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What You Need to Know When Working With An Independent Grant Professional: Before a nonprofit agency or other institution enters into an agreement to obtain advisory or grant writing services from an Independent Grant Professional, there are concerns that the agency or institution should consider:

Agency/Institution's Mission: Are the services you are seeking in line with your agency or institution's current mission? It is not wise to seek funding just because it is available. Are your mission, vision, and agency values in line with today's client needs? If so, you do not want to *stretch* them in order to fit the funder's criteria. If they're not, you have other work to do before seeking this funding opportunity.

How Will You Prove to the Potential Funder That You Have the Resources to Sustain the Project? Your funders will want to know up front who is already supporting you financially, who has the faith in your mission to donate significant sums of money to support goals and objectives they believe you can realistically achieve. New and emerging nonprofit organizations generally start small with private funding from local donors, grants or donations from area corporations and small (even family) foundations. When the agency has proven itself by obtaining this type of funding, they are likely to appear more sustainable to a larger funder, like corporations who support the agency's mission; state or national foundations; and county, state, and the federal government. There are funding opportunities that support only emerging nonprofits with budgets of less than \$300,000 for example and others who will only support organizations with budgets over one million dollars or more.

How Will You Prove to the Potential Funder That You Have the Resources to Achieve the Goals and Objectives You Are Proposing, for Each Project for Which You Seek Funding? It is imperative to be realistic. Before you enter into an agreement with someone you will pay to locate funding sources and/or write grant applications, you need to provide a convincing argument that you have the resources, manpower, skill, experience, and credibility to successfully accomplish what you say you will achieve within a stated time frame. Until you can make this convincing case, you might not be ready to spend money on outside consultation.

How Will You Pay for the Services of an Independent Advisor or Grant Professional? Most funders make it clear that their funding will not cover pre-award costs. Therefore, any money you spend planning and preparing to submit a grant application cannot come from the grant you are seeking. There is no guarantee that you will receive the grant, particularly when an agency is new or emerging; however, any advisor or grant writer you sign an agreement with will need to be paid for his or her services. Do you have enough funds in your operating budget to cover these costs? Grant Professionals who are certified (GPCs) by the Grant Professionals Association (GPA) are bound by a Code of Ethics which prohibits them from taking payment from a percentage of a grant award or only accepting payment when a grant is awarded. They have done their job in good faith and need to be paid for services, just as a doctor is paid regardless of the health outcomes of the patient. There are many variables that result in an award being rejected. These include but are not limited to: too many grant requests for the amount of funds available, lack of agency history achieving stated goals, disparities between grant request and funder's mission, or a negative history between agency and a

potential funder. None of those factors pose a negative reflection upon the job of your grant professional or the quality of the grant application you submitted.

Understand the Scope of Service Provided to You by the Advisor/Grant Professional: Prior to signing an agreement to retain the grant professional's services, he or she will provide you with a **Scope of Service**, which will detail the work to be performed, a range of hours the project task is expected to take, and a cost estimate based upon the range of hours multiplied by the professional's hourly rate. In some instances, particularly when the agency and grant professional have previously worked together extensively, a flat fee per project might be arranged. This is not likely to be done in the case of a new client/consultant relationship.

Things About the Scope of Service to Know in Advance:

