

Feds seek the particulars in your proposal preparation

The devil is in the details. And so is securing a federal grant—it's in the details. That special pink binder on the proposal you've worked on for months may as well have the word "trash" written across the front page unless the RFP you are submitting asks for a binder. And if a grant reviewer can't tell what you are saying because the flowery language is covering up the "real" information, then you might as well not waste your money on postage.

"Give them the information they are looking for and do it in precise, simple terms," said Linda Flynn, research director, CoreStrategies for Nonprofits. Be specific and pay attention to the details—it may mean the difference between whether or not your proposal makes it before a reviewer's eyes, she said.

Below, Flynn shares a few tips that she follows when submitting a federal proposal.

• **Locate the "two pages."** "The first thing I do when I get an RFP is to take out the pages that say exactly how the proposal needs to be submitted," said Flynn. "There are usually two of them." Next, read them over and over again to make sure you don't

miss anything. I keep one copy on my desk that I look at everyday while working and one with the original proposal, she said. This method will keep you from making a seemingly small mistake, like stapling a proposal when they ask for a clip, or submitting a 50-page proposal when the maximum is 20 pages.

• **Get to the point.** A common problem I see when people are applying for a federal grant is their style of writing, said Flynn. People need to get away from academic writing, which is not always to the point, and use more direct language, she said. Obtaining some knowledge of business practices and business writing will serve you well when submitting a proposal to the government.

• **Don't market.** While a family foundation might be won over by the best story, the federal government is about trying to be as objective as possible, said Flynn, so don't over-promote yourself. Watch out for "I" and "we" statements that continually tell the reviewer how great you are.

• **Quality control.** After you have compiled your proposal, give it and the two pages that outline the guidelines for submission to someone to look over, said Flynn. For the best quality control results, give it to someone who has never seen it before and after they have checked it once, have them check it again.

"The most important thing for people to remember when writing a proposal for the federal government is to not be afraid. If you are a teacher and this is your first time attempting a project like this, just think about it like one of your students writing their first research project; it becomes easier with practice," said Flynn.

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