CONGRATULATIONS, YOU GOT THE GRANT.

NOW WHAT?

NAVIGATING GRANT ADMINISTRATION

There's no such thing as free money. Nowhere is this truism more accurate than in the world of government grants. Beyond the considerable investment in time and financial resources to apply for a grant, the true work begins once the grant is awarded.

In 22 years of grant writing on behalf of clients, the Morrison team has heard and witnessed numerous stories of grant project execution and administration gone awry. So much so, in fact, that Managing Principal and grants practice lead Toni Scott began assisting clients with grant administration in order to help prevent missteps that would leave clients unable to claim their full grant awards or lose out on future grant funding entirely. The demand for these services has grown, and Morrison now has two dedicated grant administrators on the team, Michelle Genova and Melissa Deen. In guiding and assisting clients through post-award grant administration, the Morrison team has learned what works and what doesn't work towards smooth and effective grant administration. The following are some common mistakes that can cause headaches when trying to carry out a grant project.

Mistake #1 **Spending money before the grant contract is executed.** It can take a long time – several months to a year – between when a grant application is submitted to when it's awarded. Sometimes businesses and organizations can't wait that long: down-payments are required, contractors may be lost to other work, harvest is coming and they can't go another season without replacing equipment. If pre-award spending on items in the project budget is necessary, just know that most grants will not reimburse awardees for funds spent before the grant contract is executed. However, the granting agency staff is usually understanding that businesses must move forward and will often work with the grant recipient to shift funds spent pre-project to other project-related tasks or activities.

Mistake #2 **Going off-script from the contracted work plan and budget.** The work plan and budget submitted in the grant application will typically be written into the grant contract so that the award recipient is contractually obligated to follow the plan as it is written. A common mistake that grant recipients make is to put the work plan and budget on a shelf and not refer to it until the next reimbursement or grant reporting deadline. It can be really hard when writing a grant application to know exactly what tasks and strategies will be most effective and necessary in one, two, or sometimes five years. But if a project strategy is shifted without a work plan and budget revision, whether intentionally or unintentionally, future reimbursements may be put at risk. For example, a grantee might decide to shift marketing tasks from a staff person to a contractor. Or maybe the budget was written to support attendance at a trade show in Dallas, but the grantee decides to attend one in San Diego instead. Whenever changes like these are considered, the agency should be notified and consulted in advance to ensure that the budget shift is eligible and approved for grant funds.

Mistake #3 **Waiting until reimbursement time to compile documentation.** Just like with taxes and audits, it's a whole lot easier to track grant expenses and save all invoices and proof of payment into a single file folder as the money is spent than to wait until it is crunch time and try to remember what was spent. Most grant programs will allow for monthly or quarterly reimbursements; Morrison recommends sticking with a consistent reimbursement schedule in order to stay on top of grant and match spending and avoid the potential for missing or insufficient documentation. And while we're on the subject of grant reimbursement, it's important to point out that matching funds are subject to the same reporting and documentation requirements as grant funds, so keep track of those time cards and any other budget items you're using as match. Finally, it's important to remember that expenses are not the only thing you have to keep track of – most if not all grant programs also require reporting on progress toward project goals. Whether your goals and outcome measures are related to sales, production, energy savings, or some other metric, it's helpful to have a system in place from the onset of the grant to track and

monitor that information over time so the grant administrator is not scrambling at the end to hunt down the required information.

Mistake #4 **Asking forgiveness rather than permission.** Granting agencies and their staff want nothing more than to see their funded projects succeed. When grant recipients are communicative and transparent about their challenges and agency staff can recognize the grantee is doing its best to abide by the contract and follow policies and procedures, staff are usually incredibly supportive and accommodating to help find solutions. However, when they perceive that the grantee is unresponsive or trying to circumvent policies by asking for forgiveness and not permission, the process of working with the agency can become increasingly difficult, and future grant applications may be jeopardized. Another Morrison tip to avoid surprises upon report submission is to register for any e-blasts and join every program-related webinar the agency offers grant recipients. This will ensure you have the latest information and agency interpretation of program requirements.

Mistake #5 **Trying to go it alone.** Morrison recognizes that none of our clients really need us for this service... grant administration is not rocket science, and our clients are fully capable of doing it themselves. But they also have businesses to run and projects to execute aside from grant administration. So why not use the services of a consultant like Morrison, whose grant administration experts have likely already read the grant program guidelines 100 times and have positive working relationships with the agency staff? Furthermore, grant administration costs can be written into many grant applications, so depending upon the program, Morrison's fees may be reimbursable as funds. Morrison's multidisciplinary grant administration services range from simple pre-submission reviews of clients' own reimbursements and reports, to full bookkeeping and accounting services paired with grant writing expertise in writing and designing semiannual and final reports.

While grant administration can sometimes be a real headache, advanced preparation and regular attention will always help to streamline the process, support successful and effective grant execution, and set the grantee up for future funding success...so you have the privilege of doing it all again!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Morrison's Grants Manager Sarah DeForest enjoys working with clients to craft compelling and persuasive grant applications. Once they're awarded, she is grateful to be able to turn the projects over to Morrison's talented Michelle Genova and Melissa Deen, who do the real work of grant administration. Sarah can be reached by email at sdeforest@morrisonco.net.