

Moments

By [Patricia L. Duboise, MBA, GPC](#)

I was having one of those days, full of what the Chinese call "monkey mind", where your thoughts are zooming from place to place, with no particular rhyme or reason. I don't remember the exact day but I'm certain there was a grant deadline involved, and I was waiting for data from someone I was convinced was avoiding me. And suddenly in the midst of the whirlwind, it hit me... "I've been doing this for 20 years!" Twenty years. Two decades. I'm pretty sure it's not what I envisioned at the beginning of this journey.

This train of thought then led me to think about different moments in those years. Like the time, during my first few weeks on a new job, when I called to check on the status of a previously submitted grant application and was yelled at AND hung up on by the Foundation Trustee – a prominent local attorney who apparently felt my predecessor hadn't done their homework and never should have submitted in the first place. Or the time when a passerby caught me doing the "money dance" in my car after having checked my email and found out that we'd been approved for a new, six-figure federal grant. Or the time, I stepped away from my desk – and out of my comfort zone – to join my front-line colleagues in the annual point-in-time count of our city's homeless population, spending five hours riding in a van in the middle of night to count and survey individuals I write about almost every day but hardly ever engage directly.

Whether it's been one year, five years, or twenty years, our careers as grant professionals are a collection of moments – good, bad, funny, bizarre, or some combination thereof. Moments that take you from "Why am I doing this?" to "Why would I do anything else?" And back again...and back again...

As we prepare to celebrate our [2nd Annual International Grant Professional Day](#), here are some thoughts from our fellow grant writers about their own grant moments.

We blindly sent a grant request to a foundation that had never funded our organization before, using the address we found on their most recent 990. Several days later, the envelope was returned - "Insufficient Address" – and scribbled in ink was what our mail carrier assumed would be the correct address. A few days after we attempted to mail the proposal again, it was returned – *another* bad address. Frustrated, I did some Googling and picked up the phone, eventually speaking to someone from the foundation directly. Though he and I shared a few laughs over the mail debacle, I had convinced myself that there was *no way* we were going to get this grant after all the trouble we had went through. Very recently, I was surprised when we opened our mail and *voila* – a check from the foundation (AND the full amount we requested, too!). Lesson learned: pick up the phone and make that human connection!

Kristyn Conner

To me the best moment as a grant writer is when I'm able to use my grant writing skills and experience to support programs that I personally feel excited about. When I hear about a new or ongoing effort of an organization I write for, and I'm able to bring that program or project out into the light, that organization starts to get some much-deserved attention AND funding for their very worthy ideas and efforts. That's the best feeling and I am able to see my work really make a difference in my community.

Janina Edwards

Some time ago I implemented a really large federal grant and worked hand and hand with the granting agency to ensure that we didn't mess it up. After the third and final year of funding another agency didn't do so well that year and we were offered additional funding to pay for all of our eligible costs. This just went to prove that when you manage a grant correctly the grantors appreciate it.

Janeen Gaskins, MEP, GPC, CPM

In negotiations with a funder, I submitted a written concept paper/proposal. I anticipated a conversation about any adjustments they might like to see in our plan. What I did not expect was an email that began with: "I've rewritten your performance measures in the attached version. Please enter this in the grants portal." By the way, the new measures were not appropriate, so the conversation was indeed necessary.

Beth Kargel

I was a Program Officer at the Michigan Women's Foundation early in my career, back in the day when requiring grantees to submit multiple copies of the entire application packet via hard copy was the standard. One day a much larger than normal package arrived. It included a large tube of scented hand lotion in each of the review packets as a gift of gratitude and perhaps an attempt to garner goodwill from the reviewers. Unfortunately, it was heavily scented lotion and as one of the tubes broke open, the entire office smelled for days, and the attempt to create goodwill, in fact, created a negative feeling amongst the staff. The applicant would have been better advised to pick up the phone before applying and talking to us about the proposal idea and forming the start of a relationship via the phone rather than spending the time and effort creating the packets.

Diane H. Leonard, GPC

My most memorable "grant moments" have occurred while teaching grant writing to others. In one instance, I taught the basics of grant writing to a group of deaf students and professionals from the Philippines on an exchange trip to the U.S. I had studied American Sign Language (ASL) for two years at that point, so I used some sign and lots of English (with interpreters). But Philippino Sign Language (PSL) is different from ASL, so that interpreters had to take spoken English, convert to ASL, and the Philippino interpreters converted it to PSL. Confused?

Margit Brazda Poirier

One of my best moments was working with my colleagues for about a year to convene five major state health funders to engage in conversations about a new project for which we were trying to attract new resources. Each of these funders had supported our work at some point in the past, and three of the five had already committed to core or ongoing support for our existing staff and services. Luckily, after countless meetings, conference calls, concept paper drafts and revisions, and jumping through other flaming hoops, we secured \$2.4 million over two years for the new project. So satisfying!

Jodi Samuels, PhD

When a program director told a United Way officer that I was the best grant writer ever because I had gotten them more money than the program actually cost. I quickly explained to the United Way officer that this program director hadn't included her administrative costs or personnel costs – all of which I had added into the budget for her. She had only considered the costs of a quilting frame, batting, fabric, and thread for her intergenerational quilting project. The officer just smiled and said, "I understand. That's why we like proposals written by grant professionals instead of program staff."

Rebecca Vermillion Shawver, MPA, GPC

When I received notification I had received my first major grant (\$650,000) where I had completely done the work. I had taken this from concept, formed a team, and generated an application that resulted in an award, all in less than a week. The feeling was one of the most gratifying I have had, and convinced me that grant writing was something I really wanted to do.

Micki Vandelloo, GPC

...the worst mistake ever...sending the proposal to the wrong address, and tracking it down to the church...and getting there before FedEx did and gracefully taking it away and getting it to the right location!

Catherine Velasco

I collaborated with another grant writer and we were able to secure a five-year, \$6.25 million grant through CDC for a national public health awareness campaign. I realized at this point that the larger impact of the win itself was much greater than my feelings of satisfaction for helping throughout the application process.

Rachel Werner, MPA, GPC, PMP

This year I was working under a VP to help file two grant reports for six-figure grants. The VP did not answer my emails or even review the reports until 5 PM the day they were due, at which point she had numerous changes that I had to submit to finance. She told me the next day that she called the program officers and that we were ahead of the game even for submitting reports, so doesn't matter if they're late or not. Somehow this person is still in their position.

Anonymous

What are some of YOUR grant moments?