



**Building Communities:
Sharing Strategies to Secure Stimulus Funding**
August 28, 2009

What is Sustainability?

In the context of grantwriting, sustainability refers to the long term financing of the program, after the initial funding period has concluded. Developing a clear plan for sustainability is important, given the growing competition for grant dollars. A proposal that indicates a lack of financial support after the grant period is not likely to be funded.

By now you have probably reviewed several Web sites that address all components of a grant proposal. Let's take a look at the topic of sustainability on the Community Toolbox Web site from the University of Kansas - Lawrence.

"For all that the search for financial sustainability can be such a headache, sustainability is an essential goal--a 'necessary evil,' you might say. Financial sustainability allows us to stay in the game long enough to realize our dreams. That's because for all except the smallest of organizations, we need to pay for things such as staff salaries and rent for our office. These things add up. All too often, costs sneak up and become the focus of our work before we even realize what has happened. "

Strategies for Sustaining the Initiative, Community Tool Box
http://ctb.ku.edu/tools/en/section_1330.htm

If this subject is new to you, acknowledging the importance of sustainability is an important first step. Developing a plan is the second. Achieving sustainability over time is the capstone of all fundraising efforts. To learn more about specific strategies for sustainability, visit the Community Tool Box at the link above. The site lists 14 strategies and offers practical advice about how to choose among them.

Discussing Sustainability in Your Proposal

Let's focus on some practical comments from a funder's perspective, as stated on The Foundation Center Web site:

"Funders will want you to prove either that your project is finite (with start-up and ending dates); or that it is capacity-building (that it will contribute to the future self-sufficiency of your agency and/or enable it to expand services that might be revenue generating); or that it will make your organization attractive to other funders in the future. With the new trend toward adopting some of the investment principles of venture capital groups to the practice of philanthropy, evidence of fiscal sustainability becomes a highly sought-after characteristic of the successful grant proposal.

It behooves you to be very specific about current and projected funding streams, both earned income and fundraised, and about the base of financial support for your nonprofit. Here is an area where it is important to have backup figures and prognostications at the ready, in case a prospective funder asks for these, even though you are unlikely to include this information in the actual grant proposal. Some grantmakers, of course, will want to know who else will be receiving a copy of this same proposal. You should not be shy about sharing this information with the funder."

-- The Foundation Center, <http://www.fdncenter.org>

The plan for sustainability for a particular grant proposal should fit squarely within the organization's overall plan for sustainability. For this reason, it should not be written by the grant writer alone, but shaped by those involved in the overall management of the organization and/or department. You don't have to be writing grant proposals for very long before you encounter the classic "Catch 22" of grantwriting: finding accessible start up funding in an environment where ongoing funding is difficult to secure. The Minnesota Council on Foundations states this clearly from the funder's perspective:

If you continue this project in the future, how will it be supported? Most funders don't want to support the same set of projects forever. Many funders see their niche as funding innovation: supporting new approaches to old problems or finding solutions to new problems. What the funder really wants to see is that you have a long-term vision and funding plan for the project, that the project is "sustainable," especially if it is a new activity. If you don't have such a plan, start thinking about it -- if not for your funders then for the success of your project or organization.

--Minnesota Council on Foundations, <http://www.mcf.org/mcf/grant/writing.htm#Intro>

Other Funding, Future Funding, and Sustainability

The sustainability section of a proposal should cover the following three points, where appropriate:

1. If other funding has already been committed for the project, identify the source(s) of funding and the amount.
2. If the proposal is currently under consideration by other funders, be sure to disclose this.
3. This section should present your organization's strategy for sustainability once the grant period has concluded (unless the project will conclude concurrently with the funding).

