

Fundraising Basics for NAACP Units: Criteria, Pitfalls & Hints for Success

Assess Fundraising Needs

Take stock of what funds the unit already has, what additional funds are needed and what funders have given to the unit in the past. Why are additional funds needed? How much additional funding is needed? When are the additional funds needed?

Research & Develop Targeted Funding Prospect List

Developing the list of targeted funders should include the following steps.

- 1) Research to find grantmakers that give in the geographic area of the unit, that give to issues that the unit supports and that give the type of support the unit is seeking.
- 2) Refine that list by identifying what organizations the grantmakers have funded. Note if those organizations are similar to your organization and identify the amounts typically awarded by the grantmakers. These steps will enable you to determine if a funder is worth pursuing for the projects the unit plans to implement.
- 3) Circulate the Board and Program Officer lists for refined targeted funders with the unit executive and fundraising committees, etc. to determine if they have relationships with anyone associated with the funders so the unit can avoid submitting a cold proposal, if possible. Those individuals may be able to facilitate an introduction to the funder.

Also, keep in mind funders with whom the unit already has relationships either directly or indirectly through networks.

Developing a targeted prospect list must be given thoughtful consideration. The unit should plan to spend at least six months exploring potential funders.

The Application Process

Confirm deadlines, types of proposal materials required, guidelines for contacting the funder and submitting requests by reviewing funder websites. Each grantmaker will have different policies and procedures.

While the Application is Pending with Funder

After submitting a proposal, the unit will typically need to follow up with the funder to note if it has experienced leadership changes, to provide updated financial information for the unit/project and/or if the unit has secured additional supporters for the project in which it is seeking funds.

Awarded Grant Request

Accountability: The unit must make every effort to manage the grant responsibly.

Grant Award Letter: MUST READ CAREFULLY. This is the contract outlining terms of the award (amount, start/end dates; reporting dates, deliverables and expected outcomes).

Review for accuracy, sign and return. Funds cannot be spent until the award letter is signed and returned.

Deliverables: Objectives, goals and activities intended to be achieved during grant start and end dates.

Reporting: Interim and/or final narrative and financial progress reports are expected to provide detailed updates on activities, progress, problems/resolutions and expenditures. Late reporting violates agreement and may be viewed negatively for future funding.

Budgeting: Monitor spending to ensure accurate balances of expenditures and budget. Spend funds only on the stated intended purpose that is described in the award letter.

Declined Grant Request

Mission Mismatch: The primary reason proposals are declined is because the missions of the grantmaker and grant seeker do not match. During the research phase, if you learn that the unit's mission does not match the mission of the potential funder, do not waste time submitting a proposal.

Not a good time: Ensure that the unit is applying during the grant making cycle for the funder.

Incomplete Applications: Ensure that the unit provides all material in the format requested by the potential funder.

If a grant request is declined, the unit should express appreciation for the funder's consideration. Find out the reason for the decline so the unit can determine the feasibility of applying again in the future.

Cultivate Professional Relationships with Funders

The unit's primary goal in building relationships with funders should be to keep the unit on the funder's radar. This can be accomplished in several ways.

Have someone in your network introduce you to grantmakers they know (either a Board member, program officer or other senior staffer at grantmaking institutions).

Where permissible, call to seek clarification about funder policies and procedures. However, be sure to ask smart questions for information that is not already available on the funder's website. That will demonstrate that you are a serious applicant and that you did your homework by first reviewing their website.

Make contact with funders long before deadlines approach so that you are not among those overwhelming funders with last minute questions just before deadlines.

When awarded funds, manage the grant effectively by meeting deadlines, spending the grant funds only on intended purposes, budgeting responsibly and keeping the grantmaker appropriately updated on major changes with the unit and its programs for which it has received funds.