

The Strategy of Opposites

This year, FEMA received more than 20,000 grant applications from fire departments across the United States in search of financial assistance through the Fire Act. Less than one in twenty applications will ultimately be chosen by FEMA for approval. It's hard to be noticed in a line where thousands of other departments are standing next to you. So what can you do to increase your chances? Create a line in which you're the only one standing-- the strategy of opposites.

Last year, \$19 billion in grants was awarded by U.S. foundations to organizations with missions compatible with the fire service...education, health, human services and public benefit. That amounts to 211 times the money available from this year's Fire Act. Yet, while two thirds of the fire departments in this country apply for the FEMA program, not one in a hundred goes to the 57,000 foundations in this country and the opportunities they offer.

Reactive vs. Proactive

The FEMA grants represent a **reactive** approach to grantseeking. An agency such as FEMA issues an RFP and the applicants respond to the offering. The funding agency determines the problems to be addressed and awards grants to those with the most persuasive solutions. You *react* to this opportunity by determining how well your idea fits in their framework. If it's reasonably close, and you're willing to compete with others for the same money, you'll write a proposal and hope to receive a grant.

One of the disadvantages of the reactive approach is that the timetable is set by the funding agency, not you. When the RFP is received, fire departments usually have to scramble to get it all together by the deadline. A bigger disadvantage is that reactive grants usually do not match the applicant's true needs because the RFP is not designed for a specific department or community.

Proactive grant funders take a different approach. They sit back and wait for you to make the first move. The process here is that you develop the project solution, write the grant proposal and then present it to the prospective grantor. Proactive grants require more work on your part because you've got to find a funding agency who finds your proposal attractive enough to fund. However, there are three big advantages with the proactive approach:

1. You are the only applicant
2. You create the project plan and goals
3. You establish the timeline

The key to making the proactive approach successful is to place the grantors' needs ahead of yours. This is really the golden rule of grantseeking, and it's the opposite of what most inexperienced grantseekers attempt to do. First-timers usually look for prospective grantors and then try to get them interested in funding the grantseeker's project. Once again, the best strategy lies in doing the opposite: Show prospective grantors how you can help them meet *their* goals. If you are convincing, then you'll get what you want.

A classic example of the strategy of opposites...

During Hollywood's Golden Era of the 30's, 40's and 50's, all the studios had high walls to keep the

public out and "protect" their signature stars such as Gable, Lombard, Bogart, Lamar and others. Then, in 1964, Universal Studios took a bold move. They decided to give their customers what they wanted. The studio tore down its walls, swung open the gates and invited the public inside. Today, Universal generates twice as much revenue from its tours as it does from all its film, music and television enterprises combined.

The Message...

Universal recognized what the public wanted, gave it to them, and in return got what they wanted. If you follow this strategy of opposites (putting the funding agencies' goals ahead of yours), you can achieve everyone's goals.

In Search of Thermal Imaging Cameras

One of our clients, the Galveston Fire Department, needed thermal imaging cameras, so Captain Jeff Smith decided to try a proactive approach.

"I didn't want to compete with other fire departments, so I went in another direction.

We got our grant for the cameras with a city Arts and Culture proposal."

"Galveston has over 15,000 historic buildings. In many ways, the city's architecture is a lifeline to its survival through tourism. That became the key to Jeff's plan. As he points out, 'I didn't want to compete with other fire departments, so I went in another direction. We got our grant for the cameras with a city Arts and Culture proposal.'"

His Strategy...

Jeff went to Galveston's Historical Foundation with a plan showing how thermal imaging cameras are a wise investment for protecting the city's historical buildings. His proposal, *Saving Our Past From Fire*, was well-researched and persuasive. It demonstrated how the cameras can reduce the risk of fire damage (and potential economic loss) to the city.

His idea hit the city in its economic gut. The grant proposal was quickly approved, and today the Galveston Fire Department is using the new thermal imaging cameras created by Jeff Smith's idea.

Available for Review

Jeff Smith's grant proposal is available for review at:

www.theideabank.com/onlinecourse/samplegrant.html

The Three-Legged Stool

Think of your grant proposal as a three-legged stool...each leg helping support the others. The three legs represent the needs and interests of (1) the community, (2) the funding source and (3) your department. If any of the three legs are not in place, the proposal is seriously flawed.

