization. For example, if you have limited staff and are mostly volunteer run, it might take less overall time and effort to plan one, large event. If, however, you have a bigger staff and someone on your team who is specifically dedicated to event planning, it could make sense to create a monthly, or quarterly, fundraising event.

Before you start planning your event, set expectations. Think holistically about the amount of staff time you can dedicate to the event, the budget of the event, how much money you intend to raise at the event, and whether or not your organization is prepared (financially, logistically, emotionally) to achieve the desired outcome. Once you’ve established these general parameters, your organization can dive into the initial planning stages. Here are examples of some questions you can use to being effectively brainstorming:

*Who are we targeting with this event?*
*What is the age group we expect to be at the event?*
*Who will be responsible for planning and executing the event?*
*Based on our organizations fiscal year calendar, when would be the best time to host this event?*
*Are there other organizations in our community that host annual events? If so, when are they and how can we plan around them (or collaborate with them)?*
After working through the brainstorming process, you’ll have a better sense of what is needed to plan your event. Now it’s time to sit down with your event team and begin solidifying your ideas. You’ll want to consider the following logistics during this stage:

*Does everyone involved in planning and executing the event have a clear sense of their role?*
*Have we created a calendar that outlines everyone’s responsibilities and a clear timeline for achieving those goals?*
*How can we integrate our organization and mission into the event, or use the event to raise awareness about our cause? (Ex. If your hosting a fundraiser to kick off a nutrition education program can you demonstrate recipes that you would use at your food bank?)*
*Is there a way to involve our clients in the event planning or the event process?*
*How are we planning on evaluating the event?*
*Do we have the necessary insurance to protect ourselves from potential accidents at the event?*

With all this information in mind, you can start to nail down logistics and get official planning off the ground. Based on Miki Hodge’s article, *Events and Other Local Support* here are some suggestions of fun events that have been successful for other organizations in the past:

*Soup for the Soul*
*Taste of (your towns name)*
*Silent Auctions*
*Dine out for (your cause) Night*
*Run/Bike/Walk/ Events*

For guidance on how to successfully orchestrate your event, check out Kerri Moore’s [Fundraising Events: 10-Step Guide to Planning Your Own](#).

**Press Releases**

Press releases are typically used to announce an event, a change at an organization, a policy update, or to share an important story. Successful press releases include a succinct who, what, when, where, and why of the message you’re trying to publicize. Though you may be conveying a message to the public regarding an upcoming event, you should steer away from including any sales-pitch language and instead simply share the facts with your desired audience. That being said, these facts should be presented in a catchy way that intrigues your desired audience and that may lead to some positive outcomes: a story (or a series of stories) in your local newspaper; local TV coverage; additional attendance at an event; or new donors or volunteers. If you’d like to peruse some examples before crafting your own, you can look at Georgetown University’s Berkley Center article titled “[How to Write a Non-Profit Press Release.](#)"
Planning Your Application
When deciding to apply for a grant, it’s best to first take stock of your organization’s current budget and funding sources. If you’re new to fundraising at your organization, make a list of the grants that have been awarded in the past 2-3 years. If possible, add proposals that have been lost to keep track of funding that has historically been hard to secure. This will help you when deciding how best to allocate your time when preparing future proposals. After you’ve compiled historical data, create another spreadsheet that includes sections for relevant information for upcoming grants including: deadlines; required materials; and important addresses and phone numbers related to the grantees. Finally, to get yourself ready, make a calendar that outlines when you’ll have time to apply for grants, when you’ll need to hear back from possible funders, when you’d ideally like new programs to begin, and when you’ll need funding to continue existing programs.

In addition to thinking about your organizations current awarded grants and the grants that you’re applying for, familiarize yourself with your organizations budget and funding streams. One of the most important parts of creating a sustainable organization and program is to have a diversified funding stream. In fact, proof of diversified funding is also something that grant makers look for when awarding grants; they want to be sure that the project they’re supporting doesn’t wither once the grant cycle is up. Once you’ve done your necessary preparations and gotten up to speed with your organizations finances, you should be ready to start searching for opportunities.

