

successful grant-writing strategies

SOURCES OF ALTERNATIVE FUNDING ARE

MORE IMPORTANT NOW THAN EVER BEFORE.

SEEKING GRANTS IS NOT AS COMPLICATED

OR TIME-CONSUMING AS MANY BELIEVE.

In times of tight funding, school administrators must look for sources of alternative funding. A school can only have so many bake sales, gift wrap promotions, magazine sales and school carnivals before tight pocketbooks are empty. One source of supplemental funding is to secure grant funding. Some administrators shy away from grant-writing because they believe that that process is complicated, time-consuming and may not yield results. Writing grants is not difficult; however, there are some strategies that enable the writer to be successful.

and effort to writing, and after a relatively long wait they will not receive the grant — not because the proposal was not a good one, but because they did not follow the guidelines.

Prior to writing any application it is important to read the guidelines. First, check the date that the application is due into the agency. If the timeline is less than two-and-a-half weeks, information about the grant and the application should be filed in a tickler for the upcoming school year. It takes time to gather data, and unless an administrator is willing to give up sleep,

Oftentimes administrators will find a grant that looks promising. They will devote a great deal of time

two weeks is simply not enough time to write a successful grant.

If the timeline is acceptable, carefully read the guidelines, making specific notes related to the number of allowed pages and page set-up requirements, including font size and spacing. Carefully read application requirements. Find out if the agency requests letters of support, matching funds or cooperative agreements with community agencies.

Most importantly, the administrator should carefully and thoughtfully review the curricular topics and priorities. It is not unusual for a grant to target specific demo-

By Susan Van Zant

graphics or curricular areas that are not in alignment with the school goals. Sometimes a grant project will take a school off-course. If, as a result of implementing a proposed project, school goals will not be met, the application should be discarded. Another opportunity will eventually appear.

If the administrator decides that the grant proposal will bring needed funds to the school and will enhance the school program, time should be set aside, and the administrator should begin to gather data and start to write. Generally, applications ask for similar information. Some simple pointers will help to make grant-writing easier.

Introduction/project description

Most applications ask for an introduction or description of the school and the proposed project. The administrator may wish to write a one or two paragraph narrative description of the school, a brief overview of the project goal, and information about the target audience. At this point it is important to be specific about numbers. Do not limit the audience to the students. The proposal should include staff and parent/community involvement. The more people the project will touch, the more likely it is that it that it will be funded.

Statement of need

Funding agencies like to know why the application is important. The needs statement is the foundation of the entire proposal. This statement should let the agency reader understand how the school identified the area of need, or why problem areas were identified. This is an area that should be carefully written. A good needs statement should give the reader a clear picture of who has the need and what they need. The thinking may go something like this:

State need: "Our students need computers."

Ask why: "To learn word processing."

Again, ask why: "To proof, edit and revise their written work."

Write statement: "Our students need to be able to communicate clearly."

One of the most common errors that administrators make with writing a needs statement is to confuse the solution with the need. For example, the needs statement

Administrators who want information about grant opportunities should sign up for automatic e-mail notification on the California Department of Education web page, www.cde.ca.gov/funding. While not all funding opportunities are listed, CDE is in the process of consolidating funding information on one web site. There is an "other funding" button that links to additional funding sources.

An extremely useful site to obtain information about nationwide grant opportunities is www.schoolgrants.org. Brief synopses for more than a hundred opportunities are listed. Most federal grants are designed for state and district programs. Current request for proposals can be reviewed at www.ed.gov/topics.

Other useful sites include:

■ **AAUW Educational Foundation Fellowships and Grants**
www.aauw.org/3000fdnfdelgra.html

The Association of American University Women offers awards up to \$10,000 to support a classroom or school gender equity program.

■ **Christensen Fund**
www.christensenfund.org

Accepts proposals from California San Francisco Bay Area based schools/organizations whose activities support bio-cultural and educational outreach efforts in the areas of visual arts and conservation science.

