You Know You Are A Grant Writer When…

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Spend enough time in any profession, and the inside jokes that only your peers will typically laugh at annual professional conferences and the like, begin to build up. After reading Rebecca Shawver’s recent article about why more young professionals are not entering the grant writing field, I stopped to think about some of those common characteristics and traits that those of us who have been in the field for awhile can connect with.

Below I have listed the eight “You know you’re a grant writer when” statements that resonate the closest for me but I know that the list could be much longer.

I recommend that you save the list, add to the list, and refer to the list on days when you need a bit of laughter – or on the days that you need to remember that while you may be the only grant writer in your office (and lucky you if you’re not!), there are hundreds, thousands of “us” out there going through the same daily struggles to raise additional funds for the organizations and missions we so feverishly work to support. So, here are my top eight choices.

You know you’re a grant writer when…”

1. You are a whiz at Trivial Pursuit as a result of the countless facts and figures you have memorized during the crafting of a Statement of Need.

All those hours citing statistics from the Department of Labor, state school report cards, and SAMSHA pay off on the weekend when taking a break from writing to play board games with family and friends. Not only have you become the first one picked for trivia games, but you also realize you have a new level of confidence for dinner party conversation.

2. You can predict what your word or character count for a response within ten characters - without needing to utilize word count tools.

You have become so accustomed to character counts with spaces, character counts without spaces, and word counts that you can look at any word document and know the count for the document within a count of ten. While not a sellable skill by itself, it is a useful skill that aides in the process of writing character and word limited responses for applications without having to constantly check your word properties tool.
3. Your significant other doesn’t recognize you with your eyes open…or without your eyes peeking out from behind a laptop…because during a big application all of your waking hours are spent working.

Whether pushing through a case of writer’s block, or just a tough 30 page narrative (in addition to all the required attachments), there just never seems to be enough hours to spend on the application. There is always one more revision to do and some additional word smithing to work through …that can lead to extensive work hours as application deadlines approach.

4. You stalk your mailman/email delivery system for funding announcements on posted notification days.

While it used to always be the mailman that you would stalk when the announcement for funding decisions drew near, you now have the added benefit of checking your email every five minutes to see if an award notification has come in.

5. You rely on post-it notes and scraps of paper when you’re away from the computer to write down notes about current narratives in process.

Even when you step away from your document, you find yourself writing notes on sticky squares or whatever scraps of paper you can find to remind yourself of something else to check, a synonym to try, or an additional budget expense to include.

6. Your coworkers believe that you can’t start a sentence without the phrase, “Remember that the deadline is…”

Deadlines consume your life…and your calendar. As grant writers, we each develop our own calendar and deadline management system – some of us color code, some set reminders in outlook. But our work and personal schedules revolve around the identified deadlines for upcoming applications…and our co-workers know it.

7. Your coworkers rely on your ability to be psychic in regards to how they really want their program implementation plan to read.

At times, it feels like we’re trying to get water from a stone. As grant writers, our ability to pull together our colleagues’ program plans and designs can often lead one to believe that being a grant writer involves some psychic abilities for ascertaining non-spoken plans.

8. You are excited when you come across new words to replace buzz words such as collaboration and social impact with.

A thesaurus is always a great tool for the days when you are stuck looking for a better word for ‘critical’ or ‘crucial’. But there are times when you need to use nonprofit buzz words such as collaboration in a narrative. And that’s when only a true grant writer gets
noticeably excited when a new word or phrase is brought into the nonprofit vernacular for us use.

I am sure there are many more “You know you are a grant writer when” skills and moments that will come to your mind as you finish reading through my list. Jot them down, send them with your colleagues, and share a nice moment of camaraderie – before you go back to talking about the next deadline.