GRANT WRITING: THE ESSENTIALS

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Introduction

Welcome to the exciting and impactful world of grant writing! Whether you are a student embarking on a career in nonprofit management, a budding researcher eager to secure funding for your projects, or a professional looking to hone your grant writing skills, this textbook is designed to guide you through every step of the grant writing process. Grant writing is not just about securing funds; it's about crafting a story, building relationships, and making a tangible impact on communities and fields of study. This book aims to equip you with the knowledge, skills, and insights needed to excel in this rewarding field.

The journey of grant writing is both an art and a science, requiring a blend of creativity, precision, and strategic thinking. Recognizing this, we have structured this textbook to cover the foundational principles of grant writing, the step-by-step process of developing and submitting a proposal, the nuances of managing grant-funded projects, and the ethical considerations that underpin all aspects of this field. We delve into the specific challenges and strategies associated with different types of grants, including federal grants and those specific to nonprofit organizations.

Our approach is hands-on and practical, with each chapter building on the last to create a comprehensive understanding of grant writing. We have included numerous examples, exercises, and real-life case studies to illustrate key points and provide you with opportunities to practice and apply what you learn. Additionally, we discuss the latest trends and innovations in grant writing, including the use of technology and social media, to prepare you for success in today's rapidly evolving funding landscape.

This textbook is the result of a collaborative effort among experts in grant writing, fundraising, nonprofit management, and academic research. Our contributors bring a wealth of experience and diverse perspectives to the topics covered, ensuring that the content is not only informative but also reflective of current best practices.

We encourage you to engage with this material actively, to question and explore, and to use the resources and tools provided to enhance your learning experience. Whether you are drafting your first proposal or seeking to expand your organization's funding base, this book will serve as a valuable resource on your grant writing journey.

Thank you for choosing to embark on this journey with us. The path to becoming a successful grant writer is filled with learning, challenges, and ultimately, the satisfaction of seeing your efforts contribute to meaningful change. We are excited to be a part of your journey and look forward to seeing the impact you will make through your grant writing endeavors.

Let's get started!

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https://manifold.open.umn.edu/projects/grant-writing-essentials

Chapter 1: Understanding Grants and Funding Sources

In 2017, 3-time world track champion and 11-time Olympic medalist Allyson Felix encountered a problem that shouldn't have been one. She got pregnant. What should have been a joyous time was complicated by Nike, with whom she had a contract. The contract did not protect Felix in the case of pregnancy and Nike cut her pay by 70%. While Felix retired from running in 2022, she remained fired up.

Inspired by her own experiences, Felix had ideas about what kinds of support could be offered to athlete moms. Ideas without funding don't tend to go too far though, so Felix began searching for grants. In 2021, she teamed up with Athleta and the nonprofit &Mother to provide free childcare at major track events. In April 2024, Melinda French Gates pledged $1 billion to support women and families, partnering with Felix to allocate $20 million for improving women's health.

What is the likelihood that you will have to ask for money to accomplish your work at some point in your career? If you are planning to go into the public or nonprofit sectors, chances are you will. And you may have to do it a lot. Grants are the backbone of much of the work that gets done in American society, and being skilled at getting them is more valuable than ever. Grant writing is a skill that may prove useful over and over.

What is a Grant?

Grants are financial awards provided by government entities, foundations, corporations, and other organizations to fund specific projects or initiatives. Unlike loans, grants do not need to be repaid, making them highly sought after by nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, researchers, and businesses pursuing innovative projects with social, environmental, or scientific impact. Grants are designed to support efforts that align with the funder's objectives, ranging from scientific research and technological innovation to community development and the arts. The essence of a grant is its purpose to enable progress and positive change in society by providing the necessary resources to those who have the vision and expertise to make it happen.

The process of obtaining a grant involves a competitive application process where potential grantees submit detailed proposals outlining their project's goals, methodologies, potential impact, and financial needs. Funders then review these proposals through a rigorous selection process, evaluating each project's feasibility, alignment with funding priorities, and potential for lasting impact. This meticulous approach ensures that the allocated funds are used effectively to achieve the desired outcomes. For many organizations and individuals, securing a grant can be transformative, providing the financial backing needed to explore new ideas, expand services, or bring innovative solutions to life.

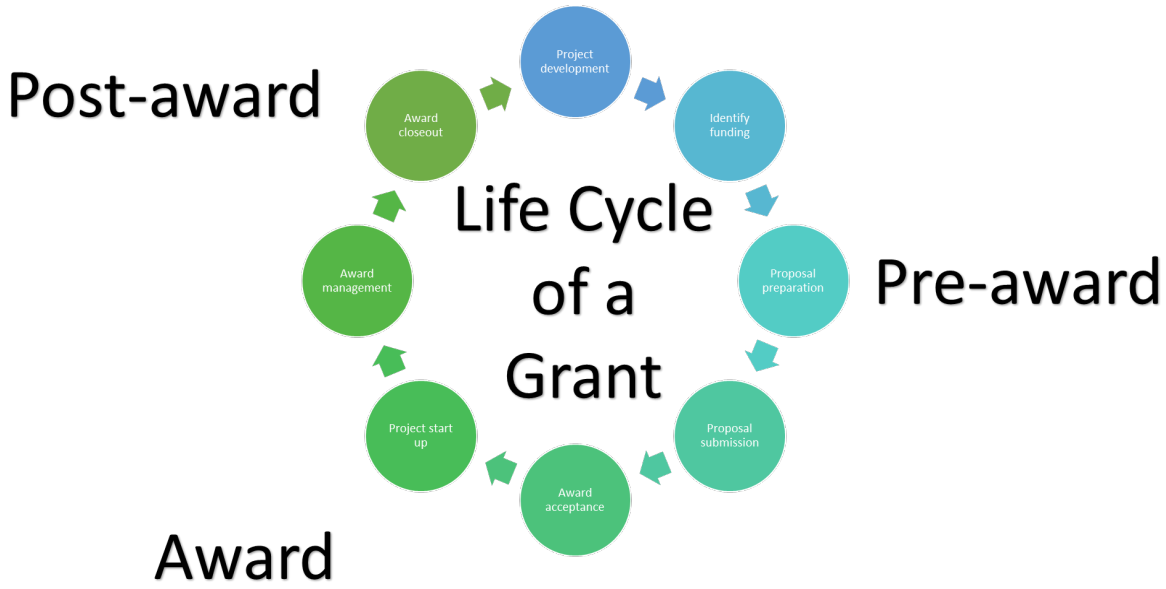
Grants play a pivotal role in fostering innovation, supporting research, and enabling community services and projects that might not otherwise be feasible. They act as catalysts for growth and development across various sectors, from healthcare and education to environmental conservation and the arts. By financially supporting projects with specific goals and outcomes, grants contribute to the broader societal good, advancing knowledge, solving complex problems, and enhancing community well-being. The strategic investment of grant funds thereby creates a

ripple effect, generating benefits that extend far beyond the immediate recipients to impact broader communities and, potentially, the world at large.

The Grant Lifecycle

The lifecycle of a grant encompasses the complete process from the conception of the funding opportunity to the ultimate closure of the grant. This lifecycle is generally divided into three phases: pre-award, award, and post-award (like in Fig. 1.1). You may find grants that vary from this a bit, the underlying principles apply to all grants, regardless of the specific calendar.

