

Successful Grant-Writing for Sustainable Human Development Programs

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According to an ancient Chinese proverb, "if you give a hungry man a meal, you will fill his belly for only one day; but if you teach him how to fish, he will be able to feed himself for the rest of his life." The proverb reminds us of the wisdom of self-sufficiency and the necessity of long-term planning to solve or prevent problems. The proverb is quite relevant to development and empowerment projects in countries of the developing world, especially countries such as Lebanon, Somalia and the former Yugoslavia which are suffering innumerable social problems as a result of long and destructive civil wars. A great deal of energy and resources have been expended on development projects in Lebanon over the last two decades, but with mixed results. Five years after the end of the conflict, the social and economic situation confronting most Lebanese people remains challenging at best and desperate at worst. Particularly affected are the displaced and individuals orphaned, widowed and handicapped by the war.

International organizations such as UNICEF, UNDP and UNHCR are currently facing pronounced pressures on their resources, both personnel and material, because of increasing social, political and economic problems in Africa, Eastern Europe and the former USSR. Because of the mixed results of many development projects in Africa and Asia over the last two decades, the UN has formulated a new development model, that of sustainable human development (*tanmiya mustadeema*). The philosophy and aims of this new model are best described by reference to the aforementioned Chinese proverb. The point of sustainable development is to begin with the individual, his or her needs, resources, abilities, hopes, fears and demands; in the context of his or her society, economy, political structure and natural environment. Beginning with these raw material and realities, the aim of sustainable development is to empower the individual — through education, assistance, training, encouragement, creation of income, and participation in decision-making processes — to take his or her life into his or her own hands and begin shaping and changing the objective circumstances confronting his or her society in order to establish a more just social and economic system, a more viable political order, and a healthier environment. These goals cannot be imposed or dictated from the outside. No one knows his or her own reality and problems better than a person himself or herself.

Although it may sound blunt, money is power. To possess it is to have authority and to wield positive influence over people, events and circumstances; to lack it is to be dependent upon the whims and demands of others who may or may not have your best interests at heart. So, how do you go about getting a grant from a foundation? We are going to outline the key steps for you, but first a word of warning: **Most foundations are cutting back on the numbers of grants they give and the amount of money they distribute due to world-wide economic pressures.** This does not mean it is impossible or hopeless to obtain a grant, it simply means that you have to work harder and do your utmost to convince a granting agency that its money will be well-spent in funding your project.

THE STAGES AND STEPS OF SUCCESSFUL GRANT-WRITING

Stage I: Preparing to Write

Step 1: Define the problem or need you wish to address and solve. What are its causes? What factors are involved? What will be the long-term impact on society if nothing is done to treat it? (Example of a problem: The link between poverty, female illiteracy and high infant mortality. Example of a need: Education and mobilization for a healthy environment.)

Step 2: Do your homework! Undertake **intensive research** on the problem or need, and the work that other groups (governmental and non-governmental) have done to solve the problem or meet the need. Did they succeed or fail? Why? Also, **do research on similar problems in other countries.** Were they successfully solved? What lessons can be learned? Can we apply these lessons to the Lebanese context? How? Who will need to be involved? What stages must be followed? How long will it take? How much will it cost? What are the potential problem areas? What are the forces and factors working against the achievement of your goals? How can you best minimize these forces and factors?

Step 3: Finding the granting agency (foundation) most likely to give you funding. It is always a good idea to get funding from more than one source for a single project. Granting agencies like to know that a) they are not carrying the entire financial weight, and b) your proposal was impressive enough to warrant funding from another agency. First, research all of the local possibilities. Do churches and mosques in your region provide funding for social development projects? Do well-to-do families provide funding for projects like yours? Next, look to the regional and international levels. Using E-mail, it should be fairly easy to find the names and addresses of major foundations and granting agencies throughout the world. Once you have this information, write a brief, professional and informative letter to "Director of Grants", stating who you are, what you wish to do and why, and requesting that they send you a copy of their grant guidelines and, if possible, a copy of their last Annual Report. **Annual Reports are valuable resources for grant-writers; they give you a clear, immediate picture of what kinds of projects get funded and why.** This is very important data to have before beginning the next stage.

After performing the above steps, you will have a good "data base" of information, and you should also have a long list of names of experts, community leaders, volunteers, teachers, lawyers, etc. Make an organized list of these individuals and organizations, either on color-coded index cards or on a computer data base. You will need their advice and participation later on.

Stage II: Writing the Grant Proposal

Step 1: Write "Draft Zero" of your grant proposal. Before you do the first draft, simply write down, on a large sheet of paper, all of your ideas, insights, dreams, observations, worries, goals and plans. At this stage, do not give any thought to logical order, correct spelling, grammatical perfection, or other people's opinions. **Simply give yourself the freedom to explore all of your ideas fully in a creative and open manner.** Do not throw this piece of paper away; it will serve you well in the following steps.

