

Partnership Documentation: A Critical Component of a Winning Grant Application

Securing partners and obtaining quality documentation of the collaboration are some of the most important yet difficult parts of the grant writing process. The ability to secure quality partnerships and documentation of the partnership directly impacts the fundability of your proposal – it can literally make or break your chances of winning an award. Too often, organizations wait until the last minute to work on this part of the grant proposal and then run into problems getting the required documentation.

Here are five tips on how to be successful with establishing partnerships and securing partnership documentation...

1. Identify strong partners in many sectors

When requesting funding for a particular grant initiative, it is important to present the request as a “united front” – demonstrating that the entire community is behind it and willing to assist with implementing the initiative. It is always good to have partners from each of the 11 sectors outlined in this white paper – keeping in mind that some grants wouldn’t necessarily be appropriate for every single sector. For example, a research grant being written to fund a biotechnology invention wouldn’t call for law enforcement or a parent to be involved. Therefore, much of the discretion is up to you and your grant writer and your intimate knowledge of what partners are appropriate for the grant.

Analyze any partners and community members who you currently work with that you can reach out to request formal partnership documentation. You can also identify new potential partners through Internet searches, word of mouth, or looking through the yellow pages.

Depending on the type of sector one represents, you will need to have suggestions for how each partner can specifically contribute to the grant program. Some partners may only be involved on an oversight committee – meeting monthly to analyze and troubleshoot implementation of the grant. Others may be more appropriate to conduct special trainings and workshops – or extend the use of particular resources (even if this means you need to add money to the budget for the partners to make this happen). These resources could be transportation, office or classroom space, volunteers, media promotions/PSAs, etc. Regardless, it is best to obtain a good partner or two in each potential partner sector (as appropriate for the grant, of course):

- Youth
- Parents
- Law enforcement
- Schools
- Businesses
- Media
- Community-based organizations
- Religious and fraternal organizations
- Civic and volunteer groups
- Healthcare professionals
- State, local, and tribal agencies



WINNING
Partnership

2. Identify each potential partner's role

Some partners will want a "piece of the budget" to provide a particular service or resource. Others will just be happy to provide support and even a testimonial of the need and demand for the grant. You will have to negotiate this with each partner BUT do so only after obtaining input from your Grant Writer so that no budgetary commitments are made that could negatively impact the grant. Always keep in mind that no matter how much a grant budget is, it is NEVER enough and you will need every penny you can spare to making your program work effectively.

3. Get your partners on board with strong talking points

Once you've identified potential partners, now you need to convince them to support you. The best approach to accomplishing this is to prepare (or work with your Grant Writer to prepare) some talking points – outlining the grant program and how a particular type of partner can contribute to the program design.

You'll also want to send your talking points to current partners and community members along with a request to partner letter.

4. Secure your partnership documentation

Once partner has agreed to support your grant initiative, you'll need to prove to the funder – through written and signed pieces of paper – that your collaboration actually exists or else, in most cases, your partnerships won't hold any value in the judging of your proposal. There are two types of documentation that you can secure from each of your partners – a Partnership Agreement or Letter of Support. It is always best to have a good combination of both Letters of Support AND Partnership Agreements. Ten or more of both types of documentation is a good goal to work towards.

A Partnership Agreement, or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), needs to be very specific, outlining the activities and commitments of each partner as well as any in-kind or money contributions/equivalents that can be calculated towards the cost share of the grant from the partner. You should obtain one specific agreement from each partner unless told otherwise. Your Grant Writer can explain this in greater detail if needed.

Letters of Support should be on your partner's letterhead...they must discuss the need for the grant program...they must describe your history of collaboration...they must pledge support for the grant program...and they SHOULD discuss the role and commitments that the partner has agreed to. General letters pledging support without a real commitment of resources are just "filler" that may or may not be considered a true and pertinent document of support by a proposal reviewer.

5. Get started now

Even when you already have partnerships in place, contacting those organizations to request partner documentation, finalizing or customizing the wording, and obtaining partner signatures can take some time as the signer juggles his/her own schedule. It is, therefore, important to get started immediately. Deadlines creep up fast, especially when you are busy with other daily business. A delay can make the difference between your initiative being awarded or denied.

If you have questions about grant partnerships or would like assistance preparing and securing partnership documentation, Resource Associates is happy to help. Our partnership development team can simplify and streamline the time consuming process of securing partners and gathering the required documentation for grant applications. Contact us today.

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