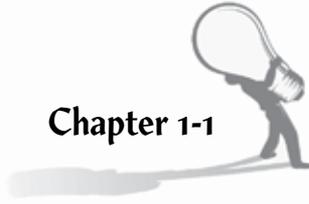


Chapter 1-1



Edi-Fecal Effigies

RIGHT BEFORE YOU WRITE

Bullshit.

Bullshit inspired me to write this book.

Not very poetic, I know, but true.

I don't mean the one word profanity for nonsense or the slang verb for lying through one's teeth.

I'm talking about the more down to earth variety: cow ka-ka, road apples, prairie muffins, pasture patties.

Some even refer to these fecal land mines as "art."

That's right, art.

Several years ago while on a road trip across country I watched a local Midwest newscast's coverage of an annual cow chip-carving contest. As I watched the proud finalists primp their "artistic" creations, I couldn't help but think: No matter how many creative ways these carvers of crap shape, paint, decorate, and wax lyrical about their edi-fecal effigies, one undeniable fact remained: it was all still ugly, smelly, useless, fly-ridden, common everyday bullshit.

The Inverted Pyramid Approach

For now, let's view the program design process as an inverted pyramid. At first, the goal is to involve as many people as possible in the initial brainstorming and information-gathering phase.

Then, as the clock ticks and the deadline draws near, the number of people involved should narrow, until

just a few core people are working on finishing the grant. And finally,

the final draft of

the response

should

be the

result of

one person,

one voice: the

grant writer. And

when the grant is awarded

(he said optimistically), the

pyramid of involvement should

expand from narrow back to wide.

This is because, as the program is implemented and spread throughout the community, you're going to need the assistance from all those stakeholders who were involved in the planning.

BILL OF WRITES

Resolved by we grant writers and program planners that in order to design a more perfect program, write more excellent proposals, use a more professional approach, establish a new and better way of thinking, ensure our program's fundability, and provide for the common good through better programming—we do hereby hold these truths to be self evident:

1. Ask not what the funding agency can do for you, but what you can do for the funding agency.
2. "Artfully sell the problem."
3. Good grants are read, but only excellent grants are funded.
4. "There's no need to fear, Underdog is here!"
5. The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.
6. Better your thinking by asking better questions.
7. No field ever got plowed by a farmer turning it over in his head.
8. Be friendly to your Reader/Scorer and your Reader/Scorer will be friendly to you.
9. Remember the "Aha!" Factor



Chapter 2-2

Character In Movies

THE STAR OF THE SHOW

SCREENWRITING AXIOM #1

It's Not WHAT Your Story Is About, But WHO Your Story Is About

Remember watching the movie *Titanic*? When the ship began to sink did the audience in the theater cry over all the steel girders and fine silverware gone to waste? No. What audiences really cared about was what happened to the *characters aboard the ship*—not the ship.

The goal of any good storyteller worth their weight in overdue library books is to create an immediate and lasting image of exactly WHO the story is about, so the audience thinks to themselves, “Yes, I know who that person is” and “Yes, I care what happens to that person,” or “That person could be me.”

The more the movie audience connects with and relates to a character on the screen—the more they root for and care about what happens to that character.

Take My Example ... Please

Let's take a look at how applying the first character axiom (“...not what but who...”) might improve your program design by determining your Target Population. Had they not read these first chapters about the first “C” in program design—CHARACTER—the planning team of the hypothetical *For Example Arts After School Program* might make the mistake of describing their Target Population like this:

Version One: *The For Example Arts After School Program* is designed to provide a much needed arts program to the Generic School District.

Version one reads as if the intention of the grant is to provide services to a district, which is nothing but a bunch of buildings. Remember, we care more about the students inside the buildings than we do the buildings.

So, if we were to improve Version One, we would ask ourselves, in very general terms at first, to whom will we provide services? In this example, the answer:

Version Two: *The For Example Arts After School Program* is designed to provide a much needed arts program to students of the Generic School District.

Better, but not excellent. There's still more work to do.

But, by completing Task #1, we've determined a specific group who most need, and will most benefit from, the proposed

Chapter 2-9



Clock In Program Design

“WHY NOW AND NOT LATER?”

Anyone who promotes a follow-these-steps-and-answer-the-questions-this-way-and-we-guarantee-you-will-win-fistfuls-of-grant-money is (as the old joke goes), “either lying or trying to sell you something.”

The reality is that there are more excellent grants than there are grant dollars to fund them. This is especially frustrating for Reader/Scorers when they have before them more well-crafted, deserving program designs than they do remaining funding slots and the Grant Gods can only choose a few from all the equally meritorious applicants.

Often this decision comes down to the Reader/Scorer asking one single burning question about each finalist’s program design:

“Why does this applicant’s program need funding *now* and not later?”

Ultimately, the process of designing an excellent program is really the process of building a new, or expanding an existing, collaborative.

