



Grant Writing in the 21st Century

By Marcie Davis

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Marcie Davis – Grant Writing in the 21st Century

SM: Hello, this is Sheri' McConnell and I am the founder and president of the National Association of Women Writers. Today you are listening to an NAWW teleseminar titled Grant Writing in the 21st Century and today we have with us Marcie Davis. Hi, Marcie.

MD: Hello.

SM: Thank you so much for being here. I'm very excited to have you here. First of all, if it gets a little bit loud and we have dogs barking or anything like that I'll go ahead and put it on mute at that point. But it sounds pretty quiet right now so I'll leave it off so you can be more interactive, and then we'll just put it on mute if we need to. Does that sound good?

MD: That sounds great.

SM: Okay, well first of all I'd love to tell them a little bit about you and your website and some of the amazing work that you've done and then we'll just jump right in with the first question. And we will open this up for Q&A at the end also. But first of all, Marcie Davis is the president of Davis Innovations, and that is located on the Web at DavisInnovates.com. It is a public health and human service consulting firm, and she's located in Santa Fe, New Mexico. She has been working over 20 years with local, state, tribal and federal non-profit and governmental entities in areas of program development, management, training, research, grant writing and evaluation. And she's specialized in criminal justice and other public health and human services. Marcie has managed the multimillion-dollar federal Victims of Crime Act program for the Florida Attorney General's office and she also established the first Victim Service Office within the New Mexico Attorney General's Office, which is huge. That's something to feel totally awesome about. She's also generating millions of dollars in local, state, and federal and private grant funding for her clients. And she has been recognized by numerous entities for her achievements and contributions in both the victim service and human service areas. So you can see why I'm very excited to have her on and have her teach you what she knows about grant writing. And definitely visit her website. I believe you have an information product that they can get for free on grant writing, isn't that true?

MD: There is, yes. There are seven steps you can get, and also we're working on a grant writing workbook as well.

SM: Okay, and that's at DavisInnovates.com. Well if you don't mind I'll just jump right in with my first question.

MD: Okay.

SM: How can—if I wanted to, because I have so many darn children—how can someone become a paid grant writer?

MD: Well there are lots of ways to do that. And I'd like to ask the group as we get started how many of you have grant writing experience.

Audience: I do, yeah.

MD: Okay, great—it sounds like a couple of you do. There are lots of different ways. When I first started out, I was working as a state employee. I thought I would always be a civil servant, and then I realized one day that I could go out on my own and actually make more money and have a better quality of life working on my own and working on multiple projects, which is what I like to do. I like to really feel like I'm helping a lot of people, and being a grant writer was a way that let me start that—where I was helping to get money for programs so that they could do the wonderful services that they wanted to provide to their communities. And then I, as the grant writer, that gave me opportunities for additional avenues for our business to work in through evaluation or even implementing the grant which was another opportunity that we like to try and grasp whenever we can. But to become a grant writer, there are a couple of different ways. If you don't have the opportunity to go out on your own and start your own business, one thing that I started with was volunteering. I volunteered with some of the local non-profit organizations, and I helped them write proposals as a volunteer and then they got to see my quality of work and what I could do for them and then they ultimately hired me. So that's definitely one way. When you think there's no possibility, you can definitely volunteer. Or you can contact agencies, share with them some of your successes and see what opportunities may be there, because executive directors, they don't like to write grants. They don't have time when they're trying to deal with all of the other issues that are impacting organizations, so when you market yourself to them as you're going to help take away some of their workload, it's a great way to get your foot in the door as a grant writer. Did that answer your question, Sheri'?

SM: It did. Did anyone else have any other questions at that point? Any further questions about being a grant writer or how to become one? Nope. Okay, well what types of grants are available? I mean that was something I wondered when I first started a non-profit.