■ **DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund**
dewittwallace.org

Awards grants of \$5,000 - \$50,000 in support of innovation in educational leadership.

■ **Jordan Fundamentals Grant Program**
www.nfie.org/jfask.htm

Awards of \$2,500 to teachers for the development of original lesson plans or thematic units that demonstrate high student expectations to schools where at least 40 percent of the school's student population is eligible for free and reduced lunch.

■ **Mr. Holland's Opus Foundation**
www.charitywatch.com/charity

Partners with schools to provide new and refurbished musical instruments to students.

■ **National Geographic Society**
www.nationalgeographic.com/society/ngo/foundation/q2html

Up to \$5,000 awarded to teachers who propose innovative geography education projects.

■ **Reading First**
www.cde.ca.gov/funding/profile

Federal program helps schools implement the state adopted reading program where 50 percent or more of the second and third graders score "below basic" on the California test.

■ **School Library Act**
www.cde.ca.gov/library

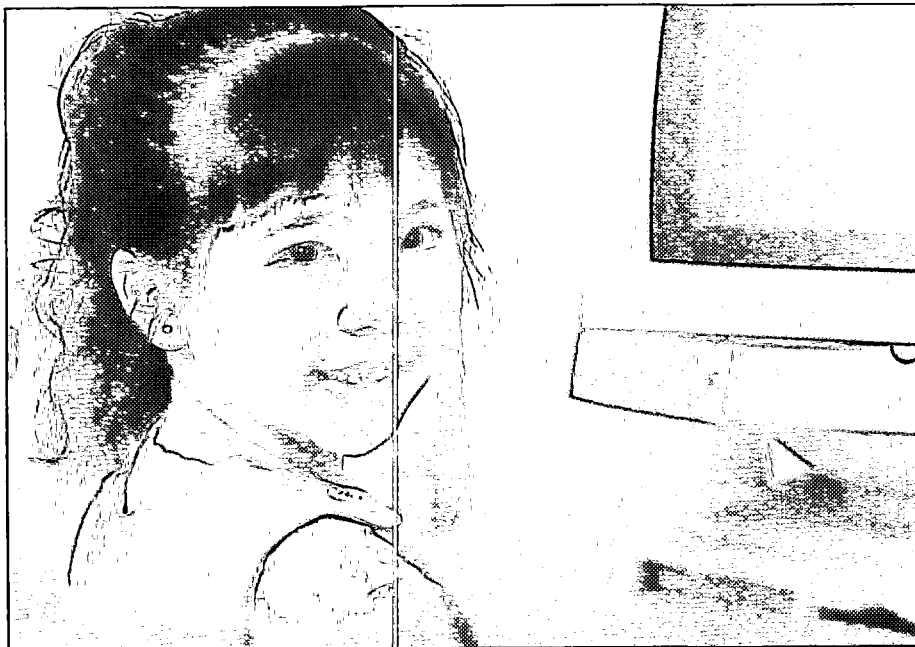
Funded by the California Public Library Act of 1998, schools can obtain library resources and equipment at the rate of \$5.32 per student.

■ **Toyota TAPESTRY Grants**
nsta.org/programs/toyota.htm

Funds mini grants of \$2,500 and other grants up to \$10,000 for innovation science projects that can be implemented over a one-year period.

■ **Whale Tail Grants**
www.coastal.ca.gov/publiced/pendx.html

Up to \$50,000 available for programs teaching the value of marine and coastal resources.



should not read, "Students need computers in the classroom," or even, "Students need to access technology." The fundamental need is not to obtain more computers, but to further develop written language skills. Technology is a way to obtain those skills. Solutions should be described in the goals/objectives section of the application.

If space permits, an administrator may want to add a paragraph describing how the need was determined or why the need is critical to the meeting school goals. This is a good place to add standardized test and/or survey data. Focus on positive opportunities. Remember to include not only the student needs, but also the staff development necessary to effectively implement the project.

