

# Beyond the Obvious: Understanding Requests for Proposals (RFPs)

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# Learning Objectives

By the end of this sessions, participants will:

- ▶ Be able to list the items that can typically be found in an RFP.
- ▶ Know how to review an RFP for information and opportunities.





**RFPs:  
From the  
sublime to the  
ridiculous**



# Brainstorm Items

Most RFPs  
usually  
contain:

Due Date

Submittal instructions

Proposal content

Grant program purpose

Funding source

Funding amounts

Allowable or required activities

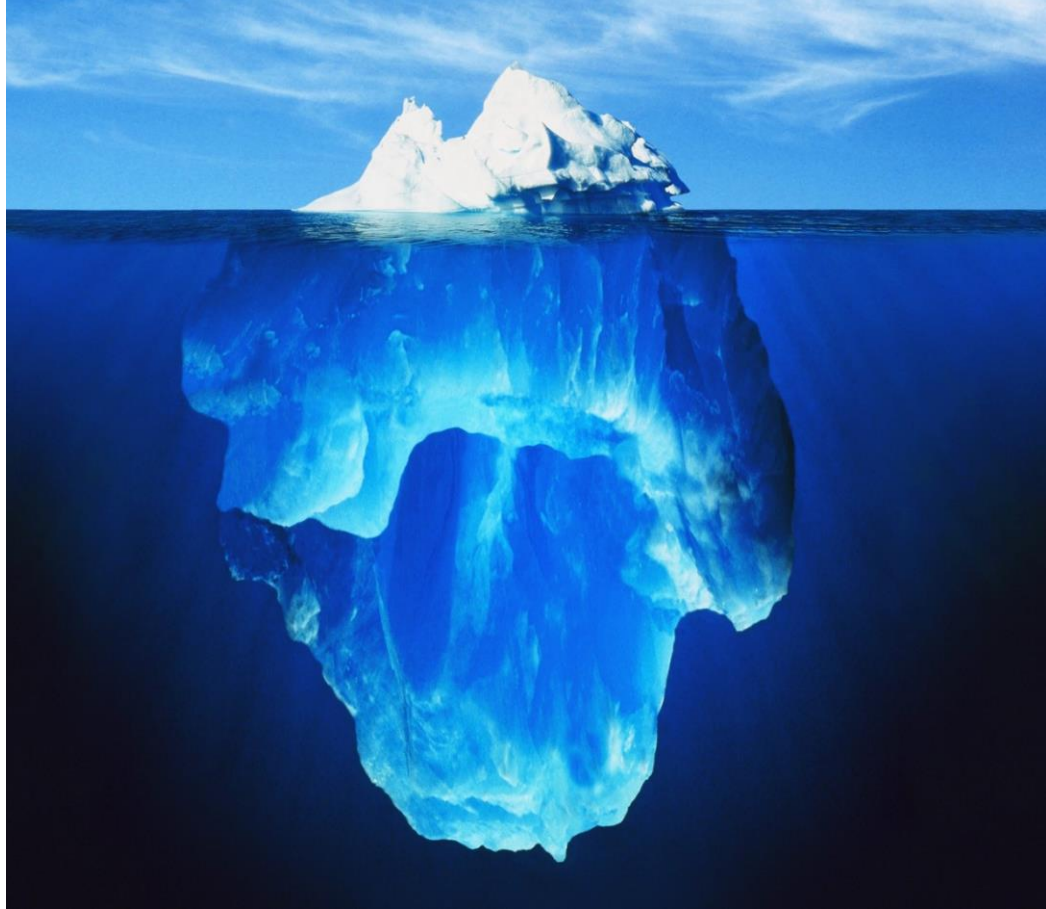
Some also have:

Scoring matrix

Reference to research

Background information

Templates for attachments



## RFP Analysis: Going Deeper

# The RFP as an instructional guide

- ▶ Follow instructions CAREFULLY - nothing in an RFP is extraneous when it comes to format and expectations. Examples: should a TOC be included? Are page numbers allowed? Footnotes or endnotes?
- ▶ Pay attention to order of items in the submission. For example: is an Executive Summary a separate attachment or does it come at the beginning of your narrative?
- ▶ Shows you how to be compliant and maintain basic competitive ability. Remember that your submission is scored according to how well you followed instructions as well as the content of your proposal.
- ▶ Following directions are important - In 2018 of 104 Youth Homeless Demonstration Programs submitted to HUD, 20 were disqualified.