MD: Right. Well grants are funds that are given to tax exempt non-profit organizations or local governments, and they're given by foundations, corporations, government agencies, small businesses and even individuals. But there is big confusion out there that some people think grants are benefits or entitlements, and they're not. They are funds that are given mostly to tax exempt non-profit organizations or local governments, but there are different types of them, which are very different applications that you're applying for. Most grants fund a specific project and they require some level of reporting, so that involves you, as the grant writer, submitting a proposal to a potential funder and really making sure that you're responding to what that individual funder is requesting. So there are three major types of grant funding opportunities and those are: local and state governments, which people really overlook and don't realize how many dollars are out there in local and state government agencies—they don't get advertised that often—so those are great opportunities; and then of course, the private and corporate foundations. There are so many out there that fund all different types of things. And then the third type is the federal government, and those are much more labor intensive applications. So when I'm looking at federal opportunities I really have to look and see what is the competition going to be like and is it really worth a client investing that money in that application when it may be so competitive.

SM: Okay. What kind of opportunities, as far as the grant writing and the research today, what does it look like when you get out there in this industry right now?

MD: Well there are so many changes in technology and there is so much increased competition for funding—with all the different things going on in our society today, the funding levels have decreased. Moneys are getting allocated to other things, so I really see it as there are really two keys for individuals who are looking at grants and who are really interested in writing grants. I think those two key concepts for grant writing in the 21st century are research and partnerships, because most funders now really require that you have some type of partnership. You can't just apply for your agency and not be working with other entities in your community. They really want to see how

their dollars are going to be maximized, so those two things are research and partnerships.

The first thing let's talk about is research. How do I begin to find potential funding opportunities without spending a fortune? There are several ways that I go about doing that. One is I'm looking at private foundations; I'm looking at local libraries to give me that information. State libraries are really good about having that information that you can go and access their resources for free. There are some things out there like the Foundation Center but they charge for membership and can be a little expensive, so I really am careful about which ones I choose to belong to and how much information I'm going to get hopefully online. I really like to get these updates sent to my e-mail so I'm not spending a lot of my time doing this research but that I have this information coming to me daily. The other thing I belong to is a couple of states' business publications because that's going to tell me a lot about the corporations that are out there: who's doing really well, who has foundations that I can look at for my clients, what are they looking to fund, and how can my clients—with their services and goals and objectives—fit into that? The other thing that I really look at—I mentioned a little bit earlier about the local and state opportunities—and I check my newspaper: the classified legal notices at least every Sunday to see what's out there because local and state governments have information access requirements that they have to post those notices in newspapers. So I try to really make a point to look at some of those on a weekly basis. And like I said, the Sunday paper is usually the one that has the most information. I also look at some of the state agency websites. And I try to do that at least once a month but once every two weeks really because most grant opportunities will not be posted for long. Some of them are as short as a 2-week turnaround. So I really want to keep my finger on the pulse of what's out there and what's coming out so that I can look at it and make an assessment to see if that grant opportunity is something that I think would be a good fit for our business or for some of our clients and would be worth our time going after. The other thing that I do is try to know the individuals at some of these agencies, the local and state government that I think would be good opportunities that have grant funds that regularly come out. And I try to know who those individuals are and get on any lists that they have so that I can be one of the ones to get the announcement as soon as it comes out. So knowing that direct contact is really helpful too. On the federal level, there is a wonderful resource called Grants.gov that will put out notices every day of the federal grants that are becoming available, so I subscribe to that. It's a free service and it's really great at letting you know what grants are

available. It only takes a few minutes to scan through their list and see if any of the opportunities are appropriate for what you're looking for. There are other federal notification systems called the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance and the Federal Register but I find those so cumbersome. I don't have time to go through all of those lists and all of that information. So the Grants.gov is really a little gold mine of what's out there. They list over a thousand federal grant programs and access to over 400 billion dollars in annual awards, so by registering once on their site, you can get information about 26 different federal agencies, so I really like Grants.gov. There are a couple of other federal opportunities through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. They have over 300 grant programs, just that one agency, so I really try to scan their website as well to see what information is coming out that might work for our clients. I know I'm telling you a whole lot of information and a lot of different sites, and I know Sheri' had said at the beginning of our call, I'll be happy to talk with any of you and give you my phone number if you want any more information about any of these programs that we're talking about this morning because grant writing can be really overwhelming, so please know that I'm happy to talk with any of you about any of this information.

