

Guest Column

Grant reviewers share their top 10 pet peeves



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Grant writing, for all its mystique, is essentially a form of communication. As in all good communication, the grant writer needs to know whom to connect with, what must be accomplished

in the process and what to include to support the objective with the identified audience.

In these terms, grant writing becomes a process of selection. But what, exactly, do you select in order to write a successful proposal?

I put that question to some grant reviewers early last month. I asked them to tell me what they *don't* like to see in grant proposals so I could pass that information along to participants in the Michigan Nonprofit Forum's Grantmakers/Grantseekers VII conference in Lansing on May 12.

I interviewed grant reviewers who work at the federal and state levels, as well as those at both large private and community foundations. Here is the resulting list of their col-

lective "Top 10 Pet Peeves" about grant proposals — and some tips for avoiding them:

No. 10: Too much, too little or not the right stuff. Relate background information to your proposal and include enough material to establish your organization's credibility. Avoid assumptions about the reviewer's local knowledge.

No. 9: Missing measurable/clear outcomes. Present a clear picture of what will happen, how you plan to proceed and how you'll know whether your program is successful.

No. 8: No sense of audience. Know who will be reviewing your proposal. Anticipate your readers' level of expertise and experience. Review proposals carefully to avoid omissions or inaccuracies that weaken credibility.

No. 7: Writing only to the \$\$\$. Instead of telling the readers what they want to fund, tell them what you plan to do, how and why. Avoid the use of buzzwords and jargon.

No. 6: No plan for life after the grant. Anticipate questions of long-term sustainability and explain in specific terms how

your program will move beyond the grant period.

No. 5: A question of scale. Ask yourself, "If I had to read this, how long would it take me? Would I find it interesting reading?"

No. 4: Not following directions. Answer the questions in the order they are asked. And always honor the funder's preference with respect to phone or written inquiries.

No. 3: Too much turf. Network before submitting your proposal to develop a shared vision, involve other agencies/organizations and draw on available expertise.

No. 2: Budget, budget, budget. Submit only a well-justified budget that includes expenses and revenues.

No. 1: A proposal that doesn't fit. Make sure your proposal is appropriate to the funder's mission and objectives. Tailor your submission to the granting institution's needs and interests.

— *The writer, Mary B. Cohen, is a Kalamazoo-based communications consultant working with nonprofit organizations, health-related businesses and private foundations.*