Nevada's War on Weeds Steps to Success Step 9 – Finding Additional Resources

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Once you have developed awareness, provided education, built your coalition, mapped your weeds, and written a weed management plan, there is often one more hurdle to surmount to make your weed control effort a reality: gaining sufficient funding. Funding can come from many different sources. Your coalition partners may each be able to provide funds or in-kind materials and labor. Weed districts may also be able to provide financial or other assistance. In many cases, however, it is necessary to search for sources of outside funding, whether from the federal government, states, foundations, corporations, or individuals. In most cases, this involves writing and submitting a grant proposal to the funding agency. While the thought of writing a grant intimidates most of us, with the help of your partners, you stand a good chance to capture some of the funds available.

Most sources of funds are now looking for applications that fit with their goals, are collaborative, and can show a measurable impact. At the same time, the project should be small enough to show positive results within the time frame of the grant. If your planning process followed Steps 1-8 of the "War on Weeds" series, you'll easily meet these three requirements.

What do I need to know before searching for a source of funding?

The first step in any grant-seeking process is to have a clearly defined problem or need, and the backing of your collaborative partners. Some grant seekers find the source of funding first, and then try to fit a project to the source. This may limit your ability to complete the project as you have planned, and can result in sidetracking of your original goals. Once your project is planned and detailed, you're ready to seek a source of funding.

What sources of funding are available?

With the advent of easy access to the Internet, the search for funding opportunities became much simpler. If you do not have access to the Web, most likely one of your partners will. Many calls for proposals are posted on the Internet along with all necessary forms. There are many sources to investigate, including:

1. **The Federal Government**: Many agencies provide federal grant funds for environmental and restoration activities, including USDA's APHIS (Anbimal and Plant Health Inspection Service), which is charged with limiting the spread of invasive species. The Federal Register lists funding opportunities on a regular basis. The web site for the Federal Register is found at: http://www.access.gpo.gov/ric/ricpubs/funding/funding1.htm.
2. **States**: States provide funding through distribution of federal block grants, and through their own legislative action. For example, the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection administers a variety of funds that may, in some cases, be applied to weed projects. Both state and federal grant procedures are very strict, and require that you follow the rules provided in the "RFP", or request for Proposal system. The RFP defines priority issues and requests proposals to address those issues.
3. **Foundations**: Many foundations exist that fund a variety of grants. One example is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Foundation, whose web site is found at http://www.nfwf.org. The "Pulling Together: A Public/Private Partnership for Invasive and Noxious Plant Management" initiative provides a mechanism for federal agencies to partner with states, private individuals, and many other groups. Foundations may be independent, corporate, or community-based. The Foundation Center (http://fdncenter.org/) provides a searchable list of funding opportunities.
4. **Companies and Businesses**: Many larger corporations support foundations that fund specific projects. The companies may give gifts of equipment, facilities, etc. It is essential to make a link between the business of the corporation and the project for which you are seeking funds. If a grant makes good business sense to a company, it is more likely to be funded.
5. **Individuals:** Gaining funding support from individuals often involves personal contact and involvement. Some individuals maintain foundations, while others provide grants directly within the community. Remember that the relationship you build with the funder is essential to your success. Many local businesses are very supportive of efforts that are good for the area's economy.

How do I write a grant proposal?

The first step is to carefully read the RFP or the instructions for submitting a proposal and make sure you are eligible to apply, and that you understand the application requirements and procedures. In many cases, applications for funding are denied simply because the rules have not been followed. In general, when writing the grant, you'll need to provide detail on who, what, when, where, why, how, and how much. This information is already included in your weed management plan, making the grant writing process much simpler.

Most grants include the following parts:

1. **Cover letter**
2. **Abstract** (summary of the overall project)
3. **Introduction** (explanation of the problem
4. **Statement of need** (why are you seeking funding?)
5. **Description of those benefited** by the project
6. **Goals and objectives** of the project (what do you hope to accomplish?)
7. **Methods** (what are the steps you will follow to complete the project?)

8. **Timeline** (when will individual activities or steps be completed?)
9. **Evaluation** of the project (how will you determine that the project has been successful in meeting the goals and objectives?)
10. **Reporting of** results (how will you share what you have learned and accomplished?)
11. **Budget** (what funds are needed to complete the project? What other sources of funding are available?)
12. **Key collaborators** (who will be involved in the project? What are their credentials? Who will coordinate the project and oversee the grant funds, acting as principal investigator?)
13. **Necessary** signatures (of collaborators, supporting agencies, etc.)
14. **Appendices** (this includes such documents as letters of support or other supporting information that doesn't fit in the rest of the proposal)

How do I design my proposal so it will be successful?

Each grant will have its own format and requirements. Be sure to follow these precisely. At the same time, avoid lengthy, rambling explanations, or your proposal will be ignored among the large number submitted. Most often, the grant will need to respond to stated questions in a limited amount of space, so keep the writing concise and to the point, and NEVER exceed the stated page limitation. Fill in all parts of the application form, even if some parts don't seem to apply to your situation, by providing a reason.

Keep your writing clear, concise, and free from technical jargon. Never assume the reviewers of the grant understand the work you are proposing, or its significance. Explain the ideas, methods, and impacts clearly, and provide any case studies, background data, or other information to back up your project. Stress the collaboration you've built, and how it will increase the chances of project success.

The budget can make or break your chances of funding. If possible, get an idea of the size of grants most often awarded by your source. If only $100,000 is available, the funding agency may not be willing to fund only one or two large proposals. When calculating the budget, be realistic. Include the funding you need as well as the contributions your group will make. It sometimes can take a year or more to receive some grant funds, so be sure to include a margin for price increases or unexpected expenditures. Remember to include administrative costs, travel, and facility costs such as phones, heat, and electricity if one of the partners cannot provide them.

When at all possible, show the total "match", or contributions from partners and others that supplement the grant funds you've requested. This may include equipment, supplies, volunteer labor, your time or salary, etc. When no actual money change hands, this is called "in kind" match. Other match can be provided from donations. Most grants now require a minimum of a 1:1 match, or $1 of match for every $1 received from the grantor.

If you are working with collaborators from state or federal agencies, they may be required to get signatures from their administrators or budge divisions. This may require from several days to weeks, so be sure to budget enough time.

All grant proposals have due dates. Some require that the proposal be received by the funding agency by a certain date, while others require postmarking by a given date. Check the RFP carefully and plan enough time so that the grant will be received by the appropriate date. Most often, if you miss the deadline, the proposal will not be considered, and all your hard work will bring no rewards. Be sure to address the proposal and cover letter to the appropriate contact person.

What happens once I submit the grant?

All grants undergo some sort of review process, whether by a private individual or a large panel of scientists. This review process may extend for weeks to months until it is complete. The instructions in the RFP will generally state the date by which decisions will be made and funds awarded. You may even be asked to make changes or amend your budget during this time period. If you are successful, you will receive a letter stating that your proposal has been selected for funding.

If the funds are tied to the federal government, there may be a gap of several months until contracts are signed and the money actually arrives. This time period can be devoted to additional planning and early implementation of your weed program. Be aware, however, that any work you do prior to the contract date will not be accepted as match for the grant.

What do I do if my proposal was not funded?

Because so many groups are competing for limited grant dollars, it is not uncommon for a proposal to be refused the first time it is submitted. In this case, request feedback from the granting agency with specific reasons for refusal. Ask if you should submit a revised proposal, or if your proposal can be forwarded to other agencies for funding. Whatever you do, don't give up! If your proposal has merit, you will be able to find a source of funding.

References:

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