Searching for the Right Opportunity
After you ground yourself in your organizations budget, it’s time to create a list of possible grants for which you can apply. Some websites that are useful for browsing opportunities include: Foundation Directory Online; Grants.Gov; Grant Station; and Guidestar. Also consider searching for and signing up for Listservs that may publicize grants related to your field of work. When you begin looking through opportunities, make sure of the following before attempting to put together either a Letter of Inquiry (LOI) or a full application:

Does the funder award grants to your community?
What is the funder’s annual giving?
Is the funder accepting proposals?
What types of organizations does the funder support?
Has the funder awarded a grant to a similar project(s) in the past?

Use these questions to weed incompatible funders, and then fill out your master list with opportunities for which you could potentially apply, making sure (as stated above) to highlight due dates and required materials. Before you start working on your proposals, familiarize yourself with the organizations, foundations, or governmental agencies from whom you’ll be requesting funds. Being familiar with their mission and their past grantees will only help you prepare a stronger proposal.
Writing the Winning Proposal

Once you’ve identified potential funders, you’re ready to begin the application process. Some foundations require a “proposal letter” or “Letter of Inquiry” (LOI) before accepting a full proposal. The LOI is like a food demo: it gives both you and the grantor an opportunity to make sure you’re a good fit. When submitting an LOI, if there is a required format, follow it. If no guidelines are provided, you can follow the below suggested outline, which should be no longer than two pages with each paragraph being 3-4 sentences long:

1) A short introductory paragraph that starts by thanking the grantor for previous support, if applicable. Also include:
   - A sentence summarizing your project and the need it addresses;
   - The amount you are requesting, and the project’s total budget;
   - And how your project fits within the funder’s guidelines and interests.

2) A short paragraph about your organization:
   - When was it founded;
   - A summary of its services;
   - And key partnerships or other facts that show your capability to complete the project.

3) A short paragraph about the issue or need your project addresses.

4) A short paragraph about how your project responds to that need:
   - What are you proposing to do?
   - Who will do it (staff, volunteers, partners)?
   - Where will it take place?

5) A sentence or two about exactly how you would use the grant funds.

6) Another couple sentences about other funders or in-kind supporters for your project, including those who have already committed, and those you still plan to approach.

7) A short paragraph about the impact of your project. What benefits will there be for the people you plan to serve? Any indirect benefits for the larger community?

8) Summarize your unique qualifications. Are there other agencies in your area doing your kind of work? If so, why are you the best prepared to take on your project.

9) Finally – thank them for their consideration, and be sure to include your contact information.

If no LOI is required – or if your LOI is successful, and you receive an invitation for a full proposal, here are some thoughts to help you get started. When preparing your final proposal, be succinct, authentic, and mission minded. Funders need to know the necessary information about your program and its outcomes, but be sensitive to their time and the number of proposals they’re reviewing. Whenever possible, include graphs or graphics to break up long sections of text, and to add support to what you’re requesting. Funders will appreciate your clarity and your evidence-driven approach. Always address the potential outcomes or impact of your program, either based on data that your organization has collected, or based on similar programming in different communities.
Another aspect of remaining clear and succinct is being direct on what it is you’re asking for. Some organizations make the mistake of trying to squeeze too many projects into one proposal. Be mindful and stick to a specific project. In that vein, while you’re writing be sure you’re respecting what funders are asking for and be sure you’re not asking for something they’re unable to fund. If you’re ever unclear on what it is that the grantors are looking for, follow their required contact requests and submit your questions. While questions may pop up while you’re writing, it’s best to review the entire application and distill your questions into fewer communications. You never want to pester the grantor, either during the application process or while you’re waiting to hear back.

Lastly, while writing and reviewing your proposal make sure not to leave anything out. Answer every question, and give yourself enough time to approach each question. For example, be sure you’re not leaving something to the last week that requires board approval or signatures because this might be impossible to get in such a short timeframe. If you’re working on putting a proposal together alone, ask someone else at your organization read it over to check for spelling and grammatical errors, and to ensure that you’ve captured all the required information.

Resources

$ Foundation Directory Online - https://fconline.foundationcenter.org/
$ The Fundraising Coach - https://fundraisingcoach.com/
$ Grant Station - https://grantstation.com/
$ Washington Nonprofits - https://washingtonnonprofits.org/