# The RFP as a valuable source of information

- ▶ An RFP often contains a deeper analysis of the subject of the grant. Make use of that research and show reviewers that you are familiar with evidence that supports your program as well as the purpose of the funding opportunity.
- ▶ An RFP provides a tone and a style to be mimicked. If it is written in an academic voice, your proposal should reflect that. If it is written in a political voice with a clear mandate, write in the tone expressed. Pay attention to the specific words they are using.
- ▶ RFP will tell you what their priorities are, even if not stated. Look at how they are allocating space or points - tells you what they care about the most.



# The RFP as an opportunity to impress

- ▶ Reviewing the RFP multiple times will provide you with the information necessary to maximize your competitiveness.
- ▶ Use the RFP to help inform strategic decisions and develop “win themes”. If it is clear that this funder is all about client engagement make sure you showcase your strengths in this area. If they talk about maximizing taxpayer investment then make sure you include leveraged or in kind funds.



# Attachments

More opportunities to impress

# Attachments are:

- ▶ More than an afterthought - every item is an additional opportunity to impress.
- ▶ A signal that you are able to put the necessary care and attention into your submission as you would to your proposed project - attention to detail is key.
- ▶ A means of showing that you understand requirements and have strong organizational skills - resumes of staff and directors should follow a template.
- ▶ A showing of support and investment from stakeholders - Letters of Support should include additional information, differ in perspective, and be as powerful as possible.
- ▶ Giving reviewers what they want, in its best possible form.

# RFP Worksheet

What is:

the due date?

the funding purpose?

the types of programs allowed?

the eligibility criteria?

the funding amount?

the application process?

# Thinking about the RFP



Observation and Intuition: Find one statement or word that immediately catches your attention.



Reflection: What emotions and concerns are being communicated by the funder?



Key Insights: What do you think they want us to know about who they are, and how they plan to operate?

## Decisions: How does your analysis of the RFP impact decisions regarding

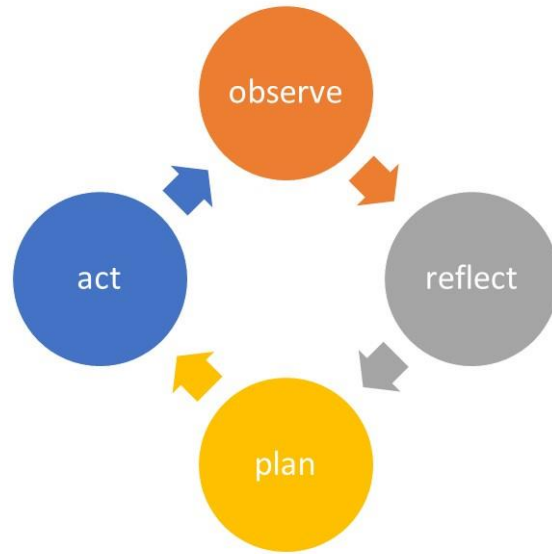
Which target population or community to work with?

What services or activities do we want to offer?

What approaches should definitely be included?

What type of data should we include in our response?

What is the cost of the project?



# Self-Assessment

# What can we do to improve?

## Assessment Statement

1. We are getting RFPs that are relevant to our work.

2 We have an efficient process and procedures in place for deciding whether to bid or not.

## Suggestions for Improvement

Identify who your funders are. Sign up for [grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) and [buy.net](https://www.buy.net) as well as philanthropic organizations.

