

Saturday, May 31, 2008

## **Teacher Survival Strategies**

Getting Classroom or Campus Grants: It's a lot Easier than you Think, If you "Think Like a Grant Benefactor"

Grant writing and grant-getting (garnering grants) carries a mystique that prevents many "ordinary" teachers from going after the money. Of course, going after the money is what most folks think about, and this "narrow thinking" limits their grant acquisition success. Sidebar Some folks believe that grants offer "free money." This is far from true. What grants offer is plenty of extra, uncompensated work. And, if the grant funding amount is small, you might be able to earn more for your instructional program by flipping burgers, part time; at the nearest fast, pretending-to-be-food drive-through site. But, getting grants is easy, if you change your mind set, and if you think like the agency or foundation that is offering the grant. What you want to think about is what the grantor wants to have happen with their money. What beneficial end result is important to them? What will cause joy and happiness to burst out in the hearts and minds of the people that represent the granting agency. And, what brings joy to the folks that support or sponsor the grant organization? Answer: Results that further their agency's or organization's mission. The Grant-Giving Agency's Mission What then if the mission of those folks matches the work that you do in your classroom? What happens is that those money-laden folks can't wait to give you money and track the results that you achieve! Grant funding is that easy, as long as you stay in tune with the grant funder's mission. If you believe that garnering grants is difficult & think again. Why Grant-Getting is Easy Grant-getting is easy because most of your competitors (for the grant dollars) focus upon the money, and what tricks they intend to perform to get the money. This is similar to the child-like mentality that we see portrayed on television when "self-absorbed, one-track-mind" males pursue makeup-laden sex-objects in bistros, bars and clubs. Sure it is easy to make fun of these stereotypes, and their intentions are betrayed by their every antic. But, the "money-grubbing" antics of your competitors' "my needs are all I know" are just as transparent (and humorous) in the eyes of the grant-giver's staff. And remember, needs don't count & not to the grant givers, and not for your students. Everyone has needs. Your students are just as deserving as every other teachers' students. What will distinguish your proposal is that you offer solutions to problems! And avoid begging. Think confidence and strength. Portray an attitude of, "This idea is so good, and the time is so right, so somebody (agency, organization, foundation, benefactor) will be quick to see the benefits and sign on to this project." Avoid negative thoughts and statements. A "I have not gotten anywhere with the dolts that run the place where I work" attitude is a grant deal-sinker. Instead, gather support from every higher-up that you can. Get them to write letters of support containing something to the effect of, "This is the first project that our district would fund on our own, if we had the discretionary funds to do so." And never communicate anything negative about your school district. Grant agencies know that anyone that would "talk trash" about their employer would do likewise about them (the granting organization) whenever the grant project implementation turned sour. (And grant implementation always turn sour.) Projects never progress as planned. Grant projects turn out to be a lot more work than the grantees ever imagined. Etc. What to Do & Here are the guidelines that you should follow in order to receive lots of grant funding. Remember that success breeds success, and the more grants that you acquire, them more that you will receive.

Also remember that a real grant requires lots of uncompensated time that you have to spend on record keeping, paper work, purchasing, documentation, follow-up report writing & as well as the grant implementation itself. (Are you sure that you want to take on that much extra work for no additional pay?) And, oh yes, the rework (Plan B) that is required to squeeze any success at all out of the project. This is because successful grant projects are more rare than grant-giving folks like to announce. After all, they funded many projects, but only a few "pan out." To gear up for grant success & Show that your students are on the verge of success at whatever the grant-giver's mission is. In order to do this, find out what the grant-giver's mission is. Look at annual reports, Websites, brochures, previous grant recipients, anything with clues, etc. Research Grant Funding Agencies and Foundations. Know what the organization is backing, and what the agency wants to accomplish based upon its mission. There is no profit in completing a grant application for a grant that mismatches your curriculum situation. For example, if the grant targets Japanese students and you teach a bilingual class of Mexican-Americans and Central American immigrants, you are wasting your time (and the time of the grant reviewer that must attach a reject slip to your proposal). Then, once you find a grant agency with a good fit to your instructional program, read the grant's Request for Proposal (RFP) the way that a nuclear physicist reads a technical paper, i.e.; line by line, with margin notes, by creating charts and checklists, by building timelines. This is a time to "suspend" your speed reading skills & read slowly and deliberately. Read for clues the way that a Crime Scene Investigator reads clues. Avoid reading the way that an English teacher reads & i.e., set aside literary (and other) criticism. Another description of this process, "Do your homework as though you were the most paranoid person you know (except your supervisor)." Develop checklists that include every single requirement of the grant. Make sure that you can accomplish each of these. This is super-important. Don't ask for the money if you can't deliver on the grant project. Identify budgets and project partners, and check with them to ensure that they can 1.) work with the grant during the grant timeline, 2.) offer support and value 3.) add to the perceived expert status of the project team. Round up

evaluation help. Grant agencies expect that someone else, generally with a positive reputation and independent status will review and evaluate the progress that you made during the grant implementation process. Make sure that the grant evaluator has the credentials to perform this service. Prepare all Letters of Support, budgets, project plans, Scope of Work, project specifications, Requirements documents and other mandatory materials. Make sure that the project budgets include indirect costs, which are costs added to the project (or subtracted from the money you have to work with) to cover incidental costs such as electricity, extra janitorial service, delivery of project items, whatever&hellip; Be aware that partner organizations are likely to tack these charges on to their participation budgets, too. These costs can run for the teen-percents to large fractions. Be careful to check this out! Be prepared for site visits from the Grant-Giving agency, if these are required. Hidden Pitfalls You are undertaking a huge commitment, without financial compensation. But, also be prepared to give away any status credit that you earn to your supervisors and other higher-up school district executives. After all, they won't allow you to move a finger on any grant without their approval. And, in most cases, only the Superintendent (or designee) are allowed to obligate a school district (contract with the Grant-Giving agency). So, while you do the "lion's share of the work," you receive a "kitten's share" of the credit. Still, garnering grants creates a fabulous addition to your resume or curriculum vita. And grants that target fantastic benefits to your students are worth pursuing. When you find a grant that is a congruent fit for your instructional program, go for it!

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