As a grant professional (with development, writing and administrative duties) for a small community colleague, I am a member of the Council for Resource Development’s (CRD) listserv. Recently, a colleague inquired as to the appropriateness of sharing complete copies of successfully-funded grant proposals with others via the Internet. The inquiring colleague was interested in what policies others in the grant field had developed for their institutions.

She recognized that as recipients of federal grant funds, their applications are subject to the Freedom of Information Act and all of its rules and regulations. She knows that anyone can ask for a copy of their full proposal and attachments and they will be provided to them by the funding agency.

However, her concerns focused upon the issue of easy access. Requests under the Freedom of Information Act can take months and months to be processed. Should she make the process easier for requesters by providing copies of her applications readily via the listserv? After all, their work products (the grant applications and all attachments) are valuable institutional resources that required expensive staff time, research data, and sometimes consultant fees. So while she wanted to be a team player, she also wanted to know if she was doing the right thing by keeping their research and funded proposals within the confines of their own college.

Many of our CRD colleagues assured her that they typically share their proposals without hesitation. On the other hand, I cautioned her that while I too believe in the spirit of sharing and strengthening the community college network (or any specialized field), I could personally appreciate and understand her cautious nature regarding the open-ended sharing of her and her consultant’s work.

**My Rules for Sharing**

I too share many, many of my proposals (and will continue to do so); but, I have some rules that I follow.
1. **I never, ever share a proposal within four to six weeks of the submission date!**
   To do so, in my opinion, only encourages “cut and paste” jobs that can (and do at times) result in plagiarism. If the applicant hasn’t bothered to review the criteria and Program Announcement prior to this time period, they aren’t likely to do it at the last minute. And frankly, laziness shouldn’t be rewarded.

2. **I never post my proposals to a listserv or other general websites.** I simply think that this is an unwise thing to do. After all, my institution has invested thousands of dollars into the development of our applications, I simply want to protect them as much as possible from wholesale downloads and plagiarism. Besides, grant writers that simply copy of variety of ideas described in several other people’s work seldom have developed a plan that best fits their own community’s needs and management structure. Therefore, if someone wants a copy of one of my proposals, they can either ask me for it (and I rarely decline a request), visit the funding agency’s website (which on occasions includes copies of funded programs), or request the document through the Freedom of Information Act.

3. **I only share with individual people.** I don’t have to know them – but they must agree to not share my proposal outside their immediate grant development team. If someone else requests a copy of my work from the individual that I have already provided a copy, I ask that they instruct them to email me individually with their request. This allows me to better control where my work is going.

   In fact, I require that they email me a confirmation that they won’t share my proposal with others unless I have pre-approved it. First, I send them an email explaining “my rules”: (1) they won’t directly “cut and paste” from my document, (2) they won’t share it with others outside of their agency’s grant development team, and (3) they won’t post it to any websites. Then after I receive an email confirming their willingness to comply with my simple rules, I forward them my proposal. Furthermore, I keep a copy of the emails so that I have a file of who I have given copies of my proposals. (Note: I sincerely doubt that there will be problems, but I am a cautious person by nature.)

4. **I usually send a PDF file that contains my proposal because then it is much more difficult to be tempted to “cut and paste” text from the document.** Nothing is a fool-proof system, but I don’t provide a Word file because I think that the temptation is much greater to start with my proposal and proceed to make minor (or even moderate) changes to it. Thus, in essence, submitting nearly all of my original proposal verbatim – as their own work. But perhaps more importantly, this defeats the purpose of designing a program plan that uniquely addresses the needs of individual communities.

   Frankly, all grant professionals should take some precautions to protect themselves from plagiarism – especially in light of the fact that I have heard stories of federal agencies denying grants that appear to be “cookie cut” by a consultant that writes for multiple applicants. Providing only PDF files discourages the tendency (whether intentional or accidental) to use your verbiage verbatim.
5. **I never share my budget unless I know the requester.** Budgets are sensitive documents that list individual wages and consultant fees. If a trusted colleague requests a copy of the budget form, I will provide it; but, this is a rare occurrence because most of my colleagues are equally sensitive about their budgets too.

**So Why Do I Share?**

There are several reasons why I share.

First, I share because I am a part of a wonderful and supportive community of fund developers. When I first transitioned from social services to higher education, I would have been lost without the guidance and sharing that I experienced with my CRD colleagues. I learned quickly that the better prepared we are as a network of community colleges, the better positioned we all are to solicit and acquire support for our students from national foundations, as well as from state and federal agencies. Being able to review and ponder the program designs, logic models, and implementation plans of another similar institution can be a very productive learning tool. Besides, how could I possibly seek advice and information from my colleagues if I was unwilling to share my knowledge and resources with them?

Secondly, I share because someday I will retire and I know that the cause that I work for will be dependent upon the expertise and capabilities of a younger generation of professional fund developers. As they move up their career ladder, they will need the hands-on knowledge that only an experienced grant professional can provide.

Thirdly, I share because I believe that it is my moral responsibility to disseminate the best practices and logic models that we have developed for the specific populations that my institution serves. Besides, much of our work is accomplished with taxpayer funds. Our successes should be documented and available for other agencies serving those whose taxes helped fund our programs.

**In Conclusion**

So while I have stressed the importance of monitoring who you openly share with, where you posted your work, and what commitments you seek from the recipients of your proposals, I want to encourage each and everyone one of you to share your grant proposals. And if you doubt the importance of sharing, ask yourself a simple question. Where would I be today if someone else had not been willing to share their time, talents, and resources with me as I advanced in my career?