Establish a communication process and criteria/decision matrix (fit, competitiveness, capacity to respond).



## Assessment Statement

3. We have a team in place with time and skills to be able to make decisions and move the process forward.

4. We can build and maintain relationships with funders when possible.

## Suggestions for Improvement

- ▶ Decide who team members are – at a minimum, your team will need a fiscal person, a content person, and someone who can write.
- ▶ Identify who is responsible for this - ideally the Executive Director and/or Development person. Communicate with funders as much as possible: before, during, and after submission.

## Assessment Statement

5. We understand the competitive nature of RFPs and the need for strategy.

6. We understand the importance of compliance with RFP instructions.

## Suggestions for Improvement

- ▶ Do the math! For example, if there are ten funding opportunities for the nation, one will go to California. Ask yourself “does this opportunity have our name on it?” and discuss what it’s going to take. Make every decision strategically.
- ▶ Create a compliance checklist that lists every required item or instruction.

## Assessment Statement

7. We have a positive and confident attitude about our ability to win.

8. We have content ready that is available for adaptation, i.e. organization history, staff resumes.

## Suggestions for Improvement

- ▶ Once you have decided to apply, drop any negative self or group talk. Raise your standards!
- ▶ Make it a priority to have organizational information developed and updated.

## Assessment Statement

9. We know how to analyze RFPs to fully understand what the funder's priorities, values, needs, etc. are.

10. We have a quality control/review process for RFPs that ensures our proposals are compliant, accurate, and competitive.

11. We know how to develop "win themes".

## Suggestions for Improvement

- ▶ Always look for themes, i.e. client engagement, tone/voice. Pay attention to language.
- ▶ Make quality control an assigned role - this may require different people for proofing vs. ensuring higher standards.
- ▶ Ask: "What do we have going for us that makes us stand out/win this?" Write a list and create a clear statement for each item. Use these as opening lines for different sections as much as possible. If there is some creative license, use text boxes.

## Responding to RFPs – Self Assessment

For each of these statements rate your organization on a scale of 1-3

1 = Need a lot help

2 = Doing okay, but with some room for improvement

3 = Totally on solid ground, we’re got this!

<b>Planning and Strategy</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>DK/NA</b>
a. We are getting RFPs that are relevant to our work				
b. We have an efficient process and procedure in place for deciding whether to bid or not.				
c. We have a team in place with time and skills to be able to make decisions and move the process forward.				
d. We can build and maintain relationships with funders when possible.				
<b>Proposal Response</b>				
e. We understand the competitive nature of RFPs and the need for strategy.				
f. We understand the importance of compliance with RFP instructions.				
g. We have a positive and confident attitude about our ability to win.				
h. We have content developed that is ready to be adapted, i.e. organization history, staff resumes.				
i. We know how to analyze RFPs to fully understand what the funder priorities, values, needs etc. are.				
j. We have a quality control/review process for RFPs that makes sure our proposals are compliant, accurate, competitive etc.				
k. We know how to develop “win themes.”				

## RFP Review Worksheet

### I. San Diego Grantmakers/WD40 Application “Treasure Hunt”

Find –

1. Due date
2. Funding purpose
3. Types of programs
4. Funding source
5. Eligibility criteria
6. Funding amount
7. Application process

### II. CalCRG RFP Discussion

1. **Observation and Intuition:** Underline or highlight one statement or word that immediately catches your attention.
2. **Reflection:** What emotions, concerns do you think are being communicated by this funder?
3. **Key Insights:** What do you think they want us to know about who they are and how they plan to operate?
4. **Decision:** After carefully analyzing this section of the RFP what might be some of the decisions we could make about –
  - a. Which target population or community to work with?
  - b. What services or activities we might want to offer?
  - c. What approaches we should for sure include?
  - d. What type of data we should include in our response?
  - e. Project cost?

