

## **Suggestions for Writing Successful Grants**

Funding from private foundations and corporations can be very important sources of revenue. However, to receive this funding, the following process may be helpful:

1. Search a standard data base of potential funders to identify funders who may be interested in your program.

Be sure your funding needs match the funder's priorities.

- Defined areas of interest (such as education, workforce development, or youth development)
- Geographic preference (this may be a town, region, state, or group of states/counties; for corporate foundations, it is often where the company has facilities.)
- Characteristics of the clients served, such as low-income, urban/rural, women/girls, or age, such as K-12.

Contact your local community foundation or other non-profit organizations in your area for recommendations on how to access a funder data base. Use search terms such as “youth development,” “science education” “technology” or “youth programs.”

Many foundations and corporations will have information on “how to apply for a grant” on their website.

2. Once you have identified a match, you may want to contact the funder to confirm that your needs and their funding priorities are a match. Make sure the funder accepts phone calls or concept papers before making this contact.

If accepted, contact can be made informally in a phone conversation, letter of interest or concept paper.

If a letter of interest or proposal is submitted, the guidelines the funders wants you to use will be very specific, and all supporting documents identified. Follow the funder's directions to the letter. Be sure to answer all their questions, keep your proposal to the number of pages stipulated, and include all the required

documentation, but do not send additional materials such as DVD's unless requested. Be attentive to deadlines! Funders will not accept late proposals.

3. In order to submit a competitive proposal here are a few tips:

- A well organized organization will be evident through a well defined budget and/or strategic (business) plan. Funders appreciate organizations that have clearly defined objectives and priorities.
- Be sure your budget includes all anticipated costs. If you have significant in-kind contributions and volunteer labor let your funder know – it shows important community support.
- Write in an active voice. “We will host” an FLL rumble rather than “we hope to be able to” host an FLL rumble. Your proposal should be well written, with no spelling or grammatical mistakes. You may have to edit your proposal several times. Be sure to explain your program well – don't assume “everybody knows what we do.”
- It may be helpful to view *FIRST* programs as year-long in duration, not just as “teams” and “regionals”.
- If you receive a grant award, be sure to thank the funder and give them proper recognition, unless they prefer to give their gift anonymously.
- A report may be required to the funder insuring their money was spent according to the terms identified in the award documentation. Remember, no monies can be spent until your award contract has been signed and any deviations from your original proposal must be approved by the funder before they are made. This includes changes to your original budget or other program allocations. If ever in doubt, ask the funder – they want you to succeed.

Prepare a grants calendar – include funder, deadline for applications, contact info, report deadlines, etc.

- Funder expectations need to be met—don't promise what you can't deliver
- Demonstrate effectiveness of project – evaluation (formal or informal)

Some reoccurring problems:

- Not enough contact with program staff, partners, affiliate partners during project/grant development.
- Each *FIRST* program- FRC, FTC, FLL handles things differently- you need to understand those nuances—if you're writing a grant for additional teams – you need to be sure those extra teams can be accommodated at a regional or tournament— how payment is made is crucial—payment via PITSCO must be exact.
- Project has to be well defined – who is doing what, and when—
- Do not make any additional purchases or changes to the budget without written approval for funder. Use money on what it was intended for.
- You absolutely must submit a final report—if it is a reporting requirement.

If you don't get funding the first time around don't be discouraged. Ask the funder what you can do to improve your application and keep applying. By following the above recommendations, however, you will have greatly enhanced your chances of success.

In order to maintain good relations with *FIRST* staff – DON'T WAIT UNTIL THE LAST MINUTE TO ASK FOR INFORMATION OR HELP. This includes program staff, finance, and development.