Figure 1.1. The Life Cycle of a Grant



In the pre-award phase, the funding agency develops and announces the funding program aligned with its mission. Applicants must then locate and assess these opportunities, ensuring they meet any specified registration requirements and submitting their proposals within the given timelines. Applicants should be aware that the submission process varies by agency, with some acknowledging receipt of applications and others not. Once submitted, the application undergoes a review for eligibility and compliance.

The award phase begins once the review is complete, and successful applicants are notified. The funding agency then finalizes the legal details of the funding agreement and disburses the funds. Recipients can then commence their projects, adhering to all required financial, administrative, and programmatic reporting standards.

During the post-award phase, the funding agency oversees the grant's administration, including regular checks on the recipient's reporting and, if necessary, conducting audits. Recipients are expected to provide financial and programmatic updates on their project's performance. Once all

requirements are fulfilled, including the submission of final reports, the grant life cycle concludes.

Contrary to some beliefs, grants are not merely "free money" but are awarded based on a shared mission between the grantee and the grantor. The grant application, in essence, is a commitment by the applicant to perform specific tasks in exchange for financial support, representing a partnership where each party contributes essential resources towards common objectives.

The Role of a Principal Investigator (PI)

The Principal Investigator (PI) plays a critical role in managing a grant-funded project. This includes overseeing the project's intellectual direction, maintaining fiscal accountability, and ensuring compliance with relevant regulations. When a project has multiple leaders, they are referred to as Co-Principal Investigators. Despite there being multiple PIs, often one individual is designated as the primary responsible party. The PI’s responsibilities span both the pre-award and post-award phases, involving tasks such as identifying funding opportunities, developing and submitting the proposal, managing project finances, and ensuring regulatory compliance throughout the project's duration.

Who are Funders and Why do they give Grants?

In the landscape of philanthropy, foundations stand as pivotal entities channeling resources towards meaningful social, educational, scientific, and cultural initiatives. These organizations, whether operating as non-profit corporations or charitable trusts, share a common goal: to support projects and individuals that contribute positively to society. Understanding the types of foundations and their funding sources is essential for grasping the dynamics of grantmaking.

Government Agencies: It’s your Money

Government agencies at the local, state, and federal levels offer grants to support projects and programs that align with public policy objectives. These agencies typically have well-defined priorities based on legislative mandates or societal needs. Funding from government sources is often substantial but comes with stringent requirements for compliance, reporting, and performance outcomes. Understanding these agencies' priorities and operating within their guidelines will make securing and successfully managing government grants less stressful.

Private Foundations: Wealth for the Public Good

Private foundations are often the embodiment of philanthropic visions, funded by individuals, families, or corporations. A quintessential example is the Ford Foundation, which leverages its resources to address global issues. These foundations are characterized by a "payout requirement," a regulatory mechanism ensuring a minimum percentage of their assets is annually distributed in the form of grants. This mandate ensures that private foundations actively contribute to their chosen causes, making them a reliable source for potential grantees seeking support.

Interestingly, foundations can include both charities — in the form of charitable trusts — and nonprofit organizations, but foundations are created to monetarily support other organizations. A

private foundation is defined as, “a nonprofit charitable entity that is generally created by a single benefactor, usually an individual or a business. Using this initial seed donation, known as an endowment, an investment is made to generate income, which is then dispersed in the form of grants to individuals or other charities in accordance with the foundation’s charitable purpose.”

There are many types of private foundations, and they serve wide ranging purposes from education initiatives to disease research. Examples of private foundations include:

- Cancer research organizations
- Private family foundations
- Arts foundations
- Community foundations

Grantmaking Public Charities: Collective Efforts for Community Impact

Contrastingly, grantmaking public charities, or "public foundations," pool resources from a diverse array of donors, including foundational grants, individual contributions, and government funds. The Save the Children Federation exemplifies this model, operating with widespread support to maximize its outreach. Community foundations fall under this category, serving as hubs for local philanthropy by aggregating donations to meet the needs of their communities effectively.

Both types of foundations are accountable to the IRS, with private foundations submitting Form 990-PF and public charities filing Form 990. These documents, accessible to the public, offer transparency into the organizations' operations, financial health, and governance.

Corporate Philanthropy: Business with a Heart

An interesting evolution in grantmaking is the role of corporate philanthropy. Companies, from giants like Wells Fargo and Target to Tyson Foods, allocate funds to support small businesses and community projects. This generosity is not merely altruistic; it stems from a commitment to corporate social responsibility (CSR). Through CSR programs, corporations signal to the public their dedication to societal welfare, enhancing their community standing and achieving tax benefits.

These initiatives often manifest through direct grants or the establishment of charitable foundations, allowing companies to channel their resources effectively while reaping fiscal advantages. Beyond tax savings, corporations recognize the value in building positive brand associations, thus using philanthropy as a strategic tool to bolster their reputations.

Individual Donors-Grassroots Giving

Individual donors provide grants based on personal interests, values, or connections to specific causes or communities. These funders may be motivated by a desire to create a lasting legacy, support innovation, or give back to their communities. Building a relationship with individual donors often requires a personalized approach, understanding their motivations, and demonstrating the direct impact of their support.

The synergy between private foundations, public charities, and corporate philanthropy creates a vibrant ecosystem of support, enabling projects and individuals across various sectors to find the backing they need to make a difference. Understanding the motivations and mechanisms behind these grants is necessary for navigating the world of philanthropy, whether one is seeking funding or looking to contribute to the greater good.

Understanding Funders

To craft successful grant proposals, one must understand the perspectives and priorities of those who provide the funding. Funders, whether they are government agencies, foundations, corporations, or individuals, have specific goals and criteria that guide their grantmaking decisions. This understanding forms the bedrock upon which effective and mutually beneficial relationships between grant seekers and grant providers are built.

Foundations, charities and nonprofits share many of the same characteristics — they're philanthropic, rely on donations, support community and public interest initiatives, and more. Given their similarities, there is often confusion surrounding the three. But, each has its own unique function and structure, which are important distinctions for both those looking to support them and those looking to work for them. So, what should you know about foundations vs. charities vs nonprofits?

The Basics of 501(c)(3)

No matter what their specific mission happens to be, charities, foundations, and nonprofits generally have one big thing in common–tax exempt status. This status, technically referred to as 501(c)(3), grants these entities certain benefits not available to other organizations.

According to the IRS, "To be tax-exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, an organization must be organized and operated exclusively for exempt purposes set forth in section 501(c)(3), and none of its earnings may inure to any private shareholder or individual. In addition, it may not be an action organization*,* i.e.*,* it may not attempt to influence legislation as a substantial part of its activities and it may not participate in any campaign activity for or against political candidates." A 501(c)(3) will fall into one of the following categories

- Religious
- Charitable
- Scientific
- Testing for public safety
- Literary
- Educational
- Fostering of national or international amateur sports, or
- Prevention of cruelty to animals and children

In addition to fitting into one of these categories, foundations, nonprofits and charities must also abide by the following rules to retain their 501(c)(3) tax exemption.

“The organization must not be organized or operated for the benefit of private interests, and no part of a section 501(c)(3) organization’s net earnings may inure to the benefit of any private shareholder or individual. If the organization engages in an excess benefit transaction with a person having substantial influence over the organization, an excise tax may be imposed on the person and any organization managers agreeing to the transaction.”