## CalCRG Program RFP

**Background:** The Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development (GO-Biz) serves as the State of California's leader for job growth and economic development efforts. GO-Biz offers a range of services to business owners including: attraction, retention and expansion services, site selection, permit assistance, regulation guidance, small business assistance, international trade development, assistance with state government, and much more.

The CalCRG program was included in the Adult Use of Marijuana Act (Proposition 64), which was approved by California voters on November 8, 2016. In accordance with the proposition, GO-Biz will award grants beginning no later than January 1, 2020, to local health departments and at least 50 percent to qualified community-based nonprofit organizations to support job placement, mental health treatment, substance use disorder treatment, system navigation services, legal services to address barriers to reentry, and linkages to medical care for communities disproportionately affected by past federal and state drug policies, also known as the War on Drugs (WoD).

The historical and current context around the WoD is critical to understanding the impact GO-Biz and the CalCRG program aspires to achieve. The WoD has disproportionately impacted communities of color, particularly low income African-American/Black and Latino/Hispanic communities. For example, even though African American/Black, Latino/Hispanic, and White persons use and sell marijuana at similar rates, African American/Black and Latino/Hispanic individuals have historically been arrested more frequently for marijuana violations. Harsh federal and state drug policies enacted during the WoD led to the mass incarceration of people of color, decreased access to social services, loss of educational attainment due to diminished federal financial aid eligibility, prohibitions on the use of public housing and other public assistance, and the separation of families. The CalCRG program aims to be a resource to address and repair the multi-generational impacts of the WoD.

While the effects of the WoD are well documented and visible in communities across the state, the CalCRG program also recognizes that populations living in impacted neighborhoods bring many assets, collaboratives, and excellent program and service providers making positive change. The CalCRG program hopes to invest in these community resources to mitigate and, where possible, overcome the presence of systemic restrictions and barriers to opportunities and resources. GO-Biz encourages applications from organizations that are bringing healing and economic empowerment to individuals, families, and communities that have been disproportionately impacted by past federal and state drug policies.

**Program Priorities**

The CalCRG program, like any new state program, will evolve and look different over time. This is particularly relevant for the CalCRG program because GO-Biz anticipates funding increasing by \$10 million each year between 2018 and 2022, at which time the expected disbursement will be \$50 million each year thereafter.

Current CalCRG program priorities include proposals from organizations led by individuals directly impacted by the WoD, organizations that serve individuals formerly incarcerated in prison, organizations placing individuals in jobs, organizations implementing trauma-informed care, and collaborative applications demonstrating a whole person care approach.

Preference points will be allocated to proposals that match current CalCRG program priorities. These funding priorities may change in future years as staff assess this inaugural funding cycle and receive continued input from stakeholders. CalCRG staff are resolved to ground the program in science and data, while being receptive to emerging and innovative approaches and to remain responsive and accountable to stakeholders and taxpayers. Although the funding amounts and program priorities will likely change in subsequent years, our mission, guiding principles, and program goals will provide a strong foundation for the program to grow and evolve.

**OUR MISSION**

The CalCRG program advances health, wellness, and economic justice for populations and communities harmed by the WoD.

**OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

1. Responsive to and focused on populations and communities disproportionately impacted by the WoD.
2. Grounded in science and data, while being receptive to emerging and innovative approaches.
3. Advancing whole person, trauma-informed approaches.
4. Accountable to taxpayers and stakeholders.

**GOALS**

1. Identify and invest in high-impact approaches to serve communities affected by the WoD.
2. Engage stakeholders and develop meaningful relationships with and provide excellent support to grantees.
3. Build awareness about the program and its impacts.
4. Optimize program administration and ensure the grant application, invoicing, and reporting processes are user-friendly.