Goals and objectives

When writing goals and objectives, administrators should remember that a goal is a general statement: "In the summer children will enjoy reading." An objective is specific: "Each child will check out 10 or more books from the public library during the summer months of July and August as measured by library records." The objectives should match one or more of the identified needs.

An objective can easily be written by following this simple formula: *Who will do what by when as measured by what instrument.* The objectives for students and staff must be

stated in measurable terms. There should be no question in the mind of the agency readers as to what the school hopes to achieve. For example: "Each third grader will demonstrate mastery of the multiplication tables (0-9) by May 2003 as measured by a timed, five-minute test of 100 multiplication facts."

Activities to support objectives

Applications frequently ask what activities will be put into place to achieve the objectives. Activities should be directly tied to and supportive of the objectives. Depending upon the application format, each activity should be described within a timeline. Activities should be in a logical order, clearly identified by person and responsibility. Finally, they should be listed in short phrases and usually begin with a verb.

Students will....

- Read relevant literature based on science themes.
- Participate in hand-on science experiences.
- Record information in science journals.
- Reflect on learnings in discussion groups.
- Participate in reinforcement activities such as ...
- Demonstrate skill and knowledge through ...

Writing a strong evaluation

The evaluation section provides information that helps agency readers to determine if the project goals can and will be achieved. The trick to writing a strong evaluation section is to refer directly back to the objectives. An evaluation measure should be identified for each objective. The method and specific measure and/or procedures for gathering data to evaluate the success of the project should be carefully delineated. When possible, use standard, nationally validated assessment tools or absolute measures of success. Applications will often ask for summative and formative evaluations.

Summative evaluation

A summative evaluation measures how well the target population achieved the project goals and is typically monitored throughout the project and fully evaluated at the end of the project. Measures would include methods such as:

- Comparison of district competency scores in identified content areas.
- Standardized assessment data.
- Authentic assessments.
- Attainments of benchmarks such as attendance rates.
- Logs that indicate participation rates of parents, students and teachers.
- Rating scales to assess specific behaviors.
- Portfolio assessments that use rubrics to demonstrate skill levels.

Formative evaluation

Formative evaluation procedures provide data during the course of the project that can be used to improve the design of the project. Formative evaluation techniques would include:

- Teacher comparison of student assignments focusing on quality improvement.
- Review of daily or weekly journals by staff and students.
- Teacher observations.
- Program Quality Review information.
- WASC accreditation feedback.
- Attitude surveys about the project by students, parents and staff.

Depending upon the policies of the

granting agency, the use of an outside evaluator may be required. When an outside evaluator is part of the project, it is standard business procedure to ask the professional evaluator to write the evaluation section of the proposal. If the grant is funded, the evaluator is hired. More typically the evaluation is internal, and the project director and/or site administrator manage the evaluation.

Proposed budget

The budget should describe what financial resources are necessary to achieve the project goals. The proposed budget and any matching funds must be directly related to proposed program activities. Administrators should be very specific. The readers want to know exactly what supplies and equipment will be purchased, and who will be paid. It is important to remember to add in taxes for the purchase of supplies and equipment, and it is essential to include fringe benefit costs when calculating salaries.

Matching funds can also strengthen a

grant by demonstrating that other organizations, businesses or community groups have investments in the project. Matching

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funds can be in the form of human and financial resources. Most agencies will allow volunteer time to be calculated and incorporated as matching funds.

To ensure that there are no glaring

typos, the administrator should ask an individual who has not participated in the writing process to carefully proof the application. The submission guidelines should be reviewed to ensure that the page-set up and format requirements are followed. The final packet should include the original, signed application and the requisite number of copies. Finally, the application should either be hand delivered or sent to the agency by registered mail, return receipt requested.

Becoming a successful grantwriter

In times of tight funding, one way to secure addition funds for specific projects is to apply for grants. By following the application guidelines and using some simple strategies, an administrator can become successful grant writer. ■

Susan Van Zant is a retired middle school school principal.

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