Further, there is a specific set of rules that these organizations have to follow regarding any political or lobbying work that they may do. Organizations with a 501(c)(3) status, while primarily focused on charitable, educational, religious, or scientific purposes, are allowed to engage in lobbying activities, but there are specific limitations and rules they must follow to ensure they retain their tax-exempt status. Here's a simplified breakdown:

1. Limited Lobbying Activities

- Direct Lobbying: Nonprofits can engage in some direct lobbying, which involves attempts to influence legislation by communicating with legislators or government employees who participate in the formulation of legislation. This can include presenting positions on specific legislation or proposed laws.
- Grassroots Lobbying: This type of lobbying involves encouraging the public to act on legislation, such as asking members or the public to contact their representatives. This is more restricted than direct lobbying.

2. Restrictions and Limitations

- Substantial Part Test: The IRS stipulates that lobbying activities must not constitute a "substantial part" of a nonprofit's activities. However, the IRS does not define precisely what "substantial part" means, leaving it somewhat subjective but generally interpreted based on time and expenditures.
- Expenditure Test (501(h) Election): Nonprofits can opt to make a 501(h) election, which allows them to spend a specified amount on lobbying activities based on the organization's size, with clear limits provided by the IRS. This election provides clearer guidelines than the substantial part test and is often recommended for organizations that plan to engage in lobbying.

3. Reporting Requirements

- Nonprofits that engage in lobbying must keep detailed records of their lobbying activities and expenditures. Those that have taken the 501(h) election must complete specific sections of the IRS Form 990 to report these activities and ensure they stay within legal spending limits.

Nonprofits that exceed the permitted amount of lobbying activities risk losing their tax-exempt status. Additionally, they may incur taxes on the excess lobbying expenditures and possibly other penalties. So, while 501(c)(3) organizations are allowed to lobby within defined limits, they must

carefully navigate these regulations to maintain their tax-exempt status and comply with federal laws. Engaging in lobbying requires strategic planning, meticulous record-keeping, and often, legal guidance to ensure all activities are conducted legally and effectively.

Organizations recognized under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, also navigate a narrow path when it comes to political activities. In order to maintain their tax-exempt status and comply with federal laws, it is extremely important to understand what is permitted and what is not.

Some examples (not even close to an exhaustive list):

Permitted Activities:

- Educational Activities: Nonprofits can conduct educational activities related to political processes, voter education, and issues of public concern, provided these activities are conducted in a non-partisan manner. This can include hosting forums, discussions, and providing educational materials as long as they don't advocate for or against specific candidates.

- Advocacy on Issues: Nonprofits can advocate for issues that align with their mission without linking their advocacy to any political campaign or candidate. It's important that these issue-based advocacies do not cross into direct or indirect support of political candidates.

- Lobbying Within Limits: As mentioned earlier, 501(c)(3) organizations can engage in a limited amount of lobbying to influence legislation relevant to their mission. The limits on what constitutes "limited" depend on the organization's choice between the "substantial part test" and the "501(h) election" for clearer expenditure guidelines.

Prohibited Activities:

- Political Campaign Activity: 501(c)(3) organizations are strictly prohibited from engaging in political campaign activity, meaning they cannot endorse, oppose, donate to, or fundraise for political candidates. This prohibition extends to any activities that could be construed as supporting or opposing a candidate for public office, including using organizational resources to favor or disfavor a candidate.

- Partisan Activities: Nonprofits cannot participate in partisan activities that show bias towards or against any political party. This includes distributing materials that favor a political party or using organizational platforms to express partisan viewpoints.

Entities that violate these rules risk losing their tax-exempt status, which can have significant financial and operational repercussions. Additionally, they could face taxes on political expenditures and other penalties from the IRS. The loss of public trust and credibility can also have long-term effects on the organization's ability to fulfill its mission. Thus, while 501(c)(3) nonprofits play a vital role in educating the public and advocating for issues, they must carefully balance their activities to avoid political partisanship and ensure compliance with their tax-exempt status regulations.

Benefits of 501(c)(3) Status

- **Tax Exemption**: Organizations are exempt from federal income tax. Many states also offer exemptions from sales and property taxes.
- **Tax-Deductible Contributions**: Donations made by individuals and corporations are tax-deductible, encouraging philanthropy.
- **Eligibility for Grants**: Many government and private grants are available only to 501(c)(3) organizations.
- **Postal Discounts**: Reduced postage rates are available for some types of mailings.

Obtaining 501(c)(3) Status

Obtaining tax-exempt status as a nonprofit organization in the United States is a process that involves several steps, primarily guided by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), but also involving your state. Here's a general overview of how to go about it:

1. Incorporate Your Nonprofit

- Begin by incorporating your organization as a nonprofit corporation in your state. This involves filing articles of incorporation with your state's Secretary of State office or similar entity. Make sure your articles of incorporation include the necessary language and clauses required by the IRS for tax-exempt status, such as a specific purpose clause and a dissolution clause dedicating your assets to another tax-exempt organization upon dissolution.

2. Obtain an EIN

- Even if you don't plan to have employees immediately, you need to obtain an EIN from the IRS. This number is essentially your organization's Social Security number and is required for tax filings and to open a bank account. You can apply for an EIN online, by fax, or mail through the IRS website.

3. Draft Your Nonprofit Bylaws

- Draft the bylaws for your organization, which will serve as the internal operating rules. While bylaws aren't submitted to the IRS, they may need to be provided upon request and are necessary for organizational governance.

4. Hold an Organizational Meeting

- Conduct an initial meeting of your board of directors as outlined in your bylaws. During this meeting, you should adopt the bylaws, set up an accounting period and tax year, and record the meeting minutes. These minutes are important for maintaining corporate compliance and proving your operational status to the IRS.

5. File for Tax-Exempt Status

- For most organizations seeking 501(c)(3) status, filing IRS Form 1023, Application for Recognition of Exemption Under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, is the key step. This detailed application requires information about your organization's structure, governance, and programs. The IRS uses it to determine if your organization qualifies for tax-exempt status. Small organizations expecting to have $50,000 or less in gross receipts annually may be eligible to file Form 1023-EZ, which is a shorter version.

- State-Level Exemption: In addition to federal tax-exempt status, you may need to apply for state-level exemptions for sales, property, and income taxes. The requirements vary by state.

6. Await IRS Determination

- After submitting Form 1023 or 1023-EZ, the IRS will review your application. This process can take several months, and the IRS may request additional information. Once approved, you will receive a determination letter confirming your tax-exempt status.

7. Maintain Compliance

- Maintain your tax-exempt status by keeping accurate records, filing annual returns (Form 990 series), and adhering to the operational restrictions of tax-exempt organizations, such as limitations on lobbying and political activities.

Obtaining tax-exempt status is a meticulous process that can be complex depending on the size and scope of your organization. Many organizations seek guidance from legal professionals or tax experts to navigate the application process and ensure compliance with all federal and state requirements.

Types of Grants

Effective grant writing requires a deep understanding of the landscape of grant funding. Grants can come from a variety of sources and are designed to support a wide range of projects and initiatives. This section provides an overview of the primary types of grants, offering insights into their purposes, sources, and how they typically operate. This foundational knowledge will help you identify which grants are the best fit for your projects and how to tailor your proposals accordingly.

1. Government Grants

Government grants are funded by local, state, or federal government agencies. These grants are often substantial and can support a wide range of projects, from scientific research to community development and education programs. Applying for government grants is usually a competitive and rigorous process, requiring detailed proposals and strict compliance with regulations. Examples include grants from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) for medical research or the National Science Foundation (NSF) for scientific and engineering research.

Securing a government grant can be a significant boon for nonprofit organizations, offering substantial financial support to further their missions. However, this funding avenue also comes with challenges that need careful consideration. Below is an overview of the advantages and disadvantages associated with receiving government grants.

