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The Berglund Center's Summer Institute

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The School Grants web site [1] is unpretentious and welcoming by design. When you visit the site, you feel like you've been mistakenly bounced to a web site designed for children. This is a web site built to attract unsuspecting schoolteachers. Don't let the appearance lead you to think the content is as playful as the color scheme and graphics. On the home page, School Grants touts itself as a one-stop site for PK-12 school grant opportunities. This is true, it does provide a wide variety of high quality resources and links. But the site is most valuable to educators who are writing grants for the first time.

The site's stated goal is "to help the most kids possible by empowering those who teach them with the knowledge and resources necessary to write successful grant proposals." [2] Because of a decrease in tax revenues, most school districts are being asked to prepare budgets that include across the board budget cuts. As a result, teachers must seek outside sources of funding for innovative projects. This fact makes this web site even more valuable.

The School Grants web site was established in 1999 when it was launched as a place school districts could find funding sources for programs they were unable to support in their existing budgets. Since then, the site has grown and now includes resources that help first time grant writers access information that will help them plan, write, and submit a grant. It has evolved from a site consisting mostly of links to government granting agencies to a site whose content provides all the help a first time grant writer will need.

The site's greatest asset is its collection of information and references for first time grant writers. An entire section of the web site is devoted entirely to supporting first time grant writers. It contains a variety of resources and links that help first time writers begin the process of writing a grant. [3] The section contains information and links that give practical advice about writing style and substance. As experienced grant writers know, there is specific information and language that grant readers look for. Some first time grant writers have well-developed projects that don't get funded because they leave out vital information they may have included had they known they

should have included it. Many a grant reader has wanted to fund a worthy idea but simply couldn't because the grant writer left out key information or didn't elaborate on some crucial aspect of the grant. With this in mind, this section of the site lets first time writers in on some of the secrets. Some of the tips they give to writers include: keep your goals realistic; put a fresh spin on an existing idea; have a reasonable, detailed budget; and try to make your project replicable and extendable to other grade levels. These are characteristics that may not be explicitly stated in an RFP (Request for Proposal).

Another valuable part of this web site is its offer of an interactive CD-ROM titled "Let's Write a Grant" [4] The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) [5] reviewed the CD-ROM and praised it for its practical approach to grant writing. They describe a proactive approach as fully developing a project before finding funding for it. This stands in contrast to the reactive approach in which project ideas are developed after funding is found.

The NASSP also praises the CD-ROM for its approach to the grant writing process. "Let's Write a Grant" emphasizes the development of resources and procedures that will help any teacher or district learn grant writing skills they will be able to use in the future. The CD-ROM identifies seven areas first time writers should focus on: assembling a grant team, identifying the problem(s) or need(s), identifying grant makers and kinds of grants, determining the appropriate funder, reading application materials and grant guidelines, gathering the information to write the proposal, and writing and submitting the proposal.

Along with the grant writing support, the site gives the users access to a range of funding sources that are categorized by region and type. Users will find it easy to access grants that are targeted for their region or state. In addition the site also supports an electronic community whose members are on a listserv called "bring home the bacon." [6] The listserv welcomes the discussion of all grant writing and funding topics. It includes an option that allows members to receive the emails in a summarized form called a nightly digest. This is convenient for teachers whose days are filled with teaching and don't have continuous access to their email.

From the design to the content, The School Grants site has established itself as a valuable place for educators. It is a model for the spirit of support and sharing that teachers rely on to survive. In these budget-tightening times, teachers should not give up on new ideas and projects that will help their students. If they utilize the resources on www.schoolgrants.org, they won't have to.

References:

[1] http://www.schoolgrants.org

[2] http://www.schoolgrants.org

[3] http://www.schoolgrants.org/grant_tips.htm

[4] http://www.schoolgrants.org/WriteGrant.htm

[5] http://www.principals.org

[6] http://www.schoolgrants.org/bacon_list.htm

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