SM: Thank you so much for offering to do that, and again, your website is at DavisInnovates.com, and I bet they can contact you probably through e-mail via the website?

MD: Yes, or telephone also. I'm happy to give my phone number

SM: Do you want to go ahead and do that?

MD: Sure, absolutely. It is 505-424-6631.

SM: Okay, and thank you very much for doing that. One of the things that I was wondering, are there some keys or some really crucial tips that you could give them that would help them achieve grant writing success faster?

MD: Absolutely. I think working with each different grant is going to be different. Each application is going to ask you for different things, but if you can go ahead and do a couple of things—I have a list of tips that I like to share with people and we've talked about some of those—but getting some basic information down of: what is the mission of your organization? Really get that refined and work on that before you have a grant application. What types of goals and objectives would you have

and what are you trying to achieve, first of all, and how does it fit your organization? Because what's so sad is when people are looking for money on a certain project that they want to fund and they apply to grant applications that are not appropriate, and a funder can see that coming a mile away—they can see that someone is just trying to fit in their program into their application. So you really want to be careful and evaluate a funding proposal and make sure that it is appropriate, and you really want to look at who should be involved in that application. Is it just you or are there people within your organization that should be involved as well, because you're going to have budget pieces to work on and you're going to have publicity things to work on. So you really want to see and make sure that you have everyone involved that needs to be at the table because funders are going to be impressed with that. They want to see that you really have thought about this project, and most importantly, they want to see that you can carry this project out, because I see a lot of people that yes, they want grant funding but then they get the funding and they don't know what to do with it. So you really want to make sure that you can have a successful program and that's really where you want to build those partnerships. And you really want to look at who should be a part of writing that proposal. One of the other things I think is a really good strategy for funding is you also want to know the politics around it. If you're going for state and local government funding, you want to get some political support behind you, so I always find out who on the city council supports this issue or who's going to be on the review committee making the decisions. You really want to send them a note and just let them know, "We're really excited about this opportunity. We would love to talk with you more about our program and how we can work together." Just some of those little things can really make a big difference when these organizations are sitting down looking at who they're going to give money to.

SM: And that really goes back to that research again, doesn't it?

MD: It does. That's why I really think the two key things are having the research and having the partnerships, because another piece of grant writing that they usually will ask you for are letters of support. You have to have endorsements from other agencies saying that your program is worthwhile; that you are who you say you are; and that you are really able to follow through with the funding. Because they're trusting you with their money and wanting to make sure that you're going to do a good thing with it. We really work with people in how to get those letters of support because they are also going to tell if it's a form letter. They're going to be really looking to see how genuine you

are through your letters of support and through your partnerships with the community. So another thing that we do that's really been helpful is when it's a big grant that we're working on, we will form an advisory committee. We want to show to the funder that we have community support, that we've brought multiple perspectives to the table, that we're culturally competent and credible, and this is a way of doing that. It's not expensive to do but it really shows not only the funder, but your community that you're genuine and that you really want to work together. And when we have done those advisory committees, it has really strengthened our proposal and really helped us to also educate the community about the topic that we're working on. I mean it's just a win-win situation all the way.

SM: Now, how did you go about selecting those advisory committees?

MD: Well to establish one, you really want to look at who are the leaders in this area in your community, and we look at that. We've done them on a local level, on a statewide level, and even on a national level, depending on the project that we're working on because you really want to get people who have multiple perspectives. For example, we're just putting together a proposal that's due tomorrow for the New Mexico Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs, and they wanted to do this federal proposal to the Office of Violence Against Women and it's on Violence Against Individuals with Disabilities. Well they've been working with their community and they realized that they wanted to deal with deaf and hard of hearing issues so we immediately contacted the New Mexico Deaf Commission, the program that deals with interpreters for this state, the program that deals with more mature members of the community, so they deal with more the seniors and hard of hearing issues. We got many non-profit and state organizations that deal with deaf and hard of hearing issues at the table and it was amazing how excited they were. We also got other sexual assault programs at the table and the domestic violence programs. Each one of these groups were really interested in coming to the table because they need to address this issue but they don't have the funding to do it, and they were thrilled to work with our client, which is the New Mexico Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs. So we put together this advisory group, which then came up with a memorandum of understanding that we could define for our grant proposal of what role each of these groups will play and what they brought to the table. It got other people talking amongst themselves, and then one of the other members that we invited has grant funds herself so now she's making funds available to deal with this in this state. So it just snowballs. And when you do this and when you really

