Grant Readiness Assessment Tool

Sources: Larry Crane, Howlett & Bourque: "Getting Funded: The Complete Guide to Writing Grant Proposals," Susan G. Komen Amarillo Affiliate, Arthur Davis.

1. **Leadership**

   a. Does your organization have a good governing structure and board of directors? Are board members committed and experienced? How many board members? With fewer than 6-12 board members, it's difficult to show community involvement and support.
   b. Are there finance and fundraising committees of the board?
   c. Is the board of directors active in raising funds for the organization?
   d. Do all board members personally support the organization financially?
   e. Do you have a visionary and capable executive director? For a startup organization, do you have a visionary, capable board that is sufficiently staffed and available to work
   f. Is the executive director active in the community and in touch with stakeholders?

2. **Impact**

   a. Can you describe the need that your organization addresses in society with facts and documented statistics?
   b. Can you answer the question, "How will the world be different as a result of the organization's work?"
   c. Can that difference (impact) be measured?
   d. Can you state the goals and objectives of the organization in clear, measurable terms?
   e. Can you describe who you serve with numbers and demographics.
   f. Can your nonprofit demonstrate a proven track record and documented outcomes? If it's a new program, do you have the credentials and support to make it successful?
   g. What is your reputation for success in the community?

3. **Strategic and Program Planning**

   Does your organization have documentation on the following elements?

   a. Mission: your organization's unique reason for existing
   b. Vision: how will the world look different in the future as a result of your work
   c. Values: the organization's core beliefs about what is important and why
   d. Goals: broad description of the impact you desire to have on a problem
   e. Objectives: SMART = Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Results-oriented, Time-bound
   f. Strategies: agency's underlying assumptions or theory of change
   g. Programmatic Activities: what the programs do to fulfill the organization's mission
   h. Outputs: the direct products of program activities (i.e. # of participants served, # of hours of service delivered, etc.)
   i. Outcomes: benefits for participants, in terms of changes in attitudes, values, knowledge, skills, behavior, condition or status

4. **Financial, Fundraising, Administrative, and Legal Capacity**

    a. Does your organization have an approved budget?
    b. Is the organization currently balancing its operating budget?
    c. Does the organization have a current, accurate financial statements?
    d. Can you articulate your fundraising plan and why it's the right approach for your organization? Based on what track record?
    e. Can your organization respond to deadlines and benchmarks in a timely manner?
    f. Do you have the proper legal status to receive funds? Some grantors allow use of a fiscal sponsor.
    g. Do you have the administrative and accounting support to accomplish and report on this project?

5. **Project Articulation**

    a. Have you identified the dollar amount that the organization needs to raise through grants?
    b. Have you defined the grant project, including goals and objectives, strategies and activities, timeline, management plan, project budget and sources of in-kind contributions?
    c. Is the purpose of the proposal consistent with the mission and goals of your agency?
    d. Can you explain the "competitive advantage" of your agency for this particular proposal?
    e. Has the project and related grant-seeking been approved by the board?
    f. Do you have or can you get the right staff for this project?

6. **Funder "Fit"**
    a. Does the project meet the stated and actual focus areas of the funder? By reviewing the grantor's website, 990's through Guidestar, or the Foundation Directly Online, you may find that the stated focus areas are not fully representative of the actual awards.
    b. Is the impact local/regional? If it is not local do you have funder interest and internal infrastructure for national/international projects and have you identified specific funders for those areas.
    c. *After* reviewing website, giving history, and other data, have you contacted the funder to discuss the project and determine if it's the right match?

7. **External Relationships**

    a. Do you know who else in the community or field is doing similar work and can you articulate what makes your work distinct from theirs?
    b. Do you have collaborative relationships with other entities doing similar work where those make sense?
    c. Do you know how the reputation of your organization will affect this proposal?
    d. Do you have active volunteers, in-kind contributions, and demonstrated community involvement and support?
    e. Can you demonstrate substantial community involvement in governance (board), operations (volunteers), finances (donors, in-kind contributions), and broader impact (partner organizations).

Four red flags when assessing nonprofit grant readiness
Source: ProfessionalGrantWriters.org
By Megan Hill with additional comments by Arthur Davis

In my organizational assessments, I often see the same red flags. Here are four ways to tell a nonprofit is not ready to apply for a grant:

1. **No other fundraising plan**: If a nonprofit doesn't have other revenue streams (or at least a solid plan for putting those in place), they're not grant-ready. Funders look at their grant award as an investment and won't make that investment unless they know the organization stands on solid financial footing. *Foundations want to know that they are not "alone" in the initial project funding and that you will be able to sustain the project after the grant period.*

2. **Few or no program details**: If an organization is asking the grant writer (who is not a program director) to make up program details, that's a telltale sign of disaster. *However, many grant writers can assist in program, evaluation and budget development. Are the program activities, objectives and measurable outcomes clearly defined?*

3. **A weak board of directors**: If the board is small and does not include relevant experts, that can spell trouble. The board should also contribute their own donations and help connect the organization to other donors and funders.

4. **A shifting mission**: A nonprofit should never change its programs or its mission to fit a grant opportunity. Nor should a nonprofit create a program to fit a specific grant. It's just not best practice and shows a lack of grant savvy.