

UNH grant forum aims to boost applicants' odds

By Jessica Varrone
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NEW HAVEN — A grant forum this week at the University of New Haven instructed community groups, nonprofit and other types of organizations to navigate the process of applying for federal, state and local funding.

"The goal for the grant forum today is simple," said U.S. Rep. Rosa DeLauro, D-3. "Let's make it easy."

DeLauro stressed the importance of knowledge when applying for funding, and said the economy has made it very hard to find proper resources to do so. But she added that just because resources are scarce, doesn't mean people don't stop asking for them.

"Critical dollars are scarcer than they ever were. We need to make the resources available," said DeLauro. "People don't get tired of asking and they come to you for answers."

James Farnam, a founder of Holt, Wexler and Farnam, a consultant based in New Haven, described how to sharpen the competitive edge in grant writing

and alternatives to government funding, and how to apply those options successfully.

"Individual organizational factors is the key towards success," said Farnam. "We help to fill in the gaps."

Farnam's firm supports groups in need of grant assistance. He said the most important part in gaining grant funding is how the applicant meets the requirements of the funder.

"The proposal doesn't always align with the strategic direction of the funder," said Farnam. "What they look for is the programs strength, the realistic unit costs and how you are going to continue once the grant is gone."

He said there are differences between federal, state and local funding, including in competition, application periods filled with a number of requirements, and lengthy review processes that have administrative screening and independent review teams.

"You have to really pay attention to the criteria and sweat the details. If there are 100 points, each point matters," he said.

Kate Iovieno, a specialist at the firm, said the key to applying successfully for grant funding is standing out from competition that seeks the same assistance.

"You want to make your

narrative jump out from the page because your application may be number 15 out of 50," said Iovieno. "Hook them with critical thinking and emotion."

Iovieno said applications can be improved by establishing the proper frame for the story line.

"The type of leadership you have for your grant funding is extremely important," said Iovieno. "Respect their time and honor their application requirements."

Farnam and Iovieno said the application format has an effect on the organization awarding grant funding. It is important to keep information simple, while still being able to accomplish the intended goal.

DeLauro believes federal funding is important because it plays a major role in providing law enforcement, economic growth, community development, educational support and health care to the state.

DeLauro, as well as Farnam's team, said they believe a crucial part of the application process is obtaining support from influential leaders who can act and speak on grant seekers' behalf.

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