

SECURING SUPPORT FOR CRANE AND WETLAND CONSERVATION PROJECTS

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INTRODUCTION

In most cases, securing financial support is the limiting factor in implementing recommended actions. Financial resources are available, but it is sometimes a problem to identify these resources, and then to secure a grant. To overcome these obstacles, the following tips are offered.

IDENTIFYING SOURCES OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT

In securing financial support for a project, it is crucial to identify funders interested in supporting projects involving wildlife research, conservation, and sustainable development. Grantors seldom support programs that fall beyond their carefully defined criteria. Thus, the first step in seeking support is to learn about the particular concerns of different funding organizations. Funders usually have published material about their areas of interest. Representatives of funding organizations often attend conservation meetings and publish announcements in newsletters and journals. If a project fits within a funder's area of interest, it is usually helpful to establish personal contact with the funder (or a member of the staff if the funder is an organization). It helps if someone within the organization can answer your questions or critique your proposal before it is formally submitted. Inviting the funder(s) to your project site is an excellent way to gain advice and cultivate interest among potential funders.

THE LETTER OF INQUIRY

Having selected the seemingly most appropriate sources, the applicant should write a letter of inquiry to each grantor to secure additional information. This provides an opportunity to cultivate the interest of the grantor without asking for support. Knowing more about the grantor will also facilitate developing a comprehensive proposal. A two-page letter should ask for information about the types of projects the grantor supports and the level of funding. The letter should summarize the importance of the proposed program, the achievable objectives, the methods to be applied, and the qualifications of the applicant. The inquiry letter should not actually request funds but should indicate the level of funding required. The actual amount requested should be determined after the grantor indicates the range of grant sizes. If the grantor asks for a formal proposal, the amount requested should fall within this range.

THE FORMAL PROPOSAL

If the potential grantor expresses interest in the proposed project, the next step is to prepare a formal proposal. This is often the most important step in any conservation effort. The proposal should be clear, concise, and well written to reflect the importance of the project and the motivation and ability of the applicant. A neat, preferably typewritten, proposal is crucial to developing the interest of the grantor; misspellings and typographical errors do not give a favorable impression.

The proposal should include a summary, a statement of the project's rationale and objectives, a description of the problem, an outline of the study methods and activities, and a specific timeline and budget. Literature sources that support statements in the proposal should be listed in alphabetical order by the author's last name at the end of the proposal. Three well respected people who know you and who are familiar with your work should be listed as personal references. Include their names, addresses, and telephone and fax numbers. References should provide their consent before you include them in your proposal. The budget should fit within the range of giving of the funder. Deadlines for submitting proposals and grant reports should be observed closely.

SECURING AND MANAGING A GRANT

If a grant proposal is accepted, thank-you letters should be sent to funders and references after the grant has been approved and after funds have been received. If a grant is provided through a supporting institution, the accountants of that institution should be advised in advance so that they are prepared to receive and manage the grant. If funds are sent directly to the grantee, the funds should be placed in a special bank account independent of all other accounts. This facilitates accounting. Funds from the account should only be used for items listed in the proposal to the grantor. Receipts should be received for all funds spent.

Well written and concise project reports and accounting reports should be submitted to the funder midway through, and upon completion of, a project. Receipts for all funds used should be kept, and a complete financial report including receipts should be submitted upon completion of the project. Unused funds should be returned to the funder.

COMMUNICATIONS

Written and verbal communication with grantors is vital in developing a productive relationship. Grantors are people

too, and their lives are devoted to providing effective, constructive grants. They appreciate being appreciated. Sometimes grantees feel grantors owe them support and after a grant is received, the grantor is forgotten. Such behavior is a prescription for reducing the possibility of grant renewal.

PERSONAL CONTACT

Receiving a grant is often based on personal contact between the grantee and grantor. If a grantor lives in or is visiting the grantee's region, the grantee should try to establish personal contact with the grantor. A 15-minute visit to the office of the grantor can be very productive and provide an opportunity to invite the grantor to visit project sites. Grantors of wildlife research and conservation projects are usually keenly interested in the natural world and welcome the opportunity to learn from specialists and to travel with them in the field.

CULTIVATING SUPPORT

In many cases, cultivation of the grantor leads to additional support, both through the grantor and through other funders

with whom the grantor has contact. This usually depends upon direct personal communication between the grantee and the grantor. A grantee should be creative in cultivating this expanded support. For example, grantees should invite grantors on expeditions or short field trips, keep grantors informed about the progress and problems of the work, and seek the advice of grantors in areas where the grantor may have expertise. In short, grantors usually give to people rather than projects. Personal contact is therefore vital.

PERSEVERING

Not all grant proposals can or will be funded, especially in the initial effort to gain support. You should not be discouraged by such results, but should look for opportunities to refine and improve the proposal, to identify more promising sources of support, and to learn from the process. In some cases, it may be necessary to redefine the focus, breadth, or organization of the project. In other cases, it may be useful to work with other individuals or non-profit organizations in your region on joint projects that offer different funding possibilities and that convey multiple benefits. In any case, it is important to continue to seek out information and contacts, and to communicate your enthusiasm for the project.