The key is realizing that funding agencies support solutions...not products. Without a vision, you don't have a mission...and without a program, you just have stuff. It's a mistake to go to a funding agency asking for help to buy a tool or piece of equipment. If you try to put that monkey (your

needs) on the funding agency's back, you'll lose every time.

What is a Grant Proposal?

A grant proposal is really a marketing tool. It defines a need and proposes a solution. A good proposal succeeds by convincing the grantor you can help solve a community issue. If you approach the funding agency as a problem solver, rather than someone who needs "stuff," you'll be coming from a position of power rather than weakness. Emphasize the idea and the money to make that idea a reality will follow.

What are Foundations Looking For..?

A key to your success is making your proposal about the foundation, not you. It's easier to get someone interested in you if you are interested in them first. Here's a good litmus test...When you read your proposal, it should have twice as many "you's" as it does "me's."

Specifically, foundations are looking for....

- ❖ Compatibility with their interests
- ❖ A well-managed department
- ❖ A track record
- ❖ Fresh ideas and solutions
- ❖ Tangible outcomes
- ❖ Project continuation plans

In your research, it's also important to note that some foundations make their grants available for **specific purposes** like building funds, operating support, equipment or seed capital. Other foundations provide grants to **specific populations** like at-risk youth, the homeless, elderly or minorities. You'll also find foundations that make grants available to **specific types** of organizations like hospitals, boys' clubs or universities. Finally, some foundations have their own types of programs they've chosen to support. When you submit your proposal, be sure to cast your project in a way that appeals to that foundation's self-defined mission.

So, how do you convince the funder to invest in you? By gaining a common ground, a shared mission...and by being a creative problem solver. If you can do this, come to the table as someone who shares their goal and has a plan to achieve it, then you will be successful.

Putting the Community First

This excerpt comes from a well-crafted grant proposal prepared by the Atwater (CA) Firefighters' Association. They place the needs of the community front and center...

Countdown to Survival.

The American Heart Association estimates your chance of surviving cardiac arrest decreases 10% with each minute that passes after your heart stops. CPR may prolong your life, but is actually effective in restarting the hearts of only 3% of the victims.

Early defibrillation, an electric shock to the heart, is the only treatment proven to convert lethal heart rhythms back to normal heartbeats. The time it takes from collapse to application of the defibrillator is your countdown to survival.

Once found only in hospitals, defibrillators are now inexpensive and fully automated. The Atwater community has equipped all of our emergency response vehicles with automated external defibrillators (AED's). We have been highly successful with this program and improved our cardiac arrest survival rates from 5% pre-AED to 30% post-AED.

Although survival rates in Atwater are well above the national average of 15%, the Atwater Firefighters' Association is not content to let seven of every ten cardiac arrest victims die. Instead, we plan to move the defibrillators even closer to the victims by placing them in every business, public gathering place, medical clinic, police car, school and gymnasium in the city. Chicago's O'Hare Airport has shown laypersons with no training at all are able to deliver a shock to cardiac arrest victims.

With your gift of \$25,000, the Atwater Firefighters' Association will create trainers in public use of AED's, purchase training equipment, and advertise our service to local government and business. Once the training program is available, the Atwater community will be responsible for the cost of purchasing and maintaining the public access defibrillation program.

Note: To read the complete proposal, please go to:
www.theideabank.com/onlinecourse/samplegrant.html

Shaping a Persuasive Proposal

An effective grant proposal follows the same process as effective advertising.

1. Gain the reader's attention (with the title and opening sentence)
2. Introduce the "idea" (in the cover letter)
3. Develop convincing evidence (in the need statement)
4. Motivate the reader to action (in the executive summary)

Author's Tip...

When you find a funding source, don't expect the source to fund 100% of your grant request. In fact, your proposal will be more appealing to the funding agency if you have multiple sources of financial support. This is true because it (1) adds to the credibility of your project and (2) reduces the funding agency's exposure.

You should apply to multiple funders, asking each for partial support. Ideally, the total of all your funding requests will add up to about 200% of the money you actually need. This allows for the likelihood that some funders will decline your proposal, or provide less than you've requested.

The funding agency may also "challenge" you by requiring a match. Matching requirements may be a soft match (such as volunteer labor or in-kind contributions) or a hard match (cash). The cash may come from a variety of sources including your own budget or from grants, donations, contributions and earned income.

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