## RFP Humor<sup>1</sup>

A while ago, a colleague imagined what our answers would be like on grant proposals if we nonprofits were allowed to be completely and brutally honest. Here are some of these honest responses, with credit to colleagues across the field, most of whom understandably prefer to remain anonymous; anything in quotes is someone else's direct words. Apologies in advance for the sarcastic, possibly biting tone; the entire sector has been on edge lately:

1. **What is innovative about your program design?** "Our program is entirely innovative. The design is unproven; the approach is untested; the outcomes are unknown. We also have a tried-and-true service delivery model with outstanding results and a solid evidence base to support it. But you funded that last year and your priority is to fund innovative projects. So we made this one up. Please send money."
2. **What is your overhead rate?** "It is too low. We systematically under-invest in human resources, financial management, and program management to keep it that way. By doing so, we have a nice, low overhead number to put on grant applications like this one. Please send money."
3. **How will you sustain this program after this grant runs out?** We will leave you alone and harass other people, continuing to spend half our time trying to convince other foundations that our programs and communities are worth being supported, instead of running and improving the programs that our communities desperately need. Then, after a year or so, when hopefully you forgot that we applied earlier, we'll reapply to your foundation. Please send money.
4. **How does your organization partner with other organizations in the area?** We have an unwritten agreement to write desperate, last-minute letters of support for one another for grant proposals like this one. Once a while, we go out drinking together, especially when we don't get grants like this one. Please send money.
5. **How will you use the funds if you receive this grant?** We honestly really need this grant to pay for rent and utilities and for wages so our staff can do important work and feed their families, but since you won't allow your funds to be used for those things, we will say that your grant is paying for whatever you will actually fund, then get other funders or donors to give and then tell them that their money is paying for the stuff that they want to fund. We will ultimately waste hundreds of hours every year trying to figure out who is paying for what, hours that could be used to deliver services. Please send unrestricted money.
6. **What is the leadership structure at your organization?** Because of understaffing, our ED is trying to handle too many things all at once and is thus not very competent at any of them. Our board actively undermines or micromanages the staff. The person who is actually holding this

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<sup>1</sup> <https://nonprofitaf.com/2018/02/answers-on-grant-proposals-if-nonprofits-were-brutally-honest-with-funders/>

whole thing together is our Operations Director Lydia, but she's being laid off because no one wants to fund operations or admin or fundraising. Please send money so we can buy Lydia a cake.

7. **How will your organization align with [so-and-so latest innovative systems-change effort]?**  
We won't, because we are doing different stuff and because we barely get enough funding to survive, much less actually attend the billions of meetings and do all the work involved in aligning with this effort that has been sucking up all the funding in the region. Please send additional money so we can align or stop asking us to align.
8. **What are other sources of potential funding for this project?** Here below are a bunch of other foundations we are applying to. We are not very confident in many of them, but we figure that the more names we list, the better it makes us look. Some of the foundations won't invest until other foundations make a first move. Please be the one to stop this game of "funding-chicken" by sending money first.
9. **If you receive a partial grant, will you still implement this program?** Likely we will, because the needs are so high, but it will not be the awesome program we envisioned, since we'll have to cut program components, not hire the staff we need, and not be able to serve as many people as we want. But if that's the only choice, we'll reluctantly take it. Then, on some nights, we'll stay awake, staring at the ceiling, crying a single tear that streaks down our worn faces, lit by the moonlight, imagining what could have been. Please send money.
10. **How will you evaluate this program?** Because we have little funding for a formal process with an external evaluator, we will have Edward, our social work practicum student, design a self-report survey. At the beginning and end of the program, we'll administer the survey. We'll put in lots of numbers and percentages to make it look impressive. This is not very rigorous or valid, due to selection bias, self-report bias, confounding variables, and a host of other issues, but it should be enough to convince you that we have good evaluation data. Please send money so we can buy Edward a cake.
11. **How will the community be transformed as a result of this grant?** Hahahaha, that's a good one! This grant is for \$5,000! And people say funders don't have a sense of humor! 5K will allow us to pay for six weeks of rent, which means we can stay open, and who knows what awesome stuff we'll accomplish during those six weeks, am I right? Please add three zeroes if you really want to see transformation.
12. **Besides sending money, what else can the foundation do to support you?:** Please introduce us to other foundations so they can also send money.

