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CUTTING TO THE CHASE: WRITING IN THE ONLINE AGE   🖶 **PRINT**

(Aug. 27, 2007) The new world of online applications, along with the need to grab people's attention immediately, has forced fundraisers and grant seekers to write tighter and leaner proposals that get directly to the point.

On Sept 6, Diane M. Gedeon-Martin will discuss how fundraisers and charities can write strong, active, effective prose—using fewer words—in her Audioconference, "**Writing Tight: Secrets to Successful Online Proposals**."

Gedeon-Martin is the president of The Write Source LLC, a grant-seeking management firm in Glastonbury, Conn. Since 1993, her company has assisted more than 170 nonprofit organizations achieve their short- and long-term grant-seeking goals. Because of her expertise in the field, she is a frequent workshop presenter and guest speaker at regional, national and international conferences, including the annual AFP International Conference on Fundraising.

While her presentation will focus on online grant proposals, her advice and guidance can be applied to almost any type of fundraising communications. "The workshop is for anyone who wants to improve the way they communicate in this era of constant news, increased distractions and shortened attention spans," Gedeon-Martin explains. "Fundraisers are in the communications business, and if we can't communicate effectively in the way people want these days, our organizations are going to lose."

Same Applications, Less Text

In the case of online grant applications, short and to the point aren't just preferred, they're essential. The biggest change between paper and online applications is the amount of space and text charities have to work with, according to Gedeon-Martin.

In the past, a funder using a paper grant application typically would have allowed a charity two pages to write a needs statement. Many online funders are now limiting needs statements to 2,000 characters, or about 500 words. (To put this in perspective, this article is 704 words.) The same is true of program descriptions. Previously, charities might have had up to three pages to discuss the services they would offer, Now they have perhaps 2,000 characters, plus an additional 1,000 to state their objective and goals.

"The components of the application are still the same," Gedeon-Martin says. "Charities just have a lot less text to work with, and that can be problematic if they aren't used to writing in a certain way. Grant applications now have to remove the fluff and get to the bare bones, and that's true of almost any communication that's directed toward a funder or donor these days."

Corporations and Government Leading the Way

So far, online applications are predominantly found in the corporate sector. About 80 percent of online grant applications are found through corporate granting processes. While most corporate online applications are similar to traditional submissions, some are now requesting details about the publicity and recognition they will receive. "That's a new requirement and is forcing grant writers to develop publicity plants, something that most haven't done before," says Gedeon-Martin.

At the same time, online grant applications are popular with the federal government as well. More than 75 percent of U.S. federal government grant applications are now online, according to Gedeon-Martin.

She expects community and private foundations to follow along in the future, although at a much slower pace. "It's a question of technology and control," Gedeon-Martin says. "Only about 10 percent of all U.S. funders, including corporations, have websites, and many of them want to retain control over who applies. This way they know they'll be receiving good applications from organizations that meet basic criteria. They don't necessarily want to open up an online site and let anyone start submitting applications."

Many funders now require a letter of intent from organizations to begin the granting process. If the letter of intent is well received, then applicants might be given a password to go to the funder's website and submit an online application.

"It's a new world of grant seeking, with organization feeling their way and doing their own thing," Gedeon-Martin explains. "Fundraisers are going to have to adjust both their processes and their writing to make sure they're taking full advantage of granting opportunities."

"**Writing Tight: Secrets to Successful Online Proposals**" can help ensure you are taking full advantage of grant opportunities and writing the most effective communications possible. To register online for this Audioconference, click **here**.