10 Key Facets of a Winning Letter of Support

By Phil Johncock

Letters of support can make or break your job interview, loan application or grant proposal. What goes into an ideal letter of support?

The ideal letter of support...

- **Is ideal in the eyes of the evaluator.** Who is the ultimate evaluator? The Human Resource Manager? Your banker? The grant review committee?
- **Influences the evaluator positively.** It adds value to your proposal. Just like proposals should be customized to funder specifications, the ideal letter of support does the same. Thought should be given to "how to influence the evaluator positively." This means getting into the head(s) of the ultimate reviewer(s). How much weight will the reviewer(s) give to these letters? How many points are given to the letters of support in the overall evaluation process?
- **Is customized to the evaluator's specifications.** It is analogous to tailing a "resume" to an ideal job. Basically, a customized resume that targets what the employer most wants will do better than a generic one-size-fits-all resume sent to 500 employers. Templates are great; they should also be used with caution. Find out what an "ideal letter of support" is in the eyes of the evaluator; then, write up that letter accordingly.
- **Connects the applying agency's strengths with what the evaluator is looking for.** Recently, a former employee of mine asked for a letter of recommendation for a couple of jobs for which he was applying. His wife told him that I wrote great letters of recommendation. This is because I do three things: 1) I read the job description to find specific criteria the employer is looking for; 2) I highlight the person's strengths; and 3) I connect #1 and #2.
- **Can be collected as you go.** Generic letters of support can be helpful but are not as ideal as customized ones. Gather them along-the-way and add them to a file. I do this with testimonials, endorsements, comments, newspaper clippings, and pats-on-the-back.
- **Brands your agency's mission statement.** It should reinforce your agency's vision, mission and goals, as well as its strategic plan to fulfill its mission.
- **Is forward thinking.** It shows specifically how different agencies plan to work together once approval is granted. Forward-thinking letters should focus on specific tasks and activities each agency brings to the table and will provide. This is more of an "agreement" statement of what will come than it is of passed performance.
- **Turns disasters into opportunities.** Take a current BIG problem in your community, like a flood, that you are addressing with your grant proposal. A good letter of support will help paint the picture of the disaster and how the solution you are providing will solve it. It is social proof.
- **Turns weaknesses into strengths.** Identify your agency's weaknesses. Perhaps a weakness is that you are a new nonprofit with no track record of successes. Turn that weakness into a strength by partnering with an agency who has been in existence with a proven track record.

- **Comes from a credible organization.** This credibility adds value to your agency. By credible, I mean "credible in the eyes of the evaluator."

And now I would like to invite you to claim "Top 10 (Grant Writing) Mistakes To Avoid" when you subscribe to the FREE weekly "Grant Writing Newsletter" for Grant Professionals by visiting [http://GrantWritingNewsletter.com](http://GrantWritingNewsletter.com).

From Phil Johncock - The Grant Professor

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