

# following the yellow brick road



## STRATEGIES FOR SECURING GRANTS

Just as Dorothy, the Tin Man, the Scarecrow, and the Lion went looking for answers to their problems, so do many Main Street programs. One particular area of concern for Main Street directors is finding the funding to carry out various activities and programs. Often the search for funding has program managers considering grants as a source of income. Just as one of the munchkins in the *Wizard of Oz* exhorted Dorothy to “follow the Yellow Brick Road,” I offer that same advice to you, the Main Street director, in your efforts to obtain grant funding.

By “Yellow Brick Road,” I am referring to a set of grant strategies that I have found to be highly effective in my profession as a municipal grant administrator and in contracting my services out to other agencies. Although these strategies do not guarantee that I will be awarded every grant request I submit, they have resulted in a very respectable 85 percent success rate. Even though the process of obtaining a grant can leave you feeling as if you’re “not in Kansas anymore,” I hope the following information will be of benefit.

Our trip down the “Yellow Brick Road” begins with a look at sources and resources for funding. People often fail to look in their own backyards when seeking grant funds. Many national corporations have philanthropic arms. Companies such as UPS, BellSouth, and General Electric seek to distribute grants in cities and towns where their

employees work. In some communities, there are local foundations that support community projects. However, as with anything worthwhile, finding these sources requires research.

Although one of the best places to locate grant resources is the Internet, finding relevant information can often seem like trying to locate a needle hidden in Dorothy’s friend the Scarecrow. A simple web search for the term “grant” will return thousands of sites that reference the term. When doing a web search, therefore, it is best to be as specific as possible. Typing the phrase “grants for historic building renovations” will provide more relevant sites than simply typing in “preservation grants.” Still, some basic websites should be bookmarked by anyone who is searching for grant funding.

**These sites are:**

Traveling down the “Yellow Brick Road” will be more productive if you are prepared and organized—if you have a roadmap so you won’t get lost and waste valuable time that could be spent working on your grant proposal. Here are five basic strategies for organizing your search:

### 1 IDEAS.

It is important to formulate your project before seeking funding. I have counseled many organizations that find out funds are available and then rush to put together a project. This wastes time, like Dorothy chasing after Toto—it slowed her down in accomplishing her goal.

### 2 NEEDS ASSESSMENT.

Whether it is formal or informal, you must have data to support the need for your project. Almost every Request for Proposal (RFP) I have seen asks for data to support your claims.

### 3 COLLABORATIONS.

Community partnerships are necessary! Funders want to see that there is community support for your program or activity.

### 4 BOILERPLATES.

Some items are common to most RFPs and others are generic enough that you can manipulate them to meet the requirements of different

### FEDERAL

The Catalog for Federal Domestic Assistance - <http://www.cfda.gov>  
The Federal Register - [http://www.archives.gov/federal\\_register/index.html](http://www.archives.gov/federal_register/index.html)  
U.S. Government’s Official Web Portal - <http://firstgov.gov/>  
Federal Funding Report - [http://www.house.gov/ffr/federal\\_funding\\_reports.shtml](http://www.house.gov/ffr/federal_funding_reports.shtml)  
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) - [www.hud.gov](http://www.hud.gov)  
U.S. Department of Transportation - [www.dot.gov](http://www.dot.gov)

### FOUNDATIONS

The Annie E. Casey Foundation - <http://www.aecf.org/>  
The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation - <http://www.rwjf.org/index.jsp>  
The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation - <http://www.mott.org>

### GENERAL

The Foundation Center - <http://fdncenter.org/>  
The Grantsmanship Center - [www.tgci.com](http://www.tgci.com)  
Grantwriters.Com - <http://www.grantwriters.com/>  
Grants, Etc. - <http://www.ssw.umich.edu/resources/index2.html?collection=grants>

funding sources. These items, which include resumes, job descriptions, graphs with information from your needs assessments, and evaluation plans, should be kept on file for easy access.

