Grant Readiness
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Grant readiness in grant-seeking organizations can be something that brings out the best of grant professional humor. When an organization is asked to consider if they are “grant ready,” the answer is usually a resounding, “Of course we are! We are ready to receive grant money!”

Joking aside, grant readiness is one of the most important factors for grant seekers to consider, relative to each and every potential application. Grant readiness comes through in all aspects of your grant seeking. It impacts how you decide what your priorities are for grant revenue and, therefore, who and what you research as part of creating a proactive grant-seeking strategy. It impacts how you sell your organization strengths during your grant funder relationship-building efforts. It impacts how you talk about your programs and organizational capacity during your application writing work. It can be difficult to put a clear answer to the question of whether or not an organization is grant ready, as it relies on so many variables.

As part of a GPC #linkyparty in December of 2014, I shared a free Grant Readiness Assessment Tool as a way to help all organizations have a checklist to consider when trying to define and assess their grant readiness. If you missed it during the #linkyparty, you can still download it here (http://www.dhleonardconsulting.com/grant-readiness-assessment-tool/). Here are three common points on the checklist where I commonly see weakness related to grant readiness, and what I encourage clients to focus their efforts on while ramping up their grant-seeking strategy:

*Strategic Plan*

It is always a telling sign when I ask a potential new client if they have a strategic plan, and their answer is, “Yes, but…” It is not that they are not a wonderful organization, nor that they will not be able to secure the grant revenue necessary to achieve their goals. Rather, it is an indicator that they are not using their strategic plan as a living document within the organization. They recognize that it is outdated or irrelevant to the work that they are doing on a daily basis and the goals that they personally see themselves working to accomplish.

*Grant Seeking and Management Policies*

Internal controls and policies related to being a successful grantee start with the policies that are in place to provide structure and consistency to the grant-seeking efforts of an organization. The consistency of those policies, and adherence to best practices from this early stage ensure that when a grant is awarded, the team will be ready to pick up with strong grant-management practices as well. In particular, with the implementation of the new OMB Uniform Grant Guidance that became effective on Dec. 26, 2014, the importance of having strong policies in place prior to being awarded funding cannot be overstated.

*Lack of Understanding of Their Numbers*

One of the rules of being in business as an owner is to “Know Your Numbers.” A similar rule should apply for all grant-seeking organizations. Know what your annual management and fundraising percentage is
based on your organization’s 990 filing. Know if that percentage has been constant or has been on the rise or decline. Know your cost per child of providing service and if that is high for your industry, average, or low for your industry. What does your organizational operating budget tell as a story about your organization? What about your project budget, when looked at without the context of your project description?

Why this focus on grant readiness? Because without working with your employer or client to be in a position of strong grant readiness, all of the best research, funder relationship building, and solid writing skills will still end in tales of woe told around GPA National conference lunch tables.

Then comes the tough question you have to ask yourself...if your employer or client is not grant-ready by your standards, how do you handle grant applications in the short term while working to address your recommendations for improved grant-readiness in the long run? My personal solution is to start each client relationship with a grant-readiness assessment, even when engaged to only write a single application. When the assessment shows that there is a weakness to be addressed, highlight what the assessment has indicated, and share with the client why this weakness may negatively impact their competitiveness in the grant process. Then highlight on the other hand, how working to address the readiness issue now will positively impact their grant-readiness on this current application, but equally for all future applications.

The conversation of return on investment (ROI) for a grant-seeking organization, as a result of focusing on their grant-readiness, isn’t something that grant professionals dare to joke about.