bring people together and have the open dialogue, it's amazing what can come out of it.

SM: And it also helps that issue of having more importance when so many key players are interested in it and care about it too.

MD: That's right, because it really builds long-term working relationships. It shows sustainability, which is another thing that funders really want you to talk about is: "How are you going to sustain this after our grant funds end?" And so it's really a great way of sharing the workload, expanding the community network and building that community consensus around an issue. It's really awesome to be a part of that.

SM: And then you'll automatically have people to plug into so you can, if you're the one using the funds, gain their experience to be sustainable. So I totally see the big picture in that.

MD: That's right.

SM: Do you mind if we open it up? I did have another question but I want to open it up because I know that some people probably got on this call for all kinds of different reasons. Some people might not know what they wanted to know about grant writing so I would love to get feedback at this point if anyone wants to ask a question. So did anyone on the call have any questions so far or just maybe something that we haven't covered or anything like that?

Judy: Marcie, this is Judy Wright calling. And I am just so grateful to be on this call this morning because I do a lot of training on preventing child sexual abuse. And I was speaking at the tribes last night, and would really like to do training across the country at the tribes because they have very specific issues with this. How does an individual... would I need to form a non-profit in order to do the training?

MD: That's a great question. And I do so much work in domestic violence and child abuse and here's our strategy. We are a for-profit company but our hearts are in all these public health and human service issues, so what we do is we approach an already established non-profit. If you are interested in doing that, I would recommend going to one of the tribes that you have a really good working relationship and talking with them about how you could do a proposal together so that the proposal may actually come from that tribe to do a national program, or you could even put together a couple of them but you would be using their non-profit status so you would not have to set up another non-profit.

Judy: Okay.

MD: That's what I would recommend because we do that all the time with different organizations.

SM: So what you're doing is you're leveraging their contacts, you're leveraging their brand, I mean in all kinds of ways, you're leveraging without having to do the insane work of being a non-profit.

MD: Exactly.

SM: It is insane, because I dissolved mine after one year because it wasn't my cup of tea to do paperwork every day.

MD: Exactly. You don't have to do that. You can partner—and funders want to see those partnerships so it's win-win for everybody.

SM: Because you have more chances of being successful with whatever you're doing the more players that are in it sometimes.

MD: Right.

Judy: And I can see that another natural partnership would be the Head Start organization.

MD: Exactly. And it may be that after you got that grant that you might then want to set up another non-profit but it's certainly not necessary. It's really the partnerships that you can cultivate and go after that funding opportunity. There are a lot of funds out there for tribal opportunities, so I would really encourage you to go after that—that sounds great.

Judy: Now, here is another question. I at one time was a PBS Ready to Learn specialist, and with the change of administration, that funding was all cut. With the new make up of Congress, do you see grants being more open?

MD: I'm very encouraged by the new Congress. As Sheri' shared with you, I've been doing this work for over 20 years and I have never seen the grant dollars dry up like they have over the last few years so I'm very hopeful that that's going to change over the next couple of years. But because of so many things that are obligated right now in our government, it has really impacted grant funding so we've really

looked more to private companies and corporations to fill in some of those gaps. We've really had good luck because there are so many companies out there, and again, we've tried to build those partnerships and combine organizations and go after some of the larger funding private foundations and corporations.

Judy: Thank you.