# ADVANCING OPPORTUNITY AND PROSPERITY

A Grantmaking Program of the WD-40 Company Foundation  
FY2019 Request for Proposal



The San Diego Foundation invites nonprofits receiving this request for proposal to apply for the WD-40 Company Foundation's Advancing Opportunity and Prosperity grant program. The WD-40 Company Foundation is a donor advised fund at The San Diego Foundation.

This program seeks to improve self-sufficiency for low-income San Diegans through improved access and raised awareness for services, resources, training, and other supports that can increase their level of self-reliance. For this grant cycle, the WD-40 Company Foundation seeks initiatives focused on promoting the economic stability and prosperity of San Diegans via support to the following broad areas:

- **Food security:** access to enough healthy food for a healthy and active life, necessary to enable people to flourish and reach their full potential: children can concentrate on school and adults on parenting and work.
- **Workforce development:** access to the skills, learning and opportunity for viable work, tied to the prosperity of our region. Workforce development imparts both hard and soft work skills and connects people's capabilities with the specific needs of industry.
- **Family economic success:** a comprehensive and holistic anti-poverty strategy that supports low-income families in earning more, saving more and investing over time, ultimately protecting and growing their financial stability and prosperity.

With this grant cycle, the WD-40 Company Foundation seeks organizations that are working in at least one of the areas listed above, but whose work potentially also produces outcomes in one or both of the other two areas, whether alone or with a partner. Approaches that involve collaboration between two or more organizations, and include a solid plan for tracking results and measuring outcomes related to Advancing Opportunity and Prosperity, will be given highest priority during the selection process.

## RATIONALE

Nationally, 37% of households live in the financial red zone of "liquid asset poverty," meaning they do not have enough in liquid savings, such as cash or assets that are easily converted to cash, to replace income at the poverty level for three months if they are without employment.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, deep and enduring wealth disparities across gender, ethnic and racial lines heighten the seriousness of financial fragility affecting many lower income individuals and families. According to research by the Center on Policy Initiatives, a third (33%) of working age families in San Diego County can't make ends meet.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Prosperity Now. (2017). *On Track or Left Behind? Findings from the 2017 Prosperity Now Scorecard*. Retrieved from: [https://prosperitynow.org/files/PDFs/2017\\_Scorecard\\_Report.pdf](https://prosperitynow.org/files/PDFs/2017_Scorecard_Report.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Center on Policy Initiatives. (2017). *Making Ends Meet*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cpisandiego.org/reports/making-ends-meet-2>

# ADVANCING OPPORTUNITY AND PROSPERITY

## A Grantmaking Program of the WD-40 Company Foundation

### FY2019 Request for Proposal

Creating solutions that help people to pull themselves permanently out of poverty involves going beyond siloed approaches that focus on deficiencies, to those that build on strengths and increase capabilities. Incorporating complementary programs such as financial literacy, workforce training and food security offers improved prospects for effective results that advance opportunity and prosperity.

Addressing poverty in our community is a complex challenge, requiring many stakeholders to work together on building effective solutions. The WD-40 Company Foundation believes collaboration is critical for enduring impact and change. This grantmaking program seeks to result in independence from support organizations over time, to improve conditions for San Diegans.

## PROGRAM AND ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Minimum grant amount is expected to be \$20,000, with the potential opportunity for multiyear funding.

### Mandatory Criteria

- Program/project must serve persons or populations within San Diego County.
- Eligibility is limited to 501(c)(3) Public Charities in good standing with the IRS (inclusion in Publication 78).
- Eligible organizations will have a Gold level certified profile on GuideStar.\*

### The San Diego Foundation will look favorably on those applications that demonstrate:

- An understanding of the current challenges and conditions of low-income families and individuals;
- The capacity to design community- and family-focused strategies that can help families and individuals become more self-reliant;
- Projects that demonstrate collaborative efforts, on their own or through partnership(s), to address one or more of the three grantmaking program focus areas.
- A Platinum level certified profile on GuideStar.