Step 2: Following the guidelines of the granting agency, **begin to structure your grant proposal.** It is a good idea to use index cards of basic facts and key points for each section. At this stage it is **extremely important that you have all of your facts and**

information in order, especially your budgetary information concerning costs, salaries, travel expenses, etc. Do not overestimate costs and salaries, or the granting agency will suspect that you are trying to make a personal gain from this project. On the other hand, however, never underestimate costs and salaries, either. You will rarely get the exact amount of money that you request; most granting agencies give somewhat less than the amount requested.

Here is an outline of a standard grant proposal, with comments and advice concerning what should appear in each section of the proposal.

I. SUMMARY

This is the single-most important section of your proposal, and also the shortest. The first sentence should be powerful and capable of attracting and maintaining the attention of the individuals on the committee that decides which grant proposals receive funding. The members of this committee will be reading hundreds of proposals, so you have to try, right from the start, to get a competitive edge. Indicate why the problem or need you have selected is so serious, how your project will solve the problem or address the need, and even have relevance for the solution of similar problems in other countries. Also stress why your organization is the best one to address this particular problem or need. The summary, in other words, should be a brief but compelling statement of the entire proposal.

II. AMOUNT REQUESTED: \$000,000

Now that you have indicated in the summary what you plan to do, you have to specify exactly how much money will be required to achieve your aims. At this point, you do not need to supply a complete itemized budget. That usually comes last, in the form of an appendix to the proposal.

III. BACKGROUND OF PROBLEM/NEED

In this section, you will use all of the data you collected during the first stage. Provide a historical account of the problem, a description of the overall socio-economic and environmental results of the problem, and a forecast of what will happen if the problem is not solved or the need is unmet. Be sure to cite other studies, previous attempts to address the problem, as well as governmental and/or UN assessments of the problem or need. You must let the granting committee know that you have given careful thought to all relevant dimensions and details of the problem. A good background section will inspire the granting agency's confidence in your intelligence, perseverance and integrity and encourage them to keep reading the proposal.

IV. Description of the Project

Begin this section by re-stating the project description given in the initial summary, then break it down into specific chronological stages, indicating who will be involved during each stage, how long it will take, and what will be the results of each stage. If you are employing a specific methodological approach or ideology, clearly indicate such in this section. In a separate appendix, you should include the *résumés* (c.v.'s) of each key person involved in the project. The description section will be the longest part of the proposal. If it is too short, you probably have not done enough research or thought out all of the details.

V. Results and Benefits of the Project

In this section, you are no longer dealing with facts you have obtained through research, but rather, with hopes, dreams and

wishes you want to realize. A very important factor that all granting agencies look for is multiplier effect, in other words, the capacity of a project to reach and influence as many people and organizations as possible, especially people in the decision-making ranks of a society or organization. This is the section in which you should state the extensive multiplier effect of your project. Another important item to emphasize is project products — will your project result in a book or video which can be used to educate and empower people throughout the country and the region? Will your project result in the establishment of a network of scholars, activists, lawyers, and teachers who will continue to meet and work on these problems/needs long after the grant money is gone? This section should conclude with a viable follow-up plan. Granting agencies do not like to put a lot of money into a limited, short-term project; they prefer to see long-term and multi-dimensional results. Make the argument here that your project has this emphasis.

VI. BUDGET NARRATIVE

Here you must provide an itemized budget, by category, for the entire project, from beginning to end. Include such categories as salaries, day-to-day expenses, such as telephone and travel costs; publication costs of any written materials; operating costs (for example, office rental, office supplies electricity, special equipment *etc.*). Provide sub-totals for each category, and then a final grand total.

VII. APPENDICES

Include an appendix for each of the following: *résumés* of key personnel; charter, by-laws and history of your organization; maps of regions you will be focusing upon, and letters of support from key political, social, and religious leaders in the targeted region.

NOTE:

It should take at least two months to write a good grant proposal once you have collected all of the necessary information. Be sure to write several drafts until you have written the shortest and most informative proposal possible, which is also interesting to read and likely to make the reader feel enthusiastic and hopeful about your project. Once you have gotten good at writing grant proposals, you can probably do a good job in less than one month's time, but if you are a beginner, give yourself time to perfect your skills.

Once you have completed the grant proposal, make sure that it arrives to the granting agency well before the deadline. It can take six to eight months to learn whether or not you have received funding. Once you have submitted the grant proposal, there is nothing to do but wait patiently and undertake any preparatory steps concerning the project that do not cost a lot of money, such as mobilizing individuals and organizations, informing the general public, targeting additional areas for focus, *etc.* Do not contact the granting agency; they will contact you, either to say you got the grant, or to let you know that you did not. If you don't get the grant, never call or write the agency asking for explanation, you will not get one. For every grant that is given, more than one hundred are refused. The foundation does not have the time to respond to hundreds of requests for explanation.

If you do not get funding the first time, do not give up! Most organizations make many attempts to obtain funding before they are successful; but once they do get funding, it becomes much easier to obtain funding in the future. Have faith in yourself and maintain enthusiasm about your project, and simply try again. Good luck!