Engaging Local Government: Promises and Pitfalls

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Engaging local government – Promises and Pitfalls

• Missions Must Align
• Opportunity to Assist
• Pay for Performance
• Under Promise/Over Deliver
• Personality and Bureaucracy
• All Politics are Local
• Rome wasn’t built in a Day...Or, play the long game!
Missions must Align

Promise

• Local Government might consider your services as a natural fit to assist furthering a specific mission, (e.g. housing, preventative services, transportation)

Pitfall

• Be very clear on what Local Government needs to from you and expect to deliver that
• You most likely will be seen as a “vendor” and will be treated as such
• Local Governments by nature are often risk averse...this leaves little room for creativity.
## Opportunity to Assist

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<tr>
<th>Promise</th>
<th>Pitfall</th>
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<td>• Occasionally Local Government looks for an entity to provide a mandated service(s)</td>
<td>• These opportunities are often presented as an RFI or RFI with very short turnaround time.</td>
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<td>• Mandated services come with very high standards for reporting and accountability</td>
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<td>• Often governmental entities are a bit slower to pay</td>
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Pay for Performance

Promise

• This method allows you to determine the full cost of providing a service, and recoup those costs for each service rendered.

• Allows a focus on outcomes, rather than outputs

Pitfall

• You need to be able to quantify all of your costs, and be transparent in how you arrive at that cost

• Billing for performance often results in unpredictable cash flow into your agency

• If you are unable to produce to the level expected, your revenue will be less than you expect
Under Promise/Over Deliver

Promise

• If you approach your local government as funder, and treat them as you would a major donor, they will be pleasantly surprised.

• With competing interests, be the NPO they remember as always meeting or exceeding goals.

• Never forget that your services should help meet government goals.

Pitfall

• Government entities have their own sense of urgency that has nothing to do with your agency needs.

• Local government staff seldom have had NPO experience, so don’t assume they understand your world.

• Unless you have worked inside local government, you can’t understand their world.
Promise

- Positional power and referent power are very real. Know where the power resides.
- Accountability, transparency and checks and balances do not always make sense, but always are focused on minimizing risk.
- Relationships are the key...from the Chief Administrator to the finance clerk.

Pitfall

- People change positions, often.
- Priorities change as often as people change. What happened before can be to your advantage or be a curse.
- Things take longer than you might ever imagine (e.g. contracts, payment, decisions)
- Spend your social capital wisely!
All Politics Are Local

Promise

• Local politicians are accessible – take the time to watch, listen and show up.
• Use your Board members to build/broaden networks
• Demonstrate your worth with both stories and numbers
• Communicate how your services aligns/strengthens a position that the politician cares about, and share the credit generously

Pitfall

• Don’t put all of your eggs in one party’s basket
• Don’t oversell, shame or embarrass
• Use the media sparingly
• Remember praising one can be interpreted as undercutting another
Rome wasn’t Built in a Day…or, Play the Long Game!

Promise
• Relationships (and trust) take a long time to develop
• Priorities and leaders change, allowing opportunities
• Small wins can turn into larger programs
• A broad and strong network can counteract unexpected change and help plan for expected change

Pitfall
• The Wheels of Government not only turn slowly, but they sometimes fall off!
• New leaders bring new priorities and sometimes react by throwing out all that was
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