The Habits of a Successful Grant Professional

By Diane H. Leonard, GPC

When presenting at conferences or on webinars, one of the most common follow-up questions I am asked afterward regardless of the presentation’s focus is about what are the key resources I read every day, or the things that I do every day/week as part of the successful grant seeking strategies we implement for my clients. While the list of resources has changed over the years, I’ve realized how important it is to have such a robust tool box of resources (as well as colleagues to ask for support from!) in order to be a successful grant professional. I have laid out the things that I do on a daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, and annual basis to try and help you identify the habits that you currently have in place that make you a successful grant professional. I hope that my list of habits also serves as a brainstorm list for you as well for other habits that might enhance your work as a grant professional.

What are the things I do every day?

- I read the grants.gov daily email (I receive the daily unfiltered listing of ALL agencies) to see what applications and modifications have been posted. You may be able to narrow that down based on the focus of your organization or clients.
- I read the Federal Register to see what might be coming down the pike for applications or opportunities for comment on new funding line items or policies.
- I check in on my #grantchat and #fundchat feeds on Twitter to see what resources and new articles are being shared by colleagues.
- I check in on the funder accounts that I follow on Twitter and Facebook to see what resources, reports, and funding opportunities they are posting.
- I read The Nonprofit Times and Chronicle of Philanthropy, skimming headlines for articles I want to read in-depth and share.
- I set aside all funding related newsletters and trade publications that may contain funding announcements to read all at one time.
- I take time away from the computer to distress, process the narratives that I’m working on, and do some mental planning for any parts of an application that I’m still working through. For me, that is running, biking, or swimming.

What are the things I do weekly?

- I read through the contents of the weekly “pending” folder where I have saved the newsletters and trade publications over the past week and then share those funding announcements with colleagues and clients via email and my blog.
- I participate in #grantchat on Tuesdays at 12pm ET (a Twitter chat for grant professionals co-moderated by myself, @dianehleonard, and Jo Miller, @jm_grants in partnership with the GPA).
- I participate in #fundchat on Wednesdays at 12pm ET when related to the grants profession (a Twitter chat for fundraising professionals run by @fundchat).

What are the things I do monthly/quarterly?
- I look at each client’s proactive grant calendar to see what is coming up over the next few months to ensure that the necessary pre-planning steps are on the schedule internally as well as with them.
- I plan out my professional development opportunities beyond participating in the weekly Twitter chats – what webinars or conferences are coming up that I could work into my schedule?
- I read publications like Blue Avocado and Nonprofit Quarterly that come out on a monthly or quarterly schedule.

What are the things I do annually?

- Layout my annual professional development schedule. Top on the list is always to get the GPA National Conference on the calendar. (I can’t wait for #gpaconf14 in Portland this October!)
- Layout my professional development, teaching/presenting engagements, and community involvement to ensure that I am meeting the requirements for maintaining my GPC.
- Ensure that each client’s registrations are current with their funders if at the individual funder, state government, or federal government level any required.
- Specific to their own fiscal year, work with each client to lay out their upcoming grant calendar, grant revenue goals, and go over their standard grant attachments to ensure that they are up to date for use in applications.

I know from talking with colleagues that each professional likely has a slightly different list or a different frequency of their core activities that support the applications they are writing each year. I would love to hear what key activities you have on your list that might not currently be on mine.