



*How to Apply for an RFP



PREPARED FOR ARTREACH AND THE TORONTO YOUTH
EQUITY STRATEGY BY PAULINA O'KIEFFE



GOAL Youth Workshop Series

The Grassroots Organizing and Leadership (GOAL) Youth Capacity Building Workshop Series was developed in 2007 by youth-led organizations, funders and other partners to provide access to learning opportunities to enhance the work of young people, artists and youth-led groups. Through different strategies and in different spaces, young people are working to make change and to have an impact on communities across the city of Toronto. To take this passion and commitment and channel it into a project, individuals or organizations require training, tools and supports that are not always available to emerging, youth-led groups.

Workshops are developed based on needs identified by young people in Toronto, and past topics have included financial management for non-profits, fundraising, grant writing, event planning, evaluation and documentation, self care, lawyers for the arts, branding and marketing, and models of youth work. These free sessions provide an accessible safe learning space for young people to ask questions, receive support, and access the resources that matter to them.

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Paulina O’Kieffe the Director for ArtReach, spoken word artist, arts educator and project manager. Paulina continues to expand ArtReach’s impact through a strong focus on outreach, ensuring that information is accessible to marginalized communities in Toronto.

Paulina is a recognized leader in both the social services sector and arts communities. She has also worked in many communities supporting youth organizing and capacity building through organizations such as Toronto Housing, For Youth Initiative, Art Starts and Tropicana Community Services.

Paulina is an alumni of the City Leaders Program (2010) and is currently on the United Way’s Speaker’s Bureau.

What is a Request for Proposals (RFP)?

A Request for Proposals (RFP) is a document that an organization, agency or company posts to announce that funding is available for a particular project or program. Vendors can place bids for that project's completion. The RFP outlines the bidding process and contract terms, and provides guidance on how the bid should be formatted and presented. A RFP is typically open to a wide range of bidders, creating open competition between companies looking for work.

Vendors are people or businesses who a specific service or product. As a vendor you respond to an RFP by submitting a proposal, which details your proposed solution to the need or desired outcome of the client.

Different Types of RFPs

- Public RFPs
- Not for Profit RFPs
- Corporate RFPs
- City RFP Process

Where to Find RFPs

- Freelancing or employment websites
- Networking events and word of mouth
- List serves and Newsletters
- Linked In
- Company/ Public Institution/ Organization websites (IE. City of Toronto, ArtReach)

Applying for RFPs vs. Grants

RFP	GRANT
<p>Business Objective:</p> <p>The objective of your proposal should focus on what the client has outlined as their needs and wants in the RFP Callout.</p>	<p>Personal Objective:</p> <p>Your proposal will focus on your own personal wants and needs for the project. You develop the proposal that will best carry out your desired outcomes.</p>
<p>Ownership – client owns the work:</p> <p>The client is hiring you as vendor, therefore the work you produce will belong to them. In some cases the contract will allow for the work to be licensed by the client but retain ownership with you. Check contracts for details.</p>	<p>Ownership – you own the work:</p> <p>At the end of a grant project you own the work you have created, however some funders will ask for license to use the work for reporting purposes.</p>
<p>Cater to the client’s vision:</p> <p>Your proposal needs to cater to the vision of the client. You can use your creativity to develop a standout proposal but the solution/services/products you provide should all cater to achieving the client’s vision.</p>	<p>Cater to your own vision:</p> <p>Your proposal is based on your own idea. You have freedom to develop it in the way you want to achieve your own individual/group goals</p>
<p>Deliverables determined by client:</p>	<p>Deliverables are more flexible</p>

The project deliverables are directly related to challenges or needs that are specific to the client. Adjusting the outcomes are not as flexible and deadlines are tighter and impact not only the client's opinion of your work but can even impact your final payment.

Project deliverables can be slightly adjusted along the way (with permission of the funder) to ensure the project continues to serve the community it is set to serve or to realign it with the individual/group goals. If you need to make changes funders are more flexible if you can properly justify the needs for the changes.

Accountable to the client:

You are accountable to the client who hired you. There is usually very little flexibility around deliverables being completed. If work is not completed you may not get paid or they may ask for a refund where applicable.

Accountable to the granting body:

You are accountable to your funder to report on the funds used and present the final outcomes of the project. There is some flexibility around final outcomes particularly if the end result isn't exactly what was proposed due to changes along the way.

You set reporting timelines:

In your proposal you will set the reporting times for each phase of the completed project within the overall timeframe of the project. Based on your overall project schedule, clients will choose proposals that work with their timeframes. Usually those who can get the work done in the shortest amount of time have an edge.

Reporting timelines set by the grant:

Funders have set reporting guidelines. Often times there is flexibility around extensions for reporting particularly if there are challenges around completing the project. In the end, the funder is interested in the project being completed in a way that it supports the public and so is more supportive around timelines.

Finding An RFP That Fits Your Skillset

Here are some questions to ask yourself before you apply to an RFP:

Do I have the skills they are asking for?

