

Lessons Learned and Tips for Strengthening Community Foundation Library Applications

Application

1. If you need to request an extension on the expected timeframe of a project or if you have underspent and want to repurpose the funds, send an e-mail to the Community Foundation's Program Officer with a written request. Feel free to call the Program Officer to discuss options. Funds may not be repurposed without prior approval. Unspent funds are to be returned to the Community Foundation.
2. Question #14 in Section 2 of the application requests you to "provide a summary (no more than 2 sentences) of the project or purpose for which funding is requested". Your response to this question is shared widely at the Community Foundation to many possible donors. Provide a clear, concise response to this question. (i.e. This project will bring two authors of youth fiction to our community providing programming at our schools and library. Programs will include 1). book discussions of the author's works prior to the author visit 2). author visits with approximately 120 middle school children 3). Writing workshops for youth that will encourage creation of their own stories.)
3. If you are modeling a program on another library's program, name the program and provide information about their outcomes/success, as well as why you think this program would have similar outcomes for your library.
4. Attach letters of support from collaborative partners such as schools, preschools, community leaders. Letters of support from teens or parents participating in a program also strengthens a proposal. Ask the partnering school librarian to submit a letter of support indicating her support for the program, and confirming her willingness to help promote the program. Other letters of support could come from the school administration, the book club students or other village representatives who are concerned about programming for youth in your community.
5. Reviewers are looking for indications of assessment and adjustment in programming. If you learned what didn't work last year and you have a plan to improve upon it this year, explain these changes in the application.
6. Some of the reviewers are new every year. Applications should be written as though the reader is new to your library and to the program. Including a brief history of the project is very helpful to provide a context for the project.
7. For applications involving two or more collaborating libraries, include information for the lead library and thorough letters of support from the collaborating libraries. Unless otherwise indicated, the requested amount will be divided equally between the libraries when calculating the \$15,000 maximum grant amount per library.
8. Have someone other than the proposal writer carefully proofread the grant request before submitting to correct grammatical errors, typos, and to improve clarity.
9. If you are receiving funds for this programming over multiple years, chart the numbers (and percentages of participation, registration, circulation, other outcomes) over the past program years to more effectively convey to the reader the impact you are having.

Program/Budget

10. In-kind contributions should also be reflected in the budget. Put a monetary value on the donation and indicate it as such. In-kind donations are a great way to indicate community support for a project.
11. Will you need time and resources for promotion of programs? Talk to other libraries about how best to promote (i.e. newspapers, posters, library/community displays, Facebook, school flyers, samples of press releases, etc.). Are your P.R. estimates reasonable for the program you are proposing?
12. What electronic platform does the system support? Nook? Kindle? Something else? Can libraries support each other for bulk purchases and technical support? If you are proposing purchases of new technology, what have you learned from libraries who are already using it?
13. Science kits (and other kits, backpacks, etc.), require staff/volunteer time to prepare them between each circulation. Is your library prepared to provide this ongoing support? Also, some kits require adult support for the child to have the best experience using them.
14. Author visit requests are strengthened when multiple libraries come together to host the author. (One library should plan to be the "lead" applicant").
15. Use best practices suggested by the "Every Child Ready to Read" program and make this clear in the application.
16. The Donor Advisor is in support of providing books for children and youth to keep. It's fine to include books for youth participating in book clubs, book distribution at events, author visits, etc. in your application. Remember to indicate work you've done to attain the best price. (Organizations like Family Reading Partnership are very experienced in these kinds of bulk book purchases). This might also be an opportunity for libraries to come together for larger purchases (Authors/publishers will sometimes provide discounts for bulk purchases. Author visit expenses may also be discounted with large book purchases). Furthermore, if books are being purchased to be given to youth, those books should also be available in the collection at the library.
17. If there are literacy concerns with some parents, surveys might be inaccessible to complete. Are there other ways to get feedback so that you can effectively determine success of your program?
18. Make sure the budget in section 2 reflects the project/program for which funds are being requested, not the whole library budget.
19. Include target numbers (i.e. participants, circulation goals, event attendance, etc.), and plan to track them for final reporting. It's not necessary for the goals to be reached, but these numbers do offer a measure of change and context over time.
20. If a program is to be held off site (not at the library), make sure the role that the library will play is very clear and indicate how the program might draw participants to the library (Advertising opportunity for an upcoming library event? Providing information about library services at the event with an invitation to visit? Highlighting the role the library plays as a unifier of community stakeholders interested in inspiring youth to read?). Again, indicate how the event will encourage a love of reading.
21. When considering a new program, it might be advantageous to run it first as a pilot program (i.e. for one age group rather than several age groups all at once), on a small scale to determine success and potential for growth. It's okay to apply for a pilot project anticipating expansion of the program in future years.

Evaluation

22. If a program is being funded year after year by the Community Foundation's Rosen Fund, use the same name for the program on the application for clarity. Track outcomes over time and include as an attachment to show results prior to Rosen funding compared to years with Rosen funding.
23. All grants will require at least one report to be submitted to the Community Foundation. Consider what information you will need to report on when writing the application so that you can plan for evaluations, surveys, participant counts, pictures, etc. If a program is complete at the time the interim report is due, indicate that it serves as both the interim and final report.
24. It is important to be clear about how the proposed project will encourage a love of reading. When using animals, puppets, special guests, etc. to offer themed programming, discuss how this program draws attention to featured books. Track the circulation of similarly themed books after an event. Did it increase? How do you know the event was successful beyond attendance?