Advantages

- Stable Funding Source: Government grants can provide a substantial and stable source of funding for specific projects or operational costs, enabling organizations to plan and execute their programs with confidence over the grant period.
- Legitimacy and Recognition: Receiving a government grant can enhance an organization's credibility and visibility. It often acts as a seal of approval that can help attract additional funding from other sources, as it demonstrates that the nonprofit meets the stringent requirements and oversight typical of government funding.
- Potential for Large Awards: Government grants often involve larger sums of money than what might be available from private sources, allowing for significant project funding that can make a considerable impact on the organization's capabilities and reach.
- Focus on Public Benefit: Government grants are typically aligned with public policy goals and societal benefits, which means they support projects that have a clear and direct impact on the community or environment, aligning well with the missions of many nonprofits.

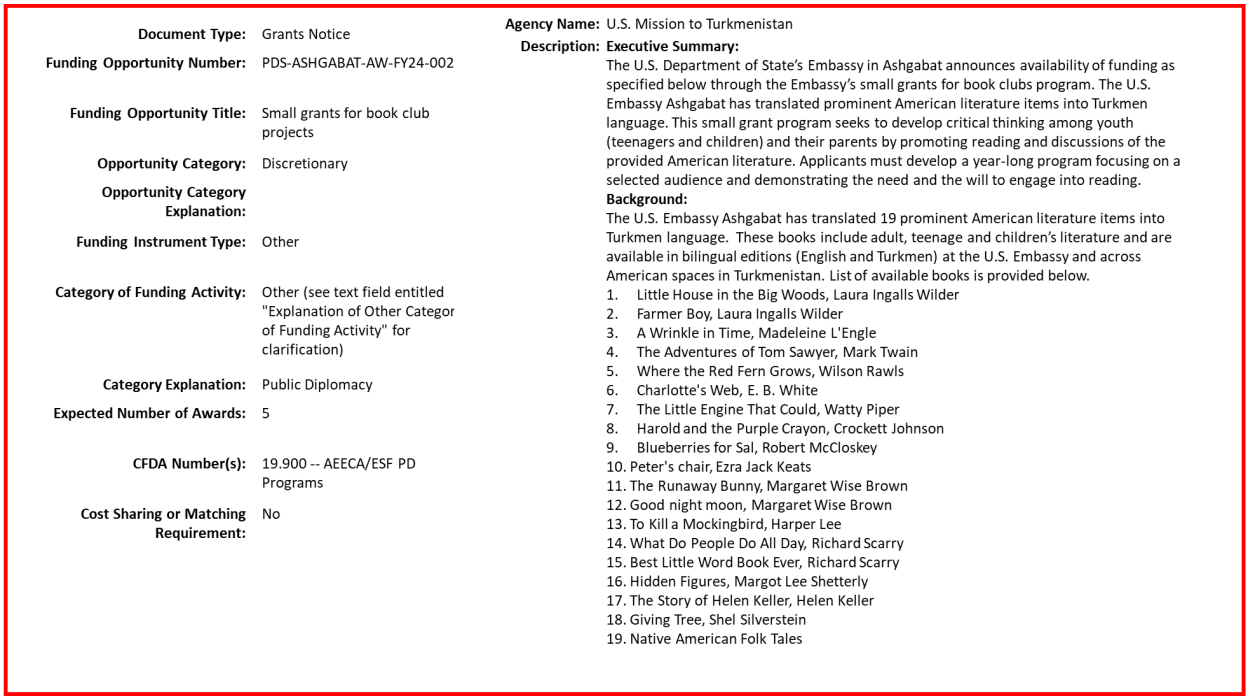
Disadvantages

- Complex Application Process: Applying for government grants can be a complex and time-consuming process, involving detailed proposals, strict guidelines, and often a competitive bidding process. The administrative burden can be substantial, particularly for smaller organizations.
- Restrictive Use of Funds: Government grants usually come with stringent conditions regarding how funds can be used, requiring organizations to adhere closely to the proposed activities and budget allocations. This can limit flexibility in responding to changing needs or unexpected challenges.
- Heavy Reporting Requirements: Recipients of government grants face strict accountability standards, including regular, detailed reporting on program progress, financial audits, and compliance with government regulations. The administrative load can be significant, diverting resources away from program activities.
- Risk of Dependency: Relying heavily on government funding can pose risks, especially if funding priorities change or if there are budget cuts. Organizations may find themselves in a precarious position if they haven’t diversified their funding sources.
- Potential for Mission Drift: In the pursuit of government funding, there's a risk that an organization may shift its focus towards projects that align with government priorities,

possibly at the expense of its original mission. This can lead to mission drift if not carefully managed.

While government grants offer valuable opportunities for funding, recognition, and the ability to make a substantial impact, they also require careful navigation of complex application processes, adherence to restrictive use and reporting requirements, and the foresight to avoid over-reliance on this funding source to maintain organizational mission and stability.

Figure 1.2. Sample Government Grant



Document Type:	Grants Notice
Funding Opportunity Number:	PDS-ASHGABAT-AW-FY24-002
Funding Opportunity Title:	Small grants for book club projects
Opportunity Category:	Discretionary
Opportunity Category Explanation:	
Funding Instrument Type:	Other
Category of Funding Activity:	Other (see text field entitled "Explanation of Other Categor of Funding Activity" for clarification)
Category Explanation:	Public Diplomacy
Expected Number of Awards:	5
CFDA Number(s):	19.900 -- AEECA/ESF PD Programs
Cost Sharing or Matching Requirement:	No

Agency Name: U.S. Mission to Turkmenistan

Description: **Executive Summary:**

The U.S. Department of State's Embassy in Ashgabat announces availability of funding as specified below through the Embassy's small grants for book clubs program. The U.S. Embassy Ashgabat has translated prominent American literature items into Turkmen language. This small grant program seeks to develop critical thinking among youth (teenagers and children) and their parents by promoting reading and discussions of the provided American literature. Applicants must develop a year-long program focusing on a selected audience and demonstrating the need and the will to engage into reading.

Background:

The U.S. Embassy Ashgabat has translated 19 prominent American literature items into Turkmen language. These books include adult, teenage and children's literature and are available in bilingual editions (English and Turkmen) at the U.S. Embassy and across American spaces in Turkmenistan. List of available books is provided below.

1. Little House in the Big Woods, Laura Ingalls Wilder
2. Farmer Boy, Laura Ingalls Wilder
3. A Wrinkle in Time, Madeleine L'Engle
4. The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, Mark Twain
5. Where the Red Fern Grows, Wilson Rawls
6. Charlotte's Web, E. B. White
7. The Little Engine That Could, Watty Piper
8. Harold and the Purple Crayon, Crockett Johnson
9. Blueberries for Sal, Robert McCloskey
10. Peter's chair, Ezra Jack Keats
11. The Runaway Bunny, Margaret Wise Brown
12. Good night moon, Margaret Wise Brown
13. To Kill a Mockingbird, Harper Lee
14. What Do People Do All Day, Richard Scarry
15. Best Little Word Book Ever, Richard Scarry
16. Hidden Figures, Margot Lee Shetterly
17. The Story of Helen Keller, Helen Keller
18. Giving Tree, Shel Silverstein
19. Native American Folk Tales

https://www.grants.gov/search-results-detail/352718

The Executive Summary and Background sections of this grant announcement are included below.

