



The Alliance for Nonprofit Growth and Opportunity (TANGO)



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Building Bridges 2022

**Grant Seeking In a Time of Transformation –
Trends and Tips for Communicating Your Organization’s Solutions
to Today’s Problems**

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Overview

- Trends in Grant Application Questions
 - Telling Your Story
- COVID, DEAI, Core Mission Support

Trends We're Seeing In Giving and Application Questions

- “Back to Basics” – Food, housing, health
- Emotional support – mental health interventions and programs
- Return To Work Programs: job training, readiness, child care
- Afterschool and Learning Gap programming for students
- Anything that helps people, families, and communities get back on their feet “post” COVID

Trends We're Seeing In Giving and Application Questions

- Centering clients and communities
- DEAI and Racial Justice
- Core Mission Support

Centering Clients and Communities in Your COVID Story

- Most organizations have a story to tell about how your clients and your org survived COVID...it is, it's a story of resiliency, grit, and creativity.
- Retire the word “pivot”. Aside from being overused, it trivializes what you all went through. Your organizations went through hell to keep your services available – talk about that hell and how you rocked it.
- Put your clients and community at the forefront of the story – it's their experiences that shaped how you changed! Talk about:
 - Their actions rather than their needs.
 - What they asked for, rather than what you gave them.
 - How your org changed for the better, rather than how you “saved the day”



Centering Clients and Communities in Your COVID Story

Example of what not to do: *“When COVID hit our community, our clients struggled to keep food on their tables and often came to us having not eaten for a couple of days. Thanks to us, we were able to give clients food through our food pantry and fed their families during these difficult times.”*

Instead: *“During the COVID pandemic, our clients’ and community’s resourcefulness created a pathway to physical nourishment. Our clients let us know that while they knew where to get free boxed and canned goods to augment their SNAP and WIC benefits, they needed help in locating affordable sources of fresh and affordable vegetables. ABC Organization partnered with a local farm and, with the help of generous donors, purchased CSA shares that created a source of fresh and locally sourced vegetables and eggs our clients could access when they needed to. To assist with distributions, our clients let us know which houses of worship they attended, and we reached out to them until we found a local church with a bus who was willing to help gather and deliver the vegetables in a centrally located drop spot.”*



Centering Clients and Communities in Your COVID Story

Talk about the toll that COVID took on your operations – staffing capacity and morale, impact on unrestricted funds and fundraising, changes in human resource support and benefits, creative solutions to operational challenges.

Talk about how you used your COVID relief funding. What (or who) did you invest in? How will these investments benefit your mission, your clients, and your community?



“Core Mission Support” or Full Cost

- Core Mission Support – a.k.a. “the new overhead”.
Administrative expenses. Indirect.
- The uncool cousin to program expenses.
- Nonprofit fundraisers (and philanthropy) have long operated under the restrictive and archaic idea that low overhead = a successful organization.
- Increasing openness (not enough) to funding these expenses *if you’re speaking about them the right way*.

“Core Mission Support” or Full Cost

The truth is, all resources spent by a nonprofit are spent in order to successfully deliver on programs.

“Core Mission Support” or Full Cost

4 things non profits can do right now to change turn tide (from the Non Profit Finance Fund):

Know your full costs: *Day-to-day operating expenses + working capital + reserves + fixed asset additions + debt principal repayment = full costs*

Ask for your full costs. Update your fundraising narratives to reflect what it truly costs to deliver your interventions and sustain your work. ***Change doesn't come cheap.*** Don't undercut your mission and put your community at risk by asking for less and promising more.

“Core Mission Support” or Full Cost

4 things non profits can do right now to change turn tide (from the Non Profit Finance Fund):

Banish the overhead ratio. Don't use low overhead as a fundraising tool (i.e., no more pitches that \$0.90 of every \$1.00 is spent directly on programs). Don't use it as a management tool. Don't use it as a proxy for efficiency or effectiveness. Kick it to the curb.

Practice new ways to talk about overhead. Most overhead costs are people costs—educated and trained employees who contribute to the mission by making sure the organization runs smoothly. Talk about what they do in compelling, specific detail, and how it contributes to mission!



“Core Mission Support” Examples

Human Resources Pitch:

“Our counselors do their best work with survivors of domestic violence when they can give each client their full time and attention. That’s why the work of our professional HR team is so important. By attracting and retaining effective staff members, ensuring payroll is accurate and on time, managing benefits, and handling proof of counselor qualifications and required training, our HR team lets counselors spend more time with our clients. This results in more clients served and stronger relationships between clients and counselors.”



“Core Mission Support” Examples

Information Technology Pitch:

“Collecting data and measuring impact can be time consuming if that data isn’t managed well. That’s why the work of our IT and impact team is so vital. By implementing and maintaining an effective CRM platform, our staff have a reliable and efficient way to collect and enter client data that allows our team to measure how well we are doing and whether our clients are experiencing real, positive changes in their lives.”

“Core Mission Support” Examples

Facilities Pitch:

“For people in trauma, accessing help and support from a mental health professional is an act of extreme vulnerability. It’s critical that the facility in which they seek help at such a time in their lives is inviting and safe. By supporting our facilities maintenance, you are helping us increase the effectiveness of our counseling programs for our clients and community. People heal best when the environment around them nurtures healing – this means installing security systems for physical protection and confidentiality, as well as upgrading the décor of our treatment rooms to maximize comfort and emotional security.”



DEAI

Philanthropy has been showing greater interest in investing in organizations with a clearly articulated vision for their role in creating a more just and equitable world.

Every non profit is in a different place with their DEAI work, but each one is on a path of exploration. **Be honest about where you are on that path. You can't write about work you haven't done, or questions you haven't asked yourself.**

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Don't be afraid to say that you need or want to do more and better. We all do.

Philanthropy isn't looking for you to outline how you're going to dismantle institutional racism and sexism with their \$5k grant. Rather, they want to know that their investees "get it" and they are making investments into those organizations who are willing to be a part of the solution.

DEAI – How To Address the Question

Can you articulate what diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion look like to your organization, and why it's important to you? Where have those conversations landed so far? Why are you where you are currently in your DEAI journey?

What levels of the organization have engaged in DEAI work?

If you don't have a formal policy or plan yet, talk about what you **do** have: professional development opportunities? Board training and recruitment shifts? Help seeking in this area? Measures taken to understand demographic shifts in your catchment areas as a way to inform programming?

Talk about concrete things you are ready to implement in 2023, even if it's just having a guided conversation.



DEAI – How To Address the Question

Mention difficulties you are having in overcoming internal barriers (for example: board recruitment, staff recruitment and retention, disagreements about program modifications and new approaches, cost constraints).

Understand the difference between **incidental effect vs intentional actions** when you write about your DEAI work to funders:

Incidental: Serving BIPOC geographic community in which you are located; client advisory groups mandated by funding sources.

Intentional: Hosting listening sessions with community members about how they regard your organization; assessing internal biases at every level of the organization. Addressing ableism and accessibility in your programs and/or physical environment.



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