



Just Keep Swimming: What Finding Nemo and Grantwriting Do (or Don't!) Have in Common

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NOTE TAKING SHEET

Alternate title of this session: _____

Is Dory proactive or reactive? _____

Reactive Trap #1:

Strategies

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

Reactive Trap #2:

Strategies

1) _____

Reactive Trap #3:

Strategies

1) _____

2) _____

Reactive Trap #4:

Strategies

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

What CAN we learn from Dory / When SHOULD we “just keep swimming?”

REFLECT: What are some steps you can take to be more proactive this year?

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)

This presentation is based on an original blog post written by Brittany Kirk for the Grants Professional Association in 2020ⁱ

Just keep swimming. Just keep swimming. Just keep swimming.

Sound familiar?

Chances are that if you are grantwriter, the refrain of Finding Nemo's beloved Dory, "just keep swimming, just keep swimming," really hits home.

With the pressures of deadlines and revenue goals always looming, sometimes we fall into a just-keep-swimming approach to grants: Copy the language. Count the characters. Submit the form. Copy the language. Count the characters. Submit the form. Just keep swimming.

But hey - all you Dorys out there: there might be a better way.

For those of you not familiar with the Finding Nemo storyline, Dory is a blue tang fish with short term memory loss. The only thing she can consistently remember is her personal motto, "Just

keep swimming," and she uses this motto to inspire Nemo's dad to persist in spite of obstacles to eventually find his lost son, Nemo.

Dory's obstacles were sharks, swarms of jellyfish, and giant whales. In grantwriting, our obstacles may be long tedious application forms, repeat denials, or invite-only funders that seem to be inaccessible. In the face of these obstacles, a just-keep-swimming approach may actually not be the best way to end up at your goal.

Grant proposals are most successful when we intentionally pause to think about what we are doing:

- *In the face of tedious application forms, ask yourself whether the time you are spending on that proposal is proportionate to the potential return in terms of exposure to new people or communities, dollars to support your program, or a long-term funding partnership with that funder.*
- *When you are up against repeat denials, pause to question whether that funder is well-aligned with your mission and goals, and seek out that funder to see if you can get feedback on your denied requests.*
- *When you are frustrated by funders that do not accept unsolicited proposals, brainstorm ways you can build a relationship with the decision-makers at that foundation, and also look into other funders that are easier to access.*

In fundraising-speak, we sometimes call this being proactive instead of reactive. Our friend Dory is a very reactive fish. She keeps swimming until she meets an obstacle, fights that battle, and then keeps swimming again. In grantwriting, the Dorys among us see an email in our inbox with a new grant opportunity and immediately get to work on that proposal, with little awareness of how that proposal might support bigger programmatic or revenue goals.

By contrast, a proactive grantwriter spends time researching prospects, prioritizing them against her goals, and planning her workload for the next few months or year. She knows that even when she faces an obstacle during the year, she has a plan in place that will allow her to keep swimming towards her goals.

So some of you might be saying... yes, but Dory reached her goal - she persisted and (spoiler alert) did in fact find Nemo. Okay, you are right; there is one thing grantwriters can in fact learn from Dory: resilience. We all need to be able to bounce back. Outsmart the sharks, float around the jellyfish, and escape the whale. Absorb that denial and rebound to try again. Invest the energy to build a relationship over a long period of time. Be creative in accessing new funding sources. Just keep swimming (but remember to pause to think a little along the way).

ⁱ <https://grantprofessionals.org/news/501382/Just-Keep-Swimming-What-Finding-Nemo-and-Grantwriting-Have-in-Common.htm>