## 5 ADEQUATE TIME AND SUPPLIES.

Usually RFPs are released with very short deadlines for the submission of proposals. Allocating enough time to complete a proposal is essential to ensure quality work. Also be sure that you have enough supplies on hand to complete the task. You don't want your printer to run out of ink while you're rushing to meet a tight deadline.

**I**n the movie, the Wizard hid behind the curtain to protect his secret. While I don't purport to be "great and powerful" like the Wizard, I do have a few writing secrets that have helped me achieve success. So that you can maintain your footing along the Yellow Brick Road, I will share a few of them with you.

## WRITE EARLY IN THE MORNING.

Set aside 20 to 30 minutes at the beginning of each day to work on your proposal. This allows you to approach the task with a fresh mind. You'll find it easier to focus before the distractions of the day disrupt your creative juices.

## SHORT VERSIONS OF KEY IDEAS.

Every Request for Proposal is divided into sections. It helps to read each section and then write a short answer. By doing this for all sections, before you expound upon any one segment, you'll find that your writing task becomes easier.

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### WRITE INSIDE OUT.

Look through the RFP until you find a section that you feel comfortable writing and complete it first. Then move on to the next section with which you are comfortable and complete it. Continue this pattern until all sections are finished. There is no rule that says you have to write your proposal in the order it is presented in the RFP. Before submitting your final proposal, however, you will need to arrange it in the proper order. I will discuss this later under packaging.

### USE CHARTS AND GRAPHS.

Some people comprehend proposals better if they include charts and graphs. Grant reviewers—the people assigned to review your proposal—often have 10 to 15 other proposals to review, and their eyes get tired. When I serve as a reviewer for the federal government, I always appreciate seeing the monotony of the written word broken up by a chart or a graph. However, use these judiciously and appropriately.

### THE MINI-MART TEST.

Write at a level that is appropriate and not overly technical. You should be able to take your proposal down to the local mini-mart and have the person working the counter comprehend it. Avoid using slang and jargon.

### FONT TYPE AND SIZE.

Always use at least a 12-point font. It is easy on the eyes. Also, use a serif font. I prefer Times New Roman. Remember, your proposal isn't the only one a reviewer will be reading. Late at night, when I am reviewing my last proposal for the day, I do not want to be straining to read the information.

First impressions are often lasting impressions. This is true not only when dealing with people, but also when submitting a proposal. The Lion, Scarecrow, and Tin Man all gave first impressions that did not reflect what they actually were. How you package your proposal can have the same effect. Remember, it is often the little things that determine whether a proposal will be funded.

When packaging your proposal, think about the reviewer who will be reading and analyzing your work. Use quality paper—24-pound is a good weight—and use paper that has at least a 92 brightness. That makes your proposal easier to read in a poorly lit room.

Use the same headings as the sections in the Request for Proposal, and arrange the sections of your proposal so that they follow the same order as the RFP. This allows the reviewer to quickly ascertain whether you have all the required information; nothing is more frustrating than having to flip back and forth between pages to see if the proposal covered a requirement. Finally, be sure to follow the RFP's instructions about maximum number of pages, appendices, and number of copies.

The last component of a successful proposal isn't part of the written document but can be as important as anything you submit. It is often called "politicking"—i.e., making sure those with influence know about your efforts. Just as Dorothy had to rely on other characters to help her get in to see the Wizard and eventually reach her goal of getting back home, you too may need to rely on others to help get your proposal funded. When seeking assistance from politicians, your objective is to provide

them with the benefits to their constituents. Let them know that when your proposal is funded, they will get positive public exposure. The goal here is to influence the funding outcome in your favor without offending the funding officials.

If you follow this "Yellow Brick Road," I am confident that you will achieve a measure of success in your grant writing endeavors. As I tell my clients, I cannot guarantee that you will have success every time you submit a proposal. I have yet to meet an individual who has written more than a few proposals and had all of them completely funded. Remember that with the courage of the Cowardly Lion, the brains of the Scarecrow, the heart of the Tin Man, and the faith of Dorothy you will find that your "dreams do come true."

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