

Developing Partnerships

The following information is an excerpt from Grants Development Guidelines and Resources for the Government of the District of Columbia 2002. Inquires regarding the complete manual should be directed to Luisa Montero-Diaz, Deputy Director, Office of Partnerships and Grants Development, (202) 727-8900.

CHAPTER V: PLANNING THE APPLICATION

Often an agency feels pressure to begin writing the proposal immediately. However, while a successfully written grant proposal IS the goal, the final written product is only the culmination of days, weeks and sometimes months worth of planning and preparation. (Writing the proposal will be discussed in Chapter VI.) The planning phase for a grant proposal is, unfortunately, often overlooked or shortchanged. It is not an easy process because it requires that the applicant agency grapple with tough questions about program goals and feasibility of activities. It is complicated by the fact that, frequently, by the time an agency decides to apply for a grant, both the planning and writing has to be collapsed into a short timeframe.

The more time you can devote to planning exactly what you want to accomplish and how before you sit down to write, the more complete, responsive, and competitive your proposal is likely to be. Do not neglect the planning phase.

Also remember that program planning for the preparation of a grant needs to be a team effort. A grant writer cannot and should not attempt to write a grant in isolation. Even if the grant is awarded, which would be unlikely, your agency could run into grave difficulties implementing such a program. The implementation of a grant involves more than one person and often more than one department or even agency. More and more, funders request that the application demonstrate how partnerships will be used to meet the goals, thereby requiring that the proposal involve a team of individuals and organizations. Any individual or organization that will be involved in the grant program's implementation should play a role in the planning process.

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Would partnerships improve the competitiveness of your proposal, either because the grantor requires it or because some type of partnership would allow you to better meet your goals?

Many funders now require multi-agency collaboration or public-private partnerships. Even when they do not, well-managed partnerships can strengthen your proposal and ultimately the implementation of your program. Strong partnerships among District agencies and/or between District agencies and community organizations demonstrate good leveraging of resources and often multiply the positive impact your program will have on your beneficiaries.

While partnerships almost always make your proposal and program stronger, badly selected partners or a badly managed partnership can lead to more headaches and worries than they are worth. Before embarking on a partnership, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Is it feasible to identify and involve partners given the application requirements and deadline?
2. Is there a clear goal around which the partners can connect?
3. Who will be the lead applicant and fiduciary agent?
4. Do I know enough about this potential partner?
5. Is the partnership viable?
6. Are the partners' roles clearly delineated?

Agencies entering into partnerships during the proposal development stage are advised to check with their contract and procurement officers to ensure that procurement regulations that guide competitive processes are not being circumvented.

When the District agency is the lead applicant, it is that agency's responsibility to manage the proposal development timeline, assign tasks to partners, ensure deliverables are completed, call meetings, etc. Partners can be good proposal editors as they know the program. They can also help you obtain commitments from other organizations and bring to bear their resources and expertise, which may help with meeting match requirements.

Below are tips for establishing effective partnerships:

- Determine what type of partners would fill gaps in your agency's ability to manage the grant program and help you fulfill your goals.
- Identify a number of potential partners with the strengths and expertise you need.
- Research potential partners' mission, goals and activities to ensure compatibility with your agency's mission and with the goals and activities of the grant program.
- Develop a personalized approach to cultivating relationships with your partners.

- Include partners in all planning meetings and discussions.
- Develop a written agreement between the partners, explicitly detailing each partner's roles and obligations and what outcomes the partners agree upon.
- Build in sufficient lead time to establish your partnership(s) prior to application submission deadline.
- Show capacity to meet the partnership agreement and expected outcomes.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) are documents that can be used to spell out each partner's role and obligations. Two samples of these written agreements are included in Appendix 9. The first sample exemplifies a partnership between DC Government agencies and the second illustrates an agreement between DC Government agencies and community-based groups. The Office of Partnerships and Grants Development is particularly interested in assisting with building and enhancing relationships with nonprofit and faith-based organizations, so do not hesitate to call OPGD for assistance on developing and documenting partnerships.