

2.2 Briefing Note to Obtain a Decision

Why Write a Briefing Note to Get a Decision?

It would be fair to say that a lot of decisions get made in government, at all levels. Each one does not need a briefing note. Some of the ways that decisions get made are:

- Memoranda or e-mails recommending an action or seeking permission,
- Minutes of meetings,
- Detailed project proposals for capital investments or policy changes,
- Minutes of meetings,
- Cabinet and Treasury Board documents.

A briefing note is just one tool to obtain a decision. Its utility in the decision-making process for an organization is that it is short and can serve as a

- Cover summary for a more detailed proposal that the reader may not have time to fully read.
- Means to get a decision made about a specific event (“Yes, we will speak at that conference.”) or concur on an administrative move (“Yes, ADM Joyce Fillion will be our representative.”)
- Approval sheet for a grant application, usually with supporting information.

General Format

The general format of a decision-focused briefing note can be:

Title

Issue

Be clear that this is a matter for decision. Often, as the example shows, that will be highlights. That addresses the question “Why am I reading this?” that is so important for an effective briefing note.

Background

Refer here to whatever elements that frame the need for a decision. That will mean referencing the legal and policy framework that requires a decision or previous history on this issue relevant to the decision. For example, "All grants over \$100,00 under the Community Improvement Act require your approval."

Current Status

This section answers the question "Why now?" and "What's currently relevant to this decision." For example, "This grant is a renewal of the previous one to this group and approval would permit continuity of the program."

Discussion/Analysis (not always included)

Add here only what may affect the decision. That could include any number of areas but be concise and do not introduce new policy or decision items here. Some of the discussion items may be:

- Risks involved, e.g., "Timely approval will avoid the risk of this group criticizing the government for its late approvals as they have done in the past."
- Costs and sources of funds: if this is within a regular program, very little must be said except to state that funds have been approved for the program. If not, then the source would have to be identified. For example, "This grant is not in the current funding plan, but due to its special nature, we believe that it can be accommodated from contingency funding for one year."

Options

The basic rule here is to present real options. If there are none, say so.

Recommendation

The recommendation is made by the person signing the Briefing Note. This in all probability is someone reporting directly to the reader of the note, e.g., a Deputy Minister recommends to a Minister, unless there is a formal delegation. The writer of the note is not the person approving the recommendation.

Decision Box

See the sample note.

Sample Briefing Note – For Decision

Briefing Note

For Decision

Approval of Grant to the Wild Rose Women’s Institute

Summary

The Department is recommending the renewal of the \$55,000 grant under *The Community Development Fund* for the Wild Rose Women’s Institute to continue its various programs as outlined in its submission (See attached). Funds are available under the program and all conditions for eligibility have been met.

Background

This application will permit the Institute to continue the various, well-received community development programs in various communities in southern Alberta. The Institute’s programs include:

- Development of programs for families to settle in smaller communities in southern Alberta,
- Information resources for women in communities on resources for their self-development, building connectivity with other families and accessing community resources,
- Conducting community-centered research to develop rural and small community capacity to support family and economic development.

This program has been in place for 8 years. Its renewal, based on program criteria, has been reviewed every year. Further, there have two formal evaluations of the program, one conducted jointly with the province, all affirming the quality of the program and the results.

Considerations

There is wide local and provincial support for this proposal. The Premier of Alberta has written you expressing her hope to see the program continue and Alberta’s readiness to continue its funding of \$35,000. Three M.P.s from the area have written you in support.

The President of the University of Lethbridge, which works with the Institute in developing community resources, has also written in support, indicating a continuation of in-kind support. Finally, the Mellrose Foundation, which supports many community programs, is committed to \$25,000 in funding.

All the criteria outlined in the program have been met. Your Advisory Committee has reviewed the application and supports its approval.

A risk involved with this application is that it continues annualized support for a community program will be interpreted as a permanent program support. This is a challenge common to such successful community programs. Given the various sources of funding, this group knows how to make applications and gather support. It would not be the moment to consider this issue, but it is one that we as a department need to bring forward ideas for resolving.

Conclusion

Aside from being a sound application with extensive partner support, this application is an opportunity for the Minister to show her support to a strong community partner in Alberta. The renewal announcement is a positive way for the Minister to show her support for this program in this part of the country.

Recommendation

The Department and the Advisory Committee recommend approval of the application. The Department will work with the Minister's staff on an announcement strategy if the Minister wishes.

Prepared by the Community Development Program Branch, Contact: Mildred Drew, 613-899-0787 or mildred.drew@canada.gc.ca.

Approved by the Deputy Minister

Ministerial Decision
Approved: <input type="checkbox"/>
Not Approved: <input type="checkbox"/>
Review Further and Return: <input type="checkbox"/>
Development an Announcement Strategy: Yes/No
Comments: