Section 6.2.1: Not Funded

PURPOSE AND POLICY

Every grant program manager will experience the rejection of a grant proposal. While it is a disappointing experience, there are actions to take upon receiving the denial of funding letter. This includes immediate steps (sharing the notification and assessing the impact) and more deliberate consideration about the impact of the funding decision and whether to re-apply at a later date.

PROCEDURE

First and foremost, any partners involved with preparing the application should be notified. The notification should come from the person who has the closest relationship, which may be the grant program manager or it may be the agency leadership. Grant program managers at public agencies should make notification in writing (preferably email) as this constitutes a public record, which should be kept in the grant file in eCivis.

To assess the next step, the grant program manager should carefully read the rejection letter. Most funders will offer a reason for the decision. Sometimes it's vague (more applicants than available funding) but often the letter will give a more concrete explanation (the application didn't meet the minimum criteria, the agency wasn't eligible, etc.). The grant program manager should determine if the funding opportunity will be available again and whether he/she can and should submit an improved application.

Impact of grant application rejection

The impact of the rejection will vary by degree and by circumstance. The grant program manager must assess how the lack of funding will impact the program, the agency, any partners and the constituents served. Once the assessment is completed in a timely manner, the grant program manager should consult with agency leadership on possible next steps.

High-stakes funding. Grant program managers pursue funding for a variety of programs under various circumstances. In some cases, the funding is available cyclically and the grant program manager budgets for renewal each year. In these cases, continued grant funding can be a rather high-stakes issue if the dollars fund employee-related expenses, agency overhead and program services to a specific constituency. If funding is cut or eliminated in this scenario, the grant program manager already should have a sustainability plan developed and would need to consult with agency leadership and the financial representative for guidance in implementing the plan. If there is no sustainability plan that prepares for the scenario of reduced or eliminated funding, the grant program manager will need to consult with agency leadership and financial representative to look at options for the program and affected populations.

Seed funding. Grant program managers often pursue grants to "seed" or start a new project or program. These are often discretionary, or competitive, funding opportunities, which, by nature, will make winning these grants more challenging. These are usually low-stake funding circumstances. The grant program manager will need to assess whether there are other funding opportunities available, whether to improve and re-submit an application or whether to abandon the project.

Learning from failure

The rejection offers a chance to learn and improve. If the funding source was a government agency, the grant program manager should request a copy of the grant reviewers' notes for his/her application (reviewers notes in a government agency a public record). The grant program manager can use the reviewers' notes to learn how to improve the application for future funding cycles (if applicable). The feedback also might help improve other grant applications currently under development. Reviewers' notes should be kept in the grant application file in eCivis.

If the funder was a private sector organization, the funder is under no such obligation to share reviewers' notes with the rejected applicant. If the grant program manager has an existing relationship with the funder, he/she should call their contact to discuss the grant application and how it might be improved. The grant program manager also has the option to cold-call the funder and ask to speak with program staff--but he/she should check first to see if the funder actively and explicitly discourages this type of contact and refrain from doing so if this is the case.

Learning from success

Most funders will publish a list a grant recipients. The grant program manager should comb through the list to see which agencies/organizations were successfully funded and learn more about the funded programs and organizations. Where possible, the grant program manager should request a copy of the successfully funded applications to learn more about what the funder was seeking in an application.

Re-applying

Many funding opportunities are available in cyclical phases. If the grant program manager has done his/her due diligence and determines that his/her agency meets the eligibility to apply for funding, the agency should plan to apply during the next funding cycle. In the interim, the grant program manager should take the steps necessary to improve the application: institute better data capturing, build stronger collaborative relationships, seek out strong endorsements, etc. Many agencies that are denied funding the first (or subsequent) time is funded during a later grant cycle. The key is ensuring that the agency is eligible to apply for funding and meets the funder's criteria. From there, it's polishing the application and making the strongest case for funding.