Carol: This is Carol from Arizona. We have a project that has to do with prison reform—actually it is encouraging writing. This is a writers group and you'll find this very interesting—we have already begun to publish through my non-profit organization an anthology of prison writings and art and this is the first of this series. And these are, I can't tell you what an incredible success story this is inside the prison. However, we're inside a private prison, which is medium to maximum security, and so now there are several states that have contracts in these private prisons and so we have collections of prisoners from different states, and there is the potential for partnerships actually. We have a little to no funding for this. The inmates are trying to get donations from family members but they're not coming in at this point. And what we intend to do is not only to encourage their writing—they have already been writing—they have very little to do, very little offered in terms of programs to reform these prisoners. Now if this goes forward, we want to see if we could also teach them, as part of our program—this is where the grant would come in—how to get software and computers to teach them how to lay out books and self-publish. This will give them an opportunity to do things when they get out of prison, which is a very difficult thing for all inmates.

MD: Absolutely.

Carol: And so we have such potential, it's such a juicy project but we need to have grants. That's why I wanted to talk with you about that specifically. But where do you see the partnerships coming in?

MD: Oh gosh, my little brain is turning like crazy. That's an awesome project. There is so much out there with the Department of Justice and with state organizations as well. I could see lots of cool partnerships—I mean with literacy programs, with the Department of Education; lots of things with computer companies that you could go after to get computers that we've done before where they just donate the software and computer piece. But I see lots of different potential partnerships with writing groups; even with churches and the faith-based is such a big thing right now, but really going after that whole Department of

Corrections support and funding and the Department of Justice. I mean you've got a model program that you're setting up. And that's something that you could definitely go after with the feds. They love model programs that are educational. I would go for the Department of Education as well because they're always looking at things in the prisons trying to educate prisoners to get those GEDs and all those type of things. So I just see lots of different partnerships on lots of different levels.

Carol: Yes, well anyway I will talk with you privately about that.

MD: Okay, great.

Carol: Because I don't want to go forward and have no funds.

MD: Yeah, and we do a lot of work with Department of Corrections and with some of the different jails and prisons. We've done a lot of that in the past. So that's great.

Carol: Okay, thank you.

SM: And Marcie, you said your "little brain" and I just totally beg to differ there—your huge brain. Does anyone else have any questions? Well do you mind if I ask another?

MD: Please.

SM: I really wanted to get into effective grant research and research tips and kind of leave them with some of that information because I know that you're putting out a workbook and you're doing lots of amazing things and they'll see that when they go to your website, but did you want to cover that area a little bit and anything else you want to cover also.

MD: Sure, absolutely, and we could also deliver a couple of the ones that we talked about. I believe researching grants is an ongoing activity. It's something that I do almost every day. I try to do something looking up to see what grants are out there because as I shared with you, the window can be so small—the turnaround time of when you can actually submit the grant. So the longer time you have to work on it, the better. So I would say, definitely reviewing the legal sections of your newspapers, especially the Sunday paper, reviewing some of the publications in your community or state on business. In New Mexico, it's the New Mexico Business Weekly. I subscribe to that and it gives

me really good information about: who are the leading corporations in the state and what are they funding; what are they concerned about? Also, library resources—getting to your state library or just your local library—there are lots of different resources that they may have. That Foundation Center that I mentioned to you, they may have a membership to that so you don't have to pay for that membership but you can go and access those resources. With the Internet today, there is just so much out there on the Internet. I would say maximize that resource to you—it's free and it's available. So just do a simple search on what you are wanting to do—just Google it and see what you can find. You'll be very surprised.

SM: So Marcie, what did grant writers do before the Internet?

MD: I don't know. They were at the library, which I was a librarian in another life, and I tell you, there are lots of good little things at the library. I also encourage people to subscribe to as many online newsletters and list serves as you can. I get a lot of information and tips from those of different things that are coming out and available and they're all free. And again, it comes to my fingertips on my e-mail, which I love. I also make sure that I'm on the mailing lists of foundations, government agencies, United Way, all the different organizations that have mailing lists; I make sure that I get on those, and their electronic mailing list as well as the snail mail. Another really good way that I've learned is I participate on community-based committees and planning groups, so anything that can get us to the table so we can find out what's coming out and how our clients might be able to have part of that opportunity has been really helpful. I know everyone's time is limited but I try to be very strategic and participate in different groups where I can really learn what's out there. I also keep a grant calendar and I pay close attention to those dates so I know that in January the city of Santa Fe is going to post their community development block grant application. So I know that that's coming out at this time of year. I know that the Housing and Urban Development is going to put out certain things at a certain time of year. So I have that calendar so I can pay close attention to what's coming available. So those are some of my basic tips for research that I do. And again, accessing that Grants.gov that I mentioned and some of those other online list serves are just really, really good sources of information.