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2. Foundation Grants

Foundations are nonprofit entities that provide grants to support charitable activities in line with their mission. These can be private foundations, established by individuals, families, or corporations, or community foundations that pool resources from multiple donors to support local initiatives. Foundation grants vary significantly in size, scope, and application requirements. Some foundations issue "open calls" for proposals, while others invite applications by direct solicitation only.

Securing a foundation grant can be a transformative experience for nonprofit organizations, offering not just the needed financial backing but also a partnership that can foster growth, innovation, and visibility. These grants are often targeted towards specific initiatives, mirroring the foundation's areas of interest such as education, health, or environmental conservation. This alignment between a nonprofit's mission and a foundation's focus can result in significant support for projects that are central to the organization's goals, potentially filling gaps that other funding sources might overlook.

Beyond the financial aspect, foundation grants can serve as a gateway to valuable networks and partnerships. Foundations are not merely funders; they often act as collaborators, offering access to a wealth of knowledge, expertise, and connections that can propel a nonprofit to new heights. Furthermore, being endorsed by a respected foundation can enhance an organization's standing in the community and among other potential donors, lending it a level of prestige and credibility that facilitates further fundraising and volunteer recruitment efforts. In some cases, foundations provide flexible funding, including unrestricted grants that allow nonprofits to allocate resources

to operational expenses or wherever the need is greatest, offering a degree of financial latitude that is rare in the nonprofit sector.

However, the path to obtaining foundation grants is fraught with challenges. The application process is notoriously competitive, with numerous organizations vying for a finite pool of resources. Crafting compelling proposals requires significant time and effort, with no guaranteed outcome, particularly when aiming for grants from highly coveted foundations. Additionally, while some grants offer flexibility, others come with stringent restrictions, earmarking funds for specific projects or programs. This can limit an organization's ability to pivot in response to unforeseen challenges or to channel funds into core operational needs.

Figure 1.3. Sample Foundation Grant

Greater Cedar Rapids Community Foundation Grant Criteria

Purpose
Program Support Grants support new, Innovative programs and sustained current and/or ongoing programs of non-profits that serve Linn County, Iowa.
Deadlines
Program Support Grants deadlines for 2024 are Friday, March 1 and Friday, September 13 at 4:30 p.m. CST.
Organization Eligibility
The Community Foundation accepts applications from nonprofit organizations with a 501(c)(3) status, governmental organizations, and non-501(c)(3) organizations that have completed arrangements to obtain a fiscal sponsor.
Multiple organizations may submit a joint application for a collaborative project - contact Program Officer to discuss this further. Organizations based outside of Linn County may only apply for the Linn County portion of program costs.
Maximum Request Amount
For organizations with operating budgets greater than $125,000, the maximum request amount is $25,000 per year. Organizations with operating budgets less than $125,000 may request an amount up to 20% of their operating budget per request (rounded up to the nearest $100).
Duration of Grants
12 - 24 months (for a two-year request)
Application and Forms
Download 2024 Program Support Grants Application and Scoring Criteria

https://www.gcrcf.org/resources-for-nonprofit-organizations-serving-linn-county-iowa/grants/grant-opportunities-and-deadlines/program-support-grants/

3. Corporate Grants

Corporate grants are offered by businesses as part of their corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs. These grants aim to give back to the community or support issues aligned with the company's values and goals. Corporate grants can support a range of projects, including educational programs, environmental conservation, and community development initiatives. Unlike government and foundation grants, corporate grants may also focus on partnership opportunities that offer mutual branding and marketing benefits.

Corporate grants can provide nonprofit organizations with financial support without requiring any loss of control or equity, allowing them to further their missions and expand their services without compromising their governance or objectives. Being selected for a corporate grant also enhances an organization's credibility and visibility, often coming with public recognition that can attract additional donors and volunteers by signaling trustworthiness and validation of the nonprofit's cause. Moreover, corporate grants may offer access to additional resources like expertise, technology, and networks, providing mentoring, training, and other forms of non-monetary support that can be invaluable for growth and development. Securing a corporate grant can be the start of a long-term partnership, where successful collaboration on a grant project leads to further funding and support opportunities, as well as potential joint ventures and advocacy. With corporate funding, nonprofits might have the opportunity to launch new projects, expand services, or innovate within their programming, which might not be possible through traditional funding alone.

However, corporate grants often come with strict guidelines on how the funds can be used, which might not perfectly align with the nonprofit’s most pressing needs, limiting flexibility in operations and project implementation. The process of applying for these grants can be time-consuming and resource-intensive, with detailed reports on fund usage required, adding to the administrative workload. There's also a risk of mission drift as nonprofits may shift their focus to align with the interests of their corporate funders, potentially diluting their impact and alienating core supporters. Accepting money from corporations, especially those with controversial reputations, can affect public perception of the nonprofit, leading stakeholders to question the integrity or independence of the organization based on its funding sources. Lastly, reliance on corporate grants for funding can lead to sustainability issues if that funding is reduced or withdrawn, making it difficult for nonprofits to plan for long-term financial stability without becoming dependent on corporate support.

Figure 1.4. Sample Corporate Grant

Walmart Spark Good Local Grants

Program Guidelines

Spark Good Local Grants are awarded through an open application process to eligible organizations operating locally and directly benefiting the service area of the facility from when they are requesting funding. Grant amounts range from a minimum of $250 to a maximum of $5,000.

Organization Eligibility

Organizations must have a Spark Good account and be verified by Deed, Walmart's third-party verification service provider. If recommended for funding, the organization must provide electronic payment information to complete the approval process. All grants are disbursed through electronic payment.

Organizations applying must meet one of the following criteria:

An organization holding a current tax-exempt status as a public charity under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, listed on the IRS Master File and conducting activities within the United States, classified as a public charity under Section 509(a)(1), (2) or (3) (Types I or II); and Deed verified.

A recognized government entity: state, county or city agency, including law enforcement or fire departments, that are requesting funds exclusively for public purposes and Deed verified.

A K-12 public or nonprofit private school, charter school, community / junior college, state/private college or university; or a church or other faith-based organization with a proposed project that benefits the community at large, such as food pantries, soup kitchens and clothing closets and Deed verified.

Selection and Approval Process

Facility management review applications and make initial funding recommendations on all submitted requests. Each facility manager may set the frequency and process in which application determinations are made. The facility manager and the grant administrator reserve the right to adjust the amount awarded to each organization without prior notice. Organizations will be notified of any decision via e-mail. Al funding decisions are final.

https://walmart.org/how-we-give/program-guidelines/spark-good-local-grants-guidelines

4. Research Grants

The primary purpose of research grants is to provide financial support for investigations and studies across a wide array of disciplines, including science, technology, engineering, social sciences, and humanities. These grants enable researchers to pursue questions and hypotheses that contribute to their field's body of knowledge, potentially leading to breakthroughs, innovations, and solutions to complex problems.

Many countries have governmental bodies dedicated to funding research, such as the National Science Foundation (NSF) in the United States, the European Research Council (ERC) in Europe, and the National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC). These agencies support a broad range of research activities, from basic science to applied research. Nonprofit organizations, such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Wellcome Trust, and the Ford Foundation, provide grants for research projects that align with their mission and goals. These can include health, education, environmental conservation, and social policy research. Universities often offer internal grants to support the research of their faculty and students. These funds may come from endowments, donations, or institutional budgets. Companies across sectors

also invest in research that can lead to new technologies, products, and processes, offering grants to academic and independent researchers whose work can contribute to their business interests.