Regardless of your experience with other programs or agencies, or your track record winning grants, your approach to each program design *should be*:

- This is our *new and improved* way we plan to collaborate for this specific proposed program;
- This is how we intend to collaborate *over and above* what we've done or are already doing; and,
- This is how *each new partner* will take our program design to the next level.

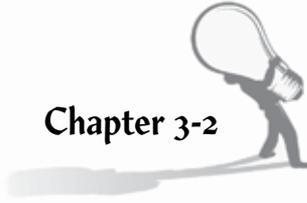
First: The Basics

Let's start with differentiating between two words often misused in grant applications. Often, applicants will mistakenly write "...we are forming a collaboration..." What they really mean to write is "...we are forming a collaborative..." What the collaborative does should be referred to as collaboration.

Huh? Let's try that again.

"Collaborative" is the noun: the group of experts, Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and community stakeholders formed to implement your program. Depending on the funding agency, a collaborative might also be referred to as a "partnership," "planning team," "your organization," "advisory board," "leadership team," "consortium" or "coalition."

Chapter 3-2



The Hell-elevator Speech

OR, "I SHOULD HAVE TAKEN THE STAIRS"

Imagine you're a Director of a funding agency that writes checks to grantees for a living. You've been in the hotel ballroom offering advice to grantees all day. Or, you've just arrived at the hotel and checked in after a long flight and still have to prepare for tomorrow's workshop. Or, you're on your way up to your room hoping that you're not late for yet another conference call about, what else?, grants and programs.

You step into the elevator, you're tired, talked out, miss your family, your bladder's half-full (you're an optimistic funding executive) and you are actually looking forward to the brief respite of an elevator ride.

Then you're recognized. A grant writer begins reciting her/his polished, carefully calculated hell-elevator speech that includes all the usual—type of program, target population, target area, proposed budget—designed to last until you reach your floor. Your first thought?

"I should have taken the stairs."

Do the math.

But let's not use the word odds. "Odds" implies that it's a total crapshoot.

And, it's only a crapshoot if you write crap.

Instead, let's use the term mathematical probability. Using mathematical probability, work off the assumption that there will be more equally qualified applicants than there will be grants awarded.

But the question is, do you have enough of a chance at winning to make it worth your Planning Team's while to apply? The answer lies in the total amount of awards the funding agency plans to dole out and the average amount of each award.

For example, if a federal agency announces that they are releasing a total of \$8.5 million dollars in grant funds divided up into awards averaging \$1.7 million dollars each over a two-year period, then that means only five grants will be awarded nationwide ($\$8,500,000 / \$1,700,000 = 5$ awards).

Considering that some federal grants attract 500+ applications, I don't like the probability of winning the above grant. First, it's too long of a long shot. Second, you may be a smaller program in a smaller community—and that grant amount would be more than triple the amount of your operating budget. That total is obviously for a larger program in a larger city or spread out over a larger region.

On the other hand, if \$90 million dollars in 21st Century Learning grants are released and the announcement suggests that each grantor will receive approximately one million dollars

So, if you're still with me, this chapter is about reading with a new set of eyes that will enable you to: (1) decipher and read between the lines of the RFP, (2) ensure that your program design aligns with the intent of the RFP, and (3) extract unanswered questions and buried requirements that need clarification in the RFP.

Of the applicants I know who aren't winning as many grants as they would like to:

MOST plan as well as others.

MOST write as well—if not better—than others.

But MOST have one big deficiency.

MOST don't *read* RFPs and application materials as well as their more successful peers.

Reading An RFP Can Be Frustrating

First, an RFP is very technical and dry and not something you'd take to the beach in the summer—unless you intend to fall asleep and get badly sunburned.

Second, RFPs are often unclear and contradictory because of how they are written or, more accurately, how they are *not written*. Seldom does one wordsmith with one vision, one voice and an abundance of uncluttered time, write an RFP. Instead, an RFP as a result of last-minute political compromise, might be hurriedly patched together by committee. Bits and pieces of irrelevant languages and requirements are cut and pasted from previous grants. Legal passages are excerpted from legislation. Outdated forms are incorporated

So the purpose of this book is not to transform you into a successful grant writer overnight.

Instead, it is to help you to *think* like a successful grant writer and learn the ability to get your program design right, before you write.

And whatever you do, don't get frustrated and give up.

You will be blazing new trails here, doing some outside-the-box thinking the likes of which you and your Planning Team may have never done before. You will be recalibrating your brains and trying to wrap them around new ideas and new strategies that will eventually lead to greater rewards.

And Much Of The Battle Is Internal

I often joke in screenwriting class that so much of writing is finding that one special yoga position where you can reach your foot around to give yourself a firm kick in the backside so that you sit down and work at it everyday.

The main thing is to have confidence. To me confidence comes from tirelessly doing your homework and doing right, what you believe is right.

What was it that guy who wore the coonskin cap said? "Be always sure you are right then go ahead."

Remember, if you are on the frontline providing program services to your Target Population, fighting the good fight every day, there is no greater expert about what you do than you.

Also remember, never look at someone else's work and think, "oh I could never do that."

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