

Distributed at the Request of Public Member Ted Neitzke

The following is the landscape for grants and processes in the state. I asked our Grants Director to also include suggestions for consideration.

Unfortunately, **most competitive grant programs do NOT allow an applicant to include the cost of grant writing** (or any other pre-award incurred planning costs) in their proposed grant budget. Most programs explicitly prohibit this in their RFP; in the rare case where it is allowed, the RFP will specify that grant funding can be used to cover the cost of grant writing, usually with conditions.

Why?

- To encourage applicants to have complete ownership of and investment in their proposed project. Grant writing consultants provide far more than just proposal writing; they work with teams for weeks, months, and sometimes years to research and develop program strategies that meet the parameters of a specific grant competition. Local willingness to invest in a grant consultant supports more extensive project development, resulting in a stronger and more comprehensive project (+ a more competitive application package).
- To create an even playing field for all applicants.
- Funding pre-award expenses incurred could create accounting and/or legal problems. (Legislation authorizing certain grant programs usually does not allow grant funds to be used for a list of specific items and services, typically including grant writing.)
- In a grant competition, not all applications are funded, and for a variety of complex reasons. So if a grant is NOT funded when a grant writer is only being paid if it is, how is he or she compensated?

On using indirect costs from the grant budget to pay for grant writing: When a grant program allows indirect costs and an applicant includes them in a grant budget, the applicant may use that line item to offset *future* grant writing costs, with the understanding that they will have to absorb any indirect costs incurred while implementing the funded project. Including indirect costs also reduces the total amount of funding available to pay for direct costs.

Caveats: Not all grants allow indirect costs, and in some cases, programs have unexpectedly eliminated the indirect cost line after a grant is funded. And if a program requires a match and the applicant proposes one that is in-kind, the program may delete the indirect cost line from the budget, as it would be supplanting.

How does this look in today’s grant landscape?

Popular Grant Programs	Value	Average Time to Write	Allows Indirect Costs	Requires a Match
DPI School-based Mental Health Services	\$150,000 over 2 years	60 hours*	YES - up to DPI approved rate	No
DPI 21st Century Community Learning Centers	Up to \$725,000 over 5 years	65 hours*	Unclear; applicants only submit a budget if they are funded.	No

Popular Grant Programs	Value	Average Time to Write	Allows Indirect Costs	Requires a Match
DPI Charter Schools subgrant	Up to \$900,000 over 5 years	80 hours*	Possibly—check with DPI	No
USDA Farm to School	\$100,000 over 1 or 2 years	50 hours*	Yes - 10% de minimus	Yes, 25%: may be in-kind
US DOJ BJA STOP School Violence	Up to \$1 million over 3 years	60 hours*	Yes - 10% de minimus	No
US DOJ COPS School Violence Prevention Program	Up to \$500,000 over 3 years	40 hours*	No	Yes, 25% cost share
USED Full-Service Community Schools**	Up to \$2.5 million over 5 years	180 hours+ (200+ pages)	Yes	Yes, determined by applicant
DWD Workforce Development grants for schools	Varies (\$25,000 - \$50,000)	35 - 55 hours*	No	Varies
Foundation grants	Varies	Varies	Typically No	Varies

*Grant writer time only. Varies based on size and scope of grant, number of project partners, client readiness to apply, and past relationship with grant writer.

**Offers a special applicant lane / priority for rural schools.

Suggested strategies and solutions:

💡 What if all state agencies hosting competitive subgrant competitions set aside a pool of Federal funding to support the purchase of grant writing services for high-need applicant teams?

Many state grants are funded with federal money that is then subgranted to LEAs. For example, in 2017 the DPI received a charter school grant from the USED to subgrant to applicants on a competitive basis. Part of that large federal grant was set aside by the DPI to fund the Wisconsin Resource Center for Charter Schools, which provides free training and technical assistance to charter school teams statewide.

What if this Center (for example) also included a set aside to cover all or part of the cost of grant writing for teams? District grant teams could complete a brief online form to quantify financial need; if selected, they would receive funding to subsidize all or part of the cost of grant writing.

💡 What if all CESAs receive a prorated and/or needs-based subsidy from the DPI to cover the cost of a grant writer, who is available to any district member in that CESA on a first-come, first-served basis and/or to districts meeting established needs criteria? This service could be shared by multiple CESAs to establish shared regional grant writing services. It could also be expanded

if individual districts wish to purchase more time and/or the CESA is willing to experiment with a contingency award fee add-on.

💡 What about sharing the cost of dedicated grant writing services between aligned organizations? Two WI communities (Howard-Suamico and Waupaca) have recently hired full-time grant writers in a shared investment / shared service model: the local **school district**, **municipality**, and local **education foundation** each agreed to cover a third of the cost of a full-time grant writer for a set time period. By the end of that time period, the trio of investors will revisit their investment to determine whether the return has made the investment worth continuing.