Research grants are specifically for research, and therefore are limited in terms of eligibility. For researchers, however, the prestige associated with securing research grants can significantly enhance their standing within their academic or scientific community, marking a pivotal point in their career development. These grants are often seen as a badge of honor, reflecting the quality and potential impact of one's work, and are important for academics striving for tenure or looking to build their research portfolio. Beyond individual achievements, grants often play a role in building research infrastructure, from state-of-the-art laboratories to comprehensive digital libraries, thereby enriching the entire research ecosystem. Moreover, the collaborative nature of many grants fosters partnerships that cross institutional and geographical boundaries, promoting a multidisciplinary approach to research that can tackle complex global challenges more effectively.

However, the path to obtaining research grants is fraught with challenges. The competitive landscape can be intense, with funding bodies often receiving applications that far exceed their capacity to support, leading to low success rates in certain fields and among early-career researchers. The application process itself is often a Herculean task, requiring extensive preparation, writing, and revision, which can distract researchers from their focus on the research itself. Once a grant is awarded, researchers must navigate strict guidelines on fund usage, adhere to rigorous reporting requirements, and are expected to deliver results within the grant's timeframe. This pressure can be particularly acute in exploratory research where outcomes are uncertain.

Further, the reliance on external funding sources for research activities introduces an element of financial instability, making long-term planning and sustainability a challenge for both researchers and their institutions. The cycle of grant applications and the dependency on such funding can lead to periods of uncertainty, affecting the continuity of research programs and the morale of research teams.

In essence, while research grants are great for fueling discovery and advancing human knowledge, they come with a set of inherent challenges that demand careful consideration and strategic planning. The balance between leveraging the opportunities provided by grants and managing the demands they impose is crucial for sustaining the vibrancy and productivity of the research community.

Figure 1.5. Sample Research Grant

National Science Foundation Research Grant

The U.S. National Science Foundation's Directorate for Technology, Innovation and Partnerships (TIP) is charged with accelerating use-inspired and translational research and development (R&D) to advance U.S. competitiveness in key technology focus areas.

Advancing Cell-Free Systems toward Increased Range of Use-Inspired Applications (CFIRE) initiative will accelerate the adoption of cell-free systems, enable new applications of this technology and contribute to the growth of the U.S. bioeconomy.

Full proposal
September 20 2024 - Deadline date
Due by 5:00 p.m. submitting organization's local time

Program guidelines
Award information
The total funding available for this activity is up to $40,000,000 over **3** years. Estimated program budget, number of awards and average award size/duration are subject to the availability of funds.

Estimated number of awards
2 to 8

Estimated number of awards description
-Up to 8 awards are anticipated depending upon availability of funds on the quality, scale, transformative-potential and diversity of project ideas developed at the Ideas Lab. Awards will be funded up to **$3,750,000** per year for up to **3** years. The budget for a given proposal should be commensurate with the complexity of the proposed research and development plan and the final maturity level and translational impact of the results.
https://new.nsf.gov/funding/opportunities/ideas-lab-advancing-cell-free-systems-toward

5. Capital Grants

Capital grants play an important role in the advancement and sustainability of various organizations, with a particular emphasis on nonprofits, charities, and foundations. These grants are earmarked for significant expenditures such as acquiring, constructing, or renovating buildings and facilities, or purchasing essential equipment and large-scale assets. While offering a myriad of benefits, navigating the terrain of capital grants also presents a set of unique advantages and challenges that organizations must carefully manage.

The essence of capital grants lies in their purpose and the broad spectrum of objectives they aim to fulfill. Primarily, these grants are deployed to promote social goods, a priority for both the public and for private foundations. By funneling resources into the development of community centers, public health facilities, and similar projects, capital grants significantly contribute to the public interest, enhancing the quality of life within communities and providing essential services that might otherwise be inaccessible.

Beyond their social impact, capital grants are instrumental in stimulating economic growth. They provide a financial stimulus to specific regions or sectors, encouraging development and revitalization efforts that can lead to job creation, increased economic activity, and improved

infrastructure. This aspect of capital grants underscores their role in fostering a dynamic and robust economic environment.

For nonprofit organizations operating on tight budgets, capital grants are a lifeline that sustains operations and facilitates expansion. These grants allow nonprofits to undertake projects and initiatives that broaden their reach and amplify their impact, enabling them to serve their communities more effectively. Moreover, capital grants support innovation by funding research and development projects or startups with innovative ideas, driving progress and technological advancements across various fields.

Capital grants are more than just financial aid; they are catalysts for social, economic, and organizational growth. They support a wide array of projects that serve the public good, stimulate economic development, sustain nonprofit operations, and encourage innovation. However, the process of obtaining and effectively utilizing capital grants involves navigating a complex landscape of application procedures, fund management, and project implementation, all while aligning with the specific goals and restrictions associated with each grant.

Figure 1.6. Sample Capital Grant

Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity Capital Grant

The intent of this program is to assist companies with large-scale capital investment projects that commit to significant job creation for Illinois residents as they relocate or expand operations within Illinois. Business Attraction Prime Sites grants can encompass a wide range of economic development projects and may include infrastructure and capital equipment purchases that will result in job creation in the state of Illinois.

Awarding Agency Name	Commerce And Econ Opp
Agency Contact	Leslie Barsema [email address redacted]
Announcement Type	Modified
Type of Assistance Instrument	Grant
Agency Opportunity Number	1
Agency Funding Program	Business Attraction Prime Sites
CSFA_Number	420-45-2608
CSFA Popular Name	Business Attraction Prime Sites
Anticipated Number of Awards	130
Estimated Total Program Funding	60000000.00
Single Award Range	$250000 - $25000000

Source of Funding	State
Cost Sharing or Matching Requirements	Yes
Indirect Costs Allowed	No
Restrictions on Indirect Costs	Yes
Posted Date	9/20/2021
Application Date Range	9/20/2021 - 06/30/2024 : 11:59pm
Grant Application Link	Please copy the entire address below and paste it into the browser… https://dceo.illinois.gov/aboutdceo/grantopportunities/2608-2023.html
Technical Assistance Session	No
Attachments	Opportunity.pdf

https://dceo.illinois.gov/aboutdceo/grantopportunities/2608-2023.html

6. Endowment Grants

Endowment grants are voluntary, substantial financial gifts provided to organizations, typically with the stipulation that the principal amount is to be kept intact while the investment income is used for ongoing support. These grants can be transformative, offering a steady stream of income over time. However, managing an endowment comes with its own set of challenges alongside its benefits.

There are four types of endowments:

- **Unrestricted Endowment** – This consists of assets that can be spent, saved, invested, or distributed at the discretion of the institution receiving the gift.
- **Term Endowment** – The principal can be expended after a period of time or a certain event.
- **Quasi Endowment** – A donation made to serve a specific purpose. The principal is typically retained while the earnings are spent per the donor's specifications. These endowments are often started by the institutions that benefit from them via internal transfers or the use of unrestricted endowments.
- **Restricted Endowment** – The principal is held in perpetuity while the earnings from the invested assets are expended per the donor's specifications.

Endowed funds differ from others in that the total amount of the gift is invested. Each year, only a portion of the income earned is spent while the remainder is added to the principal for growth. In this respect, an endowment is a perpetual gift.

