Finding Grants for Those Difficult to Fund Support Services – Part Two

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Having discussed in part one the importance of reviewing your agency's strategic plan, using it as a tool in support of your grant applications, creating a multi-year grant calendar, and encouraging in-house and outside collaborative relationships, I would like to address the early preparation of draft proposals and how to best prepared "blended" proposals.

ARE YOU PREPARING DRAFT PROPOSALS IN ADVANCE OF GRANT ANNOUNCEMENTS?

To be best prepared for future competitions, you will need to prepare draft proposals for each of the initiatives that you plan to seek grant funds to support. There are several steps that I recommend you take to ensure that you are “thinking outside the box” as you draw together committees to create these planning documents.

Stay focused upon the desired outcomes of each of your programs. Remember that before you can begin to write a successful grant application that includes funds for support services, you must identify and quantify what measurable outcomes the program will seek to accomplish. Too often, I find that grant teams will begin to lay out the budgetary needs before they even discuss their clients’ needs. This is a huge mistake in my opinion. It takes away the focus on how your program services holistically facilitate your clients’ long-term success and places the emphasis on how your agency can pay their staff or buy that next big piece of equipment.

If you are having trouble clarifying what your measurable outcomes should be, you might want to review that the mandated outcomes for other similar programs. And remember that not only federal funding agencies requiring documented and measureable client outcomes, so are private foundations. Simply saying that you want to increase the ability of a client to support his/her family isn’t enough. You will need to identify measureable process objectives as was as quantifying client outcomes (such as the percentage increase in household income and the completion of training to enter the workplace). Furthermore, by working with your team, you will create a sense of ownership in whatever success indicators you determine are best for each of your programs.

HOW DO YOUR PREPARE A “BLENDED” PROPOSAL?

To successfully create and win support for proposals that include ancillary support services, you will need to analyze how your programs function. Then you will need to prepare a program description that includes the full program services provided – with the costs associated with your holistic approach. By “blending” support services into your
key program descriptions, you will be able to spread the costs of these services over several program areas.

**Step 1 - Describe your support services by function.**

Before you can include support services within a comprehensive program application, you must be able to describe the services in relationship to each program initiative that they are designed to assist. To do this, you will need to break your support services down by functions. By doing this, you will be able to determine which services benefit more than one of your program initiatives and at what level the services are in demand by different clientele. These services may include mental health counseling, after-school care for working parents, food pantries, after-school tutoring, etc.

**Step 2 - Determine the interaction of support services with other key programs.**

Now that you have broken your support services down by functions or components, you will need to discuss how they interact with your individual programs. And, you will need to determine what specific support service expenses are associated with each of your agency’s key program areas.

Example #1: If you need funds to cover the expenses associated with your after-school daycare program, estimate cost for serving children whose parents are in your GED or job training programs. Then, include these as a support service in your next GED or job training grant applications. Tie the need for after-school care to the active participation of the children’s parents in the adult program. This will allow you (given time) to allocate proportionally the funds needed to balance your after-school program budget through the use of education and job training grants.

Example #2: If you need additional funds to cover facility costs associated with the counseling office, determine what percentage of the overall counseling services provided are directed at each of your agency’s key programs. Are 50 percent of the clients being drawn from your back-to-work initiative? If so, 50 percent of the facility expenses could be allocated to that program. If the other half of the counseling staff’s time is devoted to seniors in your stay-in-your-own-home program, then the other expenses could easily be included in a budget to support that program.

Example #3: If you need to hire an additional counselor, first identify from which internal programs the counselor’s clients will be drawn. Will the counselor assist youth from your after-school program? Or are unemployed adults from your job training program using your counseling services? Only by identifying the clients that will be served can you fairly spread the costs of the counselor’s services over the appropriate program budgets. And after you know which program budgets should be supporting the expenses, you can identify potential grant funds.

Remember that you will always have the opportunity to seek funds solely for any one of your support services. But unfortunately, there is often a shortage of funding
opportunities for some of the support services that are in highest demand (such as counseling, after-school care, and emergency assistance). Thus it is always wise to consider all your funding options when planning future grant requests.

**Step 3 - Recognize the cost effectiveness of housing support services in one area.**

All my years of working with grants and grant teams has taught me that too often each department wants to house their own support service staff members. However, this is not a wise choice in my opinion. You want to demonstrate to your donors and funders that you are keenly aware of the cost savings associated with centralized services. Having two counselors working in separate departments may cause a potential funder to question why these two professionals are not working side-by-side to support each other’s program in their down time.

Additionally, separating support services over several departments can lead to duplication of effort, creation of different policies, and grant funded positions performing non-grant related tasks. To avoid these problems, a centralized service system provides both consistency of service and ease of supervision.

**Step 4 - Identify future program needs.**

To effectively plan for future grant applications, you should anticipate for each function and program supported by the service the following:

- New staffing expenses
- Equipment and supplies
- Program material costs (including printing, software, etc.)
- Course development expenses
- Staff development and training
- Travel and mileage

**Step 5 - Calculate approximate budgetary needs of each function by department or program.**

Only by identifying the actual costs of needed services will you be able to incorporate them into overall program budgets being submitted with future applications. Before you will be able to “blend” these expenses into program proposals, you will need to determine the overall expenses of each, their breakdown by program area, and an approximate (and fair) budget for each.

**Step 6 - Facilitate in-house collaborations for all cross-functions.**

While not everyone may want to participate, you will find that it will be far easier to write “blended” proposals if you and your colleagues do the following:
• Brainstorm “mixed” proposal ideas – See how many ways you can find that tie your support services directly to a specific educational, job training, daycare program, or other program.

• Create programs that focus on client outcomes – Document that support services are a ancillary activity under nearly every grant funded program that your agency offers. Tie these supporting activities to process objectives for each program.

• Work to avoid duplication of efforts – There is absolutely no reason to hire separated staff positions. If a counseling position is going to be added, it should be located under the counseling services department. Remember that this will prevent duplication of services and lend support to all the other counselors during peak months.

• Develop patience – Remember that everyone will get their turn to include their support functions into a grant proposal. Focus on making the best and most logical matches that will support your overall program goals and those of the funders.

STEP 7 – Develop mini-proposals for each “blended” initiative based on client outcomes.

As a team (or individually if necessary), start developing mini-proposals for each “blended” initiative. Be sure to focus upon the following components:

• Need statements – Should reflect the “mixed” needs of your clients. For example, job training program participants oftentimes need family and personal counseling services in order to facilitate their successful placement in a new job.

• Implementation strategies – Stress the in-house collaborative efforts of your administrators and staff to show a “seamless” flow of support for your clients.

• Personnel needs – Again, the concept is to strengthen all support services – so don’t break up your focus by placing counselors under a variety of departments or divisions.

• Detailed estimated budget – Simply calculate what the combined costs will be for the overall program implementation strategies – including the support services as appropriate.

• Research and support for best practices – Cite support for the blended strategies that you are proposing.

STEP 8 – Submit “blended” proposals as opportunities arise.

After completing the above steps, you will have brought staff together to work collaboratively with in-house colleagues as well as staff from other agencies. You will have determined and documented the direct relationship of your support services to your agency’s key program areas. You will have proportionately allocated the expenses associated with each of your support functions.
In other words, you will be better prepared to submit winning “blended” grant applications that will provide the financial resources needed to continue offering holistic programs that address all your client’s needs.