



What your attitude to jigsaw puzzles says about your capacity for grant writing

It's August and the weather is divine so instead of laboring over an article, I thought I'd share with you a nugget that didn't make it into my book based on interviews that I did with 25 top grant writers who have collectively raised \$500 million for my book (*Grant Writing Revealed: 25 Experts Share Their Art, Science, & Secrets*).

Over and over again, the people I interviewed equated some aspect of grant development to puzzle solving and clearly are people that love to solve puzzles and figure out how pieces fit together. So, if you love puzzles and you're a grant writer, or aspire to be one, you are in good company. And, if you are not a lover of puzzles and have an errant 50,000 piece puzzle waiting to be put together, I've got the perfect holiday guests for you.

So, let's take a look at how thinking about the grant proposal as a puzzle could be helpful to you.

The RFP puzzle

Mark Eiduson said, "*RFPs and RFQs are like puzzles and it's fun to pull them apart and write strategically to meet the requirements.*" What he points to here is his ability to really deeply analyze an RFP. Less experienced grant developers are apt to read the RFP but experienced grant developers analyze, devour, and dissect an RFP.

This is especially useful in government RFPs where one word can change an entire approach. For example, I was recently in a meeting where our data person asked what the federal definition for disability was in this particular program. The way that disability was defined could mean the difference between us having a pool of 1000 people to work with or 200 – clearly changing our competitiveness.

I recommend reading an RFP once to get the lay of the land and then going through it with a toothcomb to pick out what needs to be addressed and highlight questions that come from a thorough reading. And, of course, its best when you can talk it over with someone who is familiar with the project and the funding agency because they will see things that you may not have picked up on.

The Planning Puzzle

"For me, proposal writing is about 'solving' a huge puzzle – one in which the community need has to fit together with the proposed activities and the desired outcomes have to fit both." Melissa Brown

So, once you have a fit with the funder you need to make sure that what you are proposing fits together. As Melissa says, there is an art to looking at all of the community needs and seeing which ones can be addressed realistically by this funder at this time. When we put together a jigsaw puzzle we often find and build the edges

first and then build inwards. Similarly in program planning, it's necessary to look for the structural pieces that need to be addressed first and then build the rest of the program around it.

The Process Puzzle

"It's like a big jigsaw puzzle. First, I frame the puzzle and find the smooth edges in the form of the goals and objectives, logic models, results-based accountability. I know where to begin. With a puzzle I lay out all the pieces, with a grant I look at all the data, research and articles and put them into a logical sequence into paragraphs. Then I start moving the blocks around in the way that you move big chunks of the puzzle. I will take a sentence from here and there to see how they fit together just like jigsaw pieces." Diane Gedeon-Martin

I love how Diane, thinks of the grant writing process in terms of a puzzle or building blocks. I have never thought of it this way before but it works. I often start with the goals and objectives and the necessary components such as project partners. And then, like Diane, once I have the pieces, I will move them around until they flow and fit together. When they do, you will feel it go kerchunk – and you'll probably be tired of looking at it by that stage.

Creating Beauty

And, I will leave the last word with Sue Caruso-Green who talked eloquently about the beauty of a well-crafted grant proposal, *"Grantmaking is like quilt making. You have needs, timelines, activities and when you step back you can say, "O, what a beautiful quilt. The whole is attractive and fits together."*

Wishing you the fun of a good puzzle and the satisfaction of creating something beautiful this summer - both personally and professionally.

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