



APMP-SOCAL
February 19, 2009

The Cold-Start

and

Is Grant Writing Really Different?

Our February 19, 2009, meeting featured two round-table discussions among members gathered at five venues: The cold-start proposal, and the differences between writing for grants and writing for contracts.

Cold Start

Cold-start proposals are defined as those that either begin late or begin without a genuine team and well-defined leadership structure. The proposal manager can provide continuity and prodding, but someone must “own” the proposal/project to get it off to a good start and move it along to a successful conclusion.

Often, the problem is a lack of resources – if a company must budget some of its precious bid-and-proposal money to a new project, there can be reluctance to let go of the money, or lethargy in committing it. This gets the proposal off to a slow start. Typically, it falls to the proposal manager to get things on track once the resources are committed.

Another reason for cold starts is that the opportunity is a surprise to the organization (“It just popped up...”) or it is a pet project of top management, even if the likelihood of winning is low. In either case, the proposal team must overcome a lack of capture planning, a lack of organization, and possibly a lack of commitment among team members.

And what about the “must win” proposal? One participant commented that every proposal is intended to win, so labeling something “must-win” is meaningless.

The take-away messages from the discussion:

1. Proposal managers need to get out in front early on a cold-start. Even if the project manager isn't yet leading, the proposal manager can get things organized, engage the capture manager, set up a schedule, and begin pushing. A stumbling start does not necessarily mean a doomed proposal if the right people step up early.
2. We need to have the courage to walk away from the wrong opportunities. Depending on the political climate and other factors, it can be difficult to stand up and say that the right response is

a no-bid. But this decision can free up resources to do a better job on more appropriate opportunities. It is better to write 10 proposals and win 6 than to write 20 proposals and win 5.

Is Grant Writing Different?

There is a sentiment among proposal writers that somehow a proposal for a grant is a different creature than a proposal for a contract. There are differences, but essentially the proposals are the same. Grants and contracts (and Cooperative Agreements and Other Transactions) are funding instruments that result when you write a good proposal. Mitch Boretz put it this way at the meeting: “I write proposals, not grants.”

In general, a contract is a procurement – the customer is buying something from the seller. A grant has an element of public benefit to it, and either no deliverables or more loosely defined deliverables than a contract (see the slides attached).

Scientific research grants often are so specialized that only a handful of groups are capable of satisfying the need. Often, they team up with each other rather than compete against each other. (The same is true in industry, such as aerospace, of course.) Scientific proposals often are peer-reviewed, so it is a bad idea to spend too much time disparaging the competition – your competitor, or someone close to your competitor, might be your reviewer. Rather, the proposals should focus on the novelty, innovativeness, and likelihood of success.

For social-service grants, it can be important to know the sponsoring agency and how it works. Many successful non-profits hire former government people to help them understand the intricacies of their funding agencies and write proposals that are more likely to win.



SoCal APMP
Membership Meeting

February 19, 2009

Welcome

- Host Locations

- Newport Beach-Dana Spears
- Redondo Beach-Jim Costell
- Woodland Hills-Anita Wright
- Redlands-Nora O'Toole
- San Diego-Mireille Driver

- Future Locations

- NorCal Chapter
- Valley of the Sun Chapter



New Format

- Open forum
 - Seed topics start the dialogue
 - Members with experience share
 - Others ask questions
- Goal
 - Members exchange ideas
 - Share best practices
 - Learn what to avoid



New Format

- Rules of engagement
 - One speaker at a time
 - As questions arise, host may type them in LiveMeeting
 - Everyone is free to share
 - Mute your phone when not speaking
 - If it is funny, let us all hear it



Agenda

- Topic 1

- The Cold Start (25 minutes)

- Topic 2

- Is Grant Writing Really Different? (25 minutes)

- Closing Remarks



The Cold Start

- Is there a problem with the “cold start”?
- How do you convince the team there is actually a proposal being written?
- How did we get to this point in the first place?
- Where do you find the team?
 - Or what happened to them after the kickoff?
- How do you find resources to ramp up?
- How do you move from “cold” to “tepid”?
- What impact will this have on our proposal budget?
- Are "cold starts" REALLY what we should be doing?
- How will we avoid this next time?



Is Grant Writing Really Different?

- Grant (grants.gov glossary)
 - An award of financial assistance, the principal purpose of which is to transfer a thing of value from a federal agency to a recipient to carry out a public purpose of support or stimulation authorized by a law of the United States (see 31 U.S.C 6101(3)). A grant is distinguished from a contract, which is used to acquire property or services for the federal government's direct benefit or use.



Is Grant Writing Really Different?

- Contract – in contrast (grants.gov)
 - A procurement under an award or sub award, and a procurement subcontract under a recipient's or sub recipient's contract.



Is Grant Writing Really Different?

- Grant (UCR)

- A type of financial assistance awarded to an organization for the conduct of research or other sponsored programs. A grant is used whenever the awarding sponsor does not anticipate that it will be substantially involved in the programmatic performance or direction of the proposed project.



Is Grant Writing Really Different?

- Contract – in contrast (UCR)

- A mechanism used for procuring a product or service with specific obligations for both sponsor and recipient. Typically, a research topic and the methods for conducting the research are specified in detail by the sponsor, although some sponsors award contracts in response to unsolicited proposals. The scope of work performed under a contract is more closely controlled by the sponsor than that performed under a grant.



Is Grant Writing Really Different?

- Why does anyone think it is no?
- Are the pressures the same?
- Is the structure the same?
- Can one get paid to write grants?
- Are there regulations to grant writing?



Closing Remarks

- Speaker nominations
 - People you know
 - Yourself
 - National warmup
- Formats
 - What works
 - What doesn't work
- Membership drive
- Thanks