To complete a GuideStar profile, go to:

<https://learn.guidestar.org/update-nonprofit-report?search=false&search=false>

To view an archived webinar on how to earn GuideStar Platinum, go to:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y3blvNZYyPY&feature=youtu.be>

For PowerPoint slides about GuideStar Platinum, go to: <https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/733304/Webinar%20Files/2016-05-24-platinum-work-session-slides.pdf>

Applications must be submitted online at the following link on the Smarter Select platform:

<https://app.smarterselect.com/programs/52846-The-San-Diego-Foundation-Community-Impact>

### Late or incomplete applications will not be accepted.

\*Applicants need not have Gold level at the time of application, but, if selected for funding, would need to have earned it by the time that the award is made.

**The deadline for submitting completed applications is 5:00 p.m. (PST) on Friday, November 30, 2018.**

# ADVANCING OPPORTUNITY AND PROSPERITY

## A Grantmaking Program of the WD-40 Company Foundation

### FY2019 Request for Proposal

## ADVANCING OPPORTUNITY AND PROSPERITY FY19 GRANT CYCLE TIMELINE

- Monday, October 1, 2018: RFP released.
- Friday, November 30, 2018 by 5:00 p.m.: Proposals are due.
- February 2019: Semi-finalists are notified.
- March 2019: Site visits are conducted.
- April 2019: Finalists are notified, and presentations take place.
- July 2019: Grantees are announced.

For program questions, please contact Heather Rossetti at [heatherr@sdfoundation.org](mailto:heatherr@sdfoundation.org)

For technical questions regarding the online application, please contact Kerri Favela at [kerri@sdfoundation.org](mailto:kerri@sdfoundation.org)

To access the online application, please click on the following link:

<https://app.smarterselect.com/programs/52846-The-San-Diego-Foundation-Community-Impact>

Planning and Strategy	Suggestion for Improvement
a. We are getting RFPs that are relevant to our work	Identify who your likely funders are. Sign up for grants.gov and buynet as well as philanthropy organizations.
b. We have an efficient process and procedure in place for deciding whether to bid or not.	Establish a communication process and criteria/decision matrix (fit, competitiveness, capacity to respond)
c. We have a team in place with time and skills to be able to make decisions and move the process forward.	Decide who team members are, at a minimum need a content person, a fiscal person and someone who can write.
d. We can build and maintain relationships with funders when possible.	Identify who is responsible for this – ideally the ED, and/or a Development person. Communicate with funders as much as possible -before, after and during.
Proposal Response	
e. We understand the competitive nature of RFPs and the need for strategy.	Do the math! If only 10 in the nation chances are only 1 in California – ask “does this opportunity have our name on it?”, discuss “what’s it going to take?” make every decision strategically.
f. We understand the importance of compliance with RFP instructions.	Create a compliance checklist that lists every required item or instruction.
g. We have a positive and confident attitude about our ability to win.	Once you have decided to apply then drop any negative self or group talk, raise your standards
h. We have content developed that is ready to be adapted, i.e. organization history, staff resumes.	Make it a priority to have organizational information developed and updated.
i. We know how to analyze RFPs to fully understand what the funder priorities, values, needs etc. are.	Always look for themes (i.e. client engagement), tone/voice (), pay attention to language (
j. We have a quality control/review process for RFPs that makes sure our proposals are compliant, accurate, competitive etc.	Make quality control an assigned role, may need different people for proofing versus ensuring highest standards.
k. We know how to develop “win themes”	Ask this as a question “what do we have going for us that will make us stand out/win this?” write a list and create a clear statement for each item. Use these as opening lines for different sections as much as possible. Or if you have come creative license put them in text boxes.