Figure 1.7. Sample Endowment Grant

1) A XYZ University alumni makes a $50,000 gift to establish a named endowed scholarship in memory of her husband.
2) A gift agreement is drawn up between XYZ University and the donor to guarantee that her donation will be added to the Common Investment Fund and used only for its intended purpose.
3) The newly named scholarship fund buys "units" in teh Common Investment Fund, similar to how an investor would purchase shares in a mutual fund.
4) The donor's gift is invested across major asset classes in the university's portfolio to maximize long-term return within acceptable levels of risk within the policy parameters established by the university and the appropriate state and federal statutes.
5) A predetermined portion of the income earned on the investment is used to provide a scholarship for one student per year, per the endowment agreements instructions. The fund's principal remains intact.
6) The remainder of the income earned goes back into the account with the principal and is reinvested.
7) The named fund continues to grow, ensuring future scholarships.

7. Matching Grants

Matching grants are a unique funding mechanism where nonprofits must raise a certain portion of funds, which are then matched by the grantor, either partially or on a dollar-for-dollar basis. These grants, offered by corporations, foundations, or individuals, aim to amplify the impact of the donation by requiring the nonprofit to also contribute financially to their project. The matching process usually operates on a 1:1 or 2:1 ratio, meaning the donor will match the nonprofit's fundraising efforts equally or double the amount raised by the nonprofit, respectively.

Unlike traditional grants that provide funds directly to nonprofits, matching grants incentivize organizations to engage in their fundraising activities. For instance, in a scenario where a donor promises to double any donations received, a nonprofit is motivated to increase its fundraising efforts to maximize the potential grant amount.

Applying for a matching grant typically involves a direct application to the donor, whether a corporation or another entity, which will have set specific criteria for eligibility. The nonprofit must outline how it intends to use the funds to advance its mission as part of the application process.

Matching grants are particularly effective for funding projects with strong community support, leveraging local involvement and investment. Governments or organizations might allocate matching funds for community-driven projects, where proposals are developed and submitted for funding consideration. If approved, the grantor matches the community's contribution, often including labor and materials, not just financial donations, thereby enabling groups with more time than money to successfully fund and implement local improvement initiatives. This

approach is widely used for projects like planting street trees or developing or refurbishing parks and playgrounds, harnessing the power of community engagement to achieve tangible outcomes.

Many cities set up matching grants as a way of improving areas while also involving community and neighborhood groups. For example, Seattle's Department of Neighborhoods is particularly well known and respected for their success with matching grants. The Dept. of Neighborhoods sponsors four types of matching funds for different types and scales of project. The first of these is the Large Project Fund for projects lasting up to twelve months and that cost between $15,000 and $100,000. Second is the Small and Simple Projects Fund for projects seeking awards of $15,000 or less and that can be completed in 6 months or less. Third is The Tree Fund where neighborhood groups can apply for 10 to 40 trees for planting along residential planting strips. Finally, the Neighborhood Outreach and Development Fund funds projects that involve new people in neighborhood organizations or activities. They fund a variety of projects, at many different price points, but each one of them must come with matching funds.

Figure 1.8. Sample Matching Grant

Voluntary Agencies Matching Grant Program

The Matching Grant Program helps refugees and other ORR-eligible populations overcome barriers and quickly find jobs. The intent is for refugees to become economically self-sufficient through employment within 240 days and without accessing cash assistance programs.

Participating in the Program

Matching Grant program participants must meet certain employment requirements and must enroll within 31 days after their date of arrival or eligibility.

The program works closely with clients, providing:

- Case management
- Employment skills training
- Job referrals
- Family budget planning
- The program also helps refugees with:
- Housing, utilities, and food
- Transportation
- Health and Medical
- English language training
- Social adjustment and other services

Program Administration

The Matching Grant program is provided solely through the nine domestic resettlement agencies that have agreements with the Department of State to provide reception and placement services to refugees. These resettlement agencies in turn work with over 214 local service providers in 43 states, and enroll clients who are interested in the program after an orientation to their options for employment programs. Grant recipients agree to match ORR direct client assistance funding

with cash and in-kind contributions of goods and services from the community at the rate of $1 for every $2 in federal funding.

https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/programs/refugees/matching-grants

8. In-Kind Grants

In-kind grants offer a unique form of support to nonprofit organizations by providing goods and services instead of direct financial assistance. These grants can come in many forms, such as donated equipment, professional services, or materials, and they hold a distinct set of benefits and drawbacks.

Benefits of In-Kind Grants

- Cost Savings: In-kind grants allow nonprofits to save on operational and project costs. By receiving goods and services directly, organizations can allocate their financial resources to other areas of need, enhancing their ability to fulfill their mission.
- Access to High-Quality Resources: Often, in-kind donations include high-quality goods and services that might otherwise be unaffordable for the nonprofit. This access can significantly improve the organization's operations, from upgraded technology to professional expertise.
- Strengthening Community Ties: Receiving in-kind support from local businesses or professionals can strengthen the bond between the nonprofit and its community. These relationships can lead to ongoing support, collaboration, and a stronger presence within the community.
- Enhanced Credibility: In-kind support from reputable companies or individuals can enhance a nonprofit's credibility. The association with well-known entities can boost the organization's profile and attract additional donations, both in-kind and financial.

Drawbacks of In-Kind Grants

- Misalignment with Needs: One of the primary challenges of in-kind grants is the risk of receiving goods or services that don't perfectly align with the organization's current needs. This misalignment can lead to underutilized resources and missed opportunities for more effective support.
- Logistical Challenges: Managing in-kind donations can pose logistical challenges, from storage issues for physical goods to coordinating schedules for donated services. These challenges can consume valuable time and resources that might have been allocated elsewhere.
- Difficulty in Valuation: Valuing in-kind donations for reporting purposes can be complex and time-consuming. Accurately assessing the fair market value of goods and services requires effort and expertise, which can complicate financial reporting and auditing processes.

- Potential for Dependence: Relying heavily on in-kind donations can lead to a form of dependency, where nonprofits might adjust their operations or projects based on the availability of in-kind support rather than strategic planning and needs assessment.
- Lack of Flexibility: In-kind grants offer less flexibility compared to financial grants. Organizations are limited to using the specific goods or services provided, which may not always be the most pressing need or the most efficient use of resources.

In the realm of in-kind donations, creativity and resourcefulness can significantly reduce the financial burden of projects. Here are two examples that showcase how diverse forms of in-kind support can be leveraged:

Local School STEM Laboratory Upgrade

A local school aims to upgrade its STEM laboratory to provide students with modern scientific equipment and learning materials. The estimated cost for new equipment, furniture, and educational materials is $15,000. However, a tech company in the community offers to donate gently used laptops and tablets, while a university's science department provides surplus laboratory equipment. Additionally, a retired science teacher volunteers to organize and set up the laboratory, and a local office supply store donates desks and chairs. These contributions reduce the financial need to $5,000 for specialized equipment not covered by in-kind donations. In this scenario, the tech company's and university's donations of equipment, the retired teacher's volunteer time, and the office supply's furniture are all valuable in-kind supports that substantially decrease the project's cash funding requirements.

Community Garden Initiative

A neighborhood association decides to create a community garden to promote urban greening and local food production. The project's initial budget, including land preparation, purchase of seeds, tools, and irrigation systems, totals $10,000. A local landscaping company offers to prepare the land for free, and a gardening club donates seeds and volunteers to help with the planting. A hardware store provides gardening tools at no cost, and a drip irrigation company installs a water-efficient system as part of its community service program. These in-kind contributions reduce the actual funding needed to $2,000 for miscellaneous supplies and ongoing maintenance. The landscaping service, seed and tool donations, and the irrigation system installation represent significant in-kind support, showcasing community solidarity and reducing the financial strain on the project.