SM: And I have to say that, just listening to you, it's a lot of your daily habit and it takes a lot of time management.

MD: It is.

SM: Also it makes you successful at what you're doing. I think so, listening.

MD: Thank you. Well it's definitely something that's a habit and really being aware of it and trying to make sure that I'm looking every place that I can.

SM: And I think that's great to hear. That's what's so wonderful about these teleseminars is being able to plug into someone else's life in such a way that you can see how they're doing, what they're doing and it just makes it so easy via these virtual teleseminars.

MD: I love working on grants because I get to learn so much about a topic too, whereas I may not be an expert. We just wrote a proposal on service learning and I didn't know anything about service learning when I started it, and it was so great to learn all about that topic and it was even better because we just found out yesterday that our client got that funding. So it's fun. Grant writing can be fun. It's not rocket science.

SM: At this point, did anyone else have any questions to ask?

Judy: I have one more question; this is Judy in Montana. If someone who is an individual or like the woman who was working on the prison writing project, could they turn this over to us with as much information as they could and then could you write yourself into the grant?

MD: Absolutely, we do that.

Judy: I don't want to be a grant writer; we just want to have a grant.

MD: Right. Well, we actually do that quite a bit in several different ways. One is people want us to write a grant for them but they don't have the money to hire us. So if it's a project that we're excited about and really want to be a part of, then we'll say, "Okay, we'll write the grant and we'll write ourselves in to do the evaluation." Because that's a big part of grants. Usually the funder requires some type of evaluation and you can allocate funds in the grant to pay for that evaluation. The other thing we do a lot of is we can manage the grant once it comes out. Like the grant I shared with you earlier for the New Mexico Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs, they want me to be the project director on this grant if they get the funding. And we've done that on three other big federal grants for them. And that works great. They

can't afford to pay us to write the grant but then it allows us to have some piece of it and to stay more involved, which we love, on some of these projects that are so close to our heart. So we can manage and see them implement it or we can do the evaluation or we could do another of the planning piece or something. So there are lots of different ways that we can write ourselves in to participate on the project.

Judy: Okay, thank you.

SM: That right there is amazing inside advice in the way that this industry works so it's really very, very valuable that you shared that with her. And I know that if they get to your website and they plug into some of your programs that you have or your free products and just get on your mailing list, I know you have a lot more to teach them. I think we've just started the tip of the iceberg.

MD: Thank you. We're really excited about it and I would love to talk with any of you individually. Please don't hesitate to give me a call or an e-mail. That would be great.

SM: And a lot of people will get this as a transcript and a downloadable audio so you'll probably get a surge of people in a couple of weeks when the transcript is made.

MD: Wonderful.

SM: And the transcript will be ready in the newsletter. There's a new section we put in there, that's members only and then you click on that and put your username and your password in. And those are always on the download page. But you'll receive the audio of this later today for anyone who wants to have a copy of it. Did you have anything else you wanted to share?

MD: Well I could talk about grant writing all day so I better not because I know your time is limited. But thank you so much for this opportunity. And it's really exciting to hear about the projects that people are working on. It's amazing, the work that's being done out there. So thank you for sharing that and I hope to hear from some of you.

SM: Thank you so much Marcie for being here. And thank you to everyone on the call. And if you have any questions, contact Marcie at DavisInnovates.com or you can contact us at NAWW.org. Everyone, have a wonderful day and I'll talk to you soon and keep warm. Bye.

MD: Thanks, Sheri'. Bye-bye.