

North American Street Newspaper Association (NASNA)

Session #1

What do foundations look for in a grant?

Notes

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Red Flags:

- Don't be malleable. Say upfront what you do, who you are, and know what you would say no to. It's very important to show that you're not so desperate for money that you will change your ethos or mission to get it.
- DON'T USE TRACK CHANGES in Word, or double check that you finalize copy. (told story of comments in margins of final grant proposal in which the person had suggested that McCormick foundation might be too conservative to give money for what they were asking).

McCormick Foundation:

Journalism Program: \$5.9 million budget for grant making in journalism.

Very limited time to learn about different grant applications and the grants they accept. They prefer to be contacted through a letter of inquiry rather than a personal phone call or email because of the volume of grant requests they have.

Average grant size is between \$20,000 a year, up to \$60,000+

Basic areas funded in journalism:

History:

- Had more to do with mainstream media in the past (papers losing financial model, classifieds, etc).
- Did fellowships, first amendment initiatives, etc.
- Today they're backing up and looking at journalism freshly. Looking at positives, where things are happening that are interesting and where they can help:

Three buckets:

Content: largely training for writers. Newsrooms are smaller than they were before. They're more complex than they were before. Climate change, gulf oil spill, etc, they look at how they can support training for staff to meet the needs of a new newsroom.

Audience: biggest area of grant making. *Youth media and teen journalism initiatives. They are huge supporters for this.*

Rights: Access to information. Training in doing FOIA requests and that kind of thing. Also used for legal support network (access to lawyers, etc).

McCormick is now about 50% Chicago oriented, and 50% in other parts of the country.

For grants that are smaller than \$50,000 they don't have to go to their board to fund them. This can streamline the grant proposal process.

They ask people for a letter of inquiry (LOI). This provides a crystal clear understanding of what the plans of the org are. (2 page maximum).

LOI needs to cover:

- who the org is
- what we want to do
- how we want to go about it
- what's the need statement (why doing it)
- a time frame for it
- what our ultimate outcome is
- and how much money we're looking for.

After seeing an LOI, they talk as a team to decide if they're remotely interested in funding it. If they are, they'll ask for a full proposal.

Full proposal:

- You outline a full budget for your project
- history of group
- groups 501c3 status
- last audit
- board list
- current year budget

What they're looking for (9 points):

- **Mission and focus:** (What it sounds like)
- **Needs Statement:** (What it sounds like)
- **Financial Statement:** they recognize that it's hard and that several great groups are having a hard time, but they do like to support game winners.
- **Evidence of impact:** how do we measure that we're successful
- **People behind the curtain:** (I have no idea what this means. I missed it).
- **Other funders** (does your board give to you, do individual donors give, how good are you at getting other people excited about what you're doing?)
- **Diversity of staffing/audience:** what it sounds like
- **Size of problem vs. need:** groups come to them with requests for training. The problem might be huge, but the strategy is a tiny one. If there is a huge disparity between the problem and the proposed intervention, they probably won't fund it.
- **Mission and focus a fit for us:** Is mission a concise and clearly stated mission, with a backup plan. Is there proof that there is a need for what we're doing

Program officers within a foundation are advocates, so give them as much information as possible and make it very clear. Program officers want to look at a concept and see a path to self-sufficiency, rather than just band-aiding a problem.

There might be other people trying to address similar issues, or other aspects of the same issue. Are you partnering with them? How? (Program officers look for organizations that support one another through work—it doesn't necessarily have to be a formal partnership; can merely be working together or referring clients to one another).

Interactive Relationship with Grant Funding Foundation:

IMPORTANCE OF CANDOR. Program officers think of themselves as advocates for the orgs that they fund. They want to know what's going on. Don't surprise them with bad news. Keep an interactive relationship. They're more interested in knowing about what problems you've experienced and how you dealt with them than in finding out at the last minute there's been a problem in the org.

Always ask after you get funding: what kind of relationship do you want to have now that you've funded us? Do you want to hear from us every month, quarterly, once a year? What do you want to hear about?

Capacity building:

Chicago Youth Media Corp: been working with these guys for about 4 years to foster and nurture partnerships.

The Challenge Fund for Journalism: Number of j-funders contribute to a pie. The fund then selects a dozen j-groups each year. Matching grant for whatever the group can raise from individual donors that have never given to them before.

Would typically give technical assistance and capacity building grants to orgs that they're already supporting (so if we build relationship for funding one aspect of org or journalism, later there might be opportunity for capacity building).

In terms of journalism, the rule of not funding as the number one funder is being broken frequently.

Communities program:

Started in partnership with the Chicago Tribune media group. The fundraising side works with Chicago tribune related sports teams to raise money, and McCormick matches the money dollar for dollar.

Several categories in this division of McCormick Foundation.

Strategic plan:

Within their funding areas, they're becoming even more specific in terms of what they'll fund.

They're strongly aligning with 10-year plans in terms of supporting projects that take a long term approach to solving homelessness and that are incorporated in the elements of the plan.