- **If the project does not take as much time as anticipated, do I still have to pay the minimum estimated cost?** You can request to have it stated in your agreement that you will only pay for the actual number of hours during which work was performed, if that is lower than the low end of the estimated range.
- **If the project involves more time than stated in the estimated range, do I have to pay more than the high end of that range?** If the high end of a range is estimated to be 70 hours of work at \$75 per hour, you will probably budget up to \$5,250 to pay your independent advisor/grant professional for this particular project. If the estimated range was between 50 and 70 hours for the job and your consultant worked 60 hours, you will pay him or her for the actual number of hours worked, \$4,500. However, if the project exceeds 70 hours, you need to be prepared. Your grant professional will keep a time log of all hours spent on your project and this will eventually appear in your invoice. You can write into your agreement how overages will be handled. For example, if the project involves no changes from the original scope of service, but the consultant takes longer than expected to do what he or she said they would do, you can expect him or her to accept the highest end of the range and no more (it's not your fault they took longer than expected when nothing else has changed). However, if the Scope of Service tasks change (e.g. you want something additional done that's not mentioned in the original Scope or you arrange for more or lengthier meetings, conference calls, etc than originally anticipated) then you are the responsible party. It would be wise to ask the consultant to let you know when they are within 60% - 75% of the estimated range, so you can decide from there how to proceed. Can you complete the project yourself once the top of the range has been reached? Do you wish to pay additional dollars, to retain the consultant beyond the parameters of the original estimates? These are details that need to be discussed with the consultant and written into your agreement prior to you or the consultant signing any documents.
- **What Will My Auditor Say?** It is wise to work with an accountant who is familiar with the inner-workings of nonprofit agencies, as your circumstances are very different from those of businesses, corporations, or individuals. Your consultant will generally expect payment within thirty days of the date of Invoice. Invoices are generally sent immediately upon completion of any project that takes no more than 4 to 6 weeks. Longer projects are frequently billed, based upon hours of work, on a monthly basis, and some institutions prefer to be billed every two weeks. Make these arrangements for billing prior to signing an agreement. You will need to prove to your auditor how you are spending agency funds and from which budget line your consultant is being paid.

Other Details About Submitting Grant Proposals: Although you are considering retaining a professional to guide you in the process of grant submission or even to prepare a grant application for

your agency or institution, there are many duties you or someone within the agency will need to perform.

- Schedule time to be available to answer questions regarding all facets of the project for which you are seeking funding and about your agency itself. Someone with authority within the organization will need to be the point person with the consultant. In addition, the independent grant professional will expect the person with signatory authority to regularly review and make recommendations regarding all proposal drafts sent to them by the consultant.
- Most funders require many attachments to be submitted with the grant application. These include:
 - Agency operating budget (common)
 - Most recent financial statement (less common)
 - Latest financial audit (if you are required to have one - common)
 - Most recently completed Form 990 (less common)
 - IRS Letter of Determination for 501(c)(3) organizations (common)
 - In Florida, some funders will request your SunBiz Authorization to do Business in the State (less common)
 - Listing of Board of Directors, occasionally with affiliations and/or other identifying information (common)
 - Copy of agency's Articles of Incorporation (common)
 - Copy of agency's Bylaws (common)
 - Agency Organizational Chart and specific Program Org Chart (common)
 - Job Descriptions, when positions are to be funded (common)
 - Resumes of Key Staff and those who are expected to fill positions to be funded by the grant award (common)
 - Letters of Support (common)
 - Memoranda of Agreement with community partners (common)

Have all of these items available well in advance of an application due date. Most grant applications are submitted on-line; therefore electronic as well as hard copies are essential. Be certain to keep documents that are subject to change (e.g. financial statements, audits, board members, etc up to date and accurate)

- **The Grant Application Budget** – Determine in advance of signing an agreement who will be responsible for preparing the proposal Budget and Budget Narrative. If you wish the consultant to perform these duties, they should be stated in the Scope of Service. Budget documents must contain no errors and must align with everything you have said in your application narrative. The Budget Narrative must justify all expenditures.
- A *Request for Proposals (RFP)* or *Request for Applications (RFA)* generally contain all the information you and the grant writer need to know regarding submitting the proposal application. **You are just as responsible as the grant writer for knowing this document and all requirements, instructions, and questions to be answered or information to be provided.**
- No matter how good a completed grant application might look to you, remember **you have to live with the project and are responsible for achieving the stated outcomes if you receive the funding.** You and your Board must determine if this is the right path for your agency and whether or not it is realistic and attainable. **Best Wishes for Great Success!**