Most RFPs are looking for specific skills, services or products to achieve the outcomes they desire for their projects. If you apply to an RFP make sure that you have the skills to offer the services or products they require

Do I have the time to finish the project in the timeline?

RFP proposals have specific timelines. If you plan on submitting a proposal make sure the timelines you set out are actually achievable. Look at your own schedule and make sure that other projects or life events won't interfere with you successfully completing this project.

Do I need a partner to help me with the deliverables?

If you don't have all the skills that a client is looking for try partnering with someone who does. This gives you a chance to apply for the RFP and also develop your own skills throughout the project.

Is this project in line with my value system?

Not all RFPs are for everyone. Make sure the work you are producing is in line with your own core values, otherwise you may find yourself in a moral dilemma while trying to complete the work. Be sure to ask questions, understand exactly what the work entails and research the company's background. Only take jobs that you feel you can complete. If the job doesn't align with your core values/beliefs just move on to the next project.

Common Sections of an RFP

Background:

Read the background to understand who your client is and how this project relates to what they need.

Project Summary:

The project summary gives you an overall picture of what the project will entail. Project Summaries will also give you important facts about the eligibility, key qualifications and timelines for the project.

Project Goals:

The project goals will tell you exactly what the client expects and what you need to be able to deliver.

Budget:

The budget outlines how much the client is investing in this project for your service. Make sure to really pay attention to your budget and give yourself the competitive advantage by bidding a bit lower than the max budget.

Project Description:

The project description will give you a detailed outline of the project and can include the final product expected.

Selection Criteria:

This section will tell you exactly how the proposal will be assessed and selected. Pay attention to criteria and make sure your proposal has covered everything. Look for areas to add value.

Proposal Requirements:

This section tells you exactly how the proposal needs to be submitted. Follow the guidelines exactly to ensure you don't disqualify yourself.

What To Include in Your RFP Submission

Packaging

First impressions are everything, so make sure your submission stands out. The overall packaging and design of the submission is really important- it introduces the caliber of your work to your clients and shows effort levels. This is especially important for those who are submitting for projects in any kind of design or media work.

***TIP:** Make sure your contact information is visible. Include the project contact name, address, phone number, email, and website if you have it.

Executive Summary

The executive summary is a short document that summarizes a proposal so that the reader can be familiar with your proposal without having to read the entire document. It is important to summarize the need of the client and an overview of your proposed solution in this section. This section should allow the client to see that you understand their needs.

Background/ History

Make sure to outline you or your team's skills and how they will be used in the project. Give the client examples of previous projects that showcase those skills and successful outcomes. Include team bios and the role they will be playing in the project.

What To Include in Your RFP Submission

Solution

This section is one of the most important. Here you will outline how you propose how you or your team will complete the deliverables as outlined in the RFP. Make sure to include:

*A workplan that outlines your objectives and the activities that will take place

*A detailed schedule for the entire project. Include start and finish times for each activity if you can. Also include major milestones when clients will be able to review drafts of work.

*A proposed overall budget. The budget should be no more (or even slightly less) than the maximum budget allowed by the client. Include any incentives the client might receive if they choose your proposal here as well.

References

Provide the client with references they can reach out to in order to verify your skillset and previous works. Choose references that had similar projects or had a very good experience with you and will speak the highest of your skill set.

Portfolio

Your portfolio is one of the most important aspects of your proposal. It will serve as a visual aid to the client who will be able to see your actual work and whether it is to the level they want. Make sure to choose relevant and recent materials to present.

RFP Pitches

If you apply to an RFP and find yourself to be successful, the client will call you in for an interview/or pitch process in which you speak to your skills, your proposal and assure the client you are the right person for the job.

Here are some key things to remember:

- First impressions matter:
- Be prepared – know your proposal inside out and prepare to answer any questions:
- Know your presentation style and be unique
- Research your client's market
- Understand what makes you stand out and SELL IT!
- Have confidence in your delivery – practice and get feedback on your presentation
- Use examples of projects you have done in the past

Top Tips For Completing an RFP

- Client based vs your own approach: When applying to an RFP remember that the purpose of the proposal is to show the client that
- Budgets: When developing your budget ensure that you have covered your costs. Where possible, give yourself a competitive edge by slightly reducing costs, giving discounts where possible. It is important to remember that it is important that you do not undercut yourself too much in order to give yourself competitive edge. If you price your services too low some clients will question the quality of service they may receive.
- How to give yourself that competitive edge: Another way in which to give yourself competitive edge is to showcase other aspects of your business that might interest the client. For example, if your business provides great service and has a strong social mandate this may encourage clients to choose you as you bring an added incentive.
- Portfolio and references: When including your portfolio, make sure the material is relevant, current and your best work. References should be professional or personal references that have had the best experience with your work and can speak to your service and ability to complete the project.
- Entrepreneurial mindset: Always remember that unlike a grant, an RFP Proposal is a chance to secure new clients and develop relationships with them that will lead to more work. Whereas grants have limits on the number of times you can apply and can be very competitive, gaining work through an RFP proposal may open you up to a relationship with a client that can recommend you to others or use you for future projects with less of an intense process.