These examples illustrate the power of in-kind donations in enabling projects to move forward with reduced financial requirements, while fostering a sense of community involvement and partnership.

Figure 1.9. Sample In-Kind Grant

Service Objects In-Kind Grant Program

Service Objects In-Kind grants will support organizations that encourage environmental leadership through the reduction of waste, and caring for our resources. We will provide in-kind

donations to organizations that are working to encourage environmental conservation, as well as providing education for both personal and environmental health.

Data quality and validation services may include: address validation, email appending, phone number appending, email validation, demographics data, geocoding with latitude-longitude coordinates, and other data validation services. In-kind contributions support the programs and/or daily operations of an environmental organization. If you meet the following criteria, please fill out the application.

In-Kind Grants are offered to:

- Organizations that have 501(c)(3) status within the United States
- Projects that require community demographic, geographic, address information and related data validation services
- Programs that focus on reducing waste that directly impacts the environment
- Programs that focus on immediate support for natural environmental disasters
- Builds action-oriented public involvement
- Based on need, and awarded on an individual basis

Supporting the Organizations that Aid our Environment

- All funding requests should be quantifiable with specific product requests and plan objectives, with a clear measure for evaluating success.
- Projects should have a good chance of significant measurable results with momentum over a fairly short-term (one to three years)
- Applications that come with detailed projects descriptions will be viewed favorably, and will be taken into consideration during the granting process.

https://www.serviceobjects.com/about-us/in-kind-grants/

Conclusion

So, now we have traversed the comprehensive landscape of grants and funding sources, dissecting the various types of grants and understanding the diverse spectrum of funders, including governments, foundations, corporations, and individuals. This journey has hopefully helped you start to understand the intricacies of the grant ecosystem and also underscored the importance of navigating these waters with insight and strategy. If you are still confused or overwhelmed, don't worry–we will get into all of these topics more deeply in the chapters ahead.

Grants, as we've seen, are more than mere financial transactions; they are the backbone of many projects and initiatives across sectors, enabling innovation, supporting services, and facilitating the advancement of knowledge and societal well-being. By delving into the nuances of different grant types, we've highlighted the importance of aligning project needs with the right kind of funding, perhaps the most critical step towards achieving project goals and maximizing impact.

Understanding the motivations and expectations of various funders has equipped us with the knowledge to tailor proposals and projects that resonate with their objectives, enhancing the chances of securing funding. The exploration of the grant ecosystem has further revealed the dynamic interplay between funders and recipients, emphasizing the value of building and maintaining robust relationships within this network.

As we close this chapter, it's clear that navigating the grant landscape requires a blend of knowledge, strategy, and relationship-building. The insights shared here aim to serve as a compass, guiding readers through the complexities of grants and funding sources. Whether embarking on a new project or seeking to expand existing initiatives, the ability to effectively engage with this ecosystem can be a decisive factor in turning visions into reality. Armed with a deeper understanding of grants and a strategic approach to funding, organizations are better positioned to make a meaningful impact in their respective fields and communities.

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Chapter 2: Preparation for Grant Writing

The National Institute of Food and Agriculture, which is part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, published a Fact Sheet, "20 Tips for Grant Writing Success". Reading the Fact Sheet revealed an interesting pattern. Of the 20 (very helpful) tips, which are included below, very few of them are about writing. In fact, around half of the tips have to do with the research and preparation involved before any writing gets done at all.

1. Find the right program for you and your idea.
Review the purpose of the program or funding priority, and determine if your idea fits. Is it a mainstream fit? On the fringe? Do you meet the eligibility requirements? Don't waste time applying for the wrong programs.

2. Become a "student" of the Request for Applications (RFA) document.
Read it in full. Understand the main goals of the program and the instructions outlined on how to assemble the proposal.

3. Develop a timeline for preparation.
Create a timeline that allows for completion of the proposal at least four weeks before submission deadline. If you rush preparation it will show, and reviewers will notice.

4. Understand criteria for evaluating proposals.
RFAs normally contain the criteria that will be used by reviewers to evaluate your proposal. Understand these criteria before you begin preparing your proposal. It will provide better understanding of where to target greatest efforts.

5. Understand review process and reviewers.
Reviewers may be assigned 10 to 20 proposals. Following directions in the RFA, and preparing the proposal logically and clearly helps reviewers.

6. Write logically and clearly.
Organize the proposal according to the outline in the RFA or evaluation criteria, whichever is most logical.

7. Prepare a budget with a strong justification.
Unreasonable budgets hurt proposals. Keep budgets within the guidelines of the RFA. They are judged on degree of reasonableness. 8. Obtain critical input from experienced and successful colleagues. Find someone who is clear, concise and not afraid to be honest with feedback.

9. Fill out forms completely and correctly.
Make sure you have prepared all required documents and include all required information in the correct format.

10. Allow time for intramural administrative requirements.
Submit on time and follow all deadlines.

11. Make sure your project team has all the expertise needed for successful completion.
Recruit collaborators or technical consultants as needed. Include letters of support, if required. Clearly explain who will do what and why, as well as each person's expertise and why they are required on the project.

12. Use acronyms sparingly and identify them.
Acronyms conserve space but often at the expense of clarity. Consider including an acronym "key" to which the reader can easily refer.

13. Write clearly and concisely.
Avoid words with multiple meanings – e.g., use because instead of since, that instead of which, and may instead of might. Avoid redundancy except where it is critical, such as in hypotheses, goals or outcomes.

14. Use font effects sparingly.
These include highlighting, bold, italics, underlining, etc. Use consistently and primarily when critical to focus the reader on that text.

15. Use tables and figures to help illustrate important points.
A picture can be worth 1,000 words!

16. Avoid writing dense narratives.

17. Omit use of external links.
Proposals should be self-contained.

18. Write for both the expert and the novice.
Not all reviewers will be experts on your proposed topic but will have some expertise to contribute. Write to show seasoned reviewers that you are an expert and current on the topic. Write also so the novice reviewer can understand the proposal and to show the importance of the work.

19. Learn about the review process.
The best way to do this is through experience, like serving on RFA review panels. Review RFAs to identify programs for which you have expertise, and contact the program leader to volunteer. Provide a very brief description of your expertise and your CV.

20. For resubmitted proposals, respond to the previous review positively and effectively. Use the one-page Response to Previous Review to your advantage in communicating revisions. Be polite and appreciative. Reviewers will give credit to applicants for a nicely crafted Response to Previous Review.

Before we can jump right into writing, there is mandatory preparatory work. This stage is about research and information. The first part involves identifying potential funders and assessing their compatibility with your project based on a set of general criteria. Equally important is conducting a comprehensive needs or problem assessment to fully understand the specific issues your program or organization aims to address. This assessment should help you identify existing gaps within the community and clearly articulate how your project can effectively bridge these gaps. By ensuring that these preliminary steps are carefully executed, you set the stage for a well-informed, compelling grant proposal that is more likely to resonate with potential funders and successfully secure the necessary support.

Finding Grants

There are over 126,000 private foundations and over 90,000 governments in the U.S, and according to at least one database, over 2,000 corporate grants with current RFPs as of this writing. There are funders out there, it is simply a matter of finding the right match for your organization or project.

Once the type of funding required has been identified, the next step is to initiate the search for potential funding sources. This involves creating a comprehensive list of prospective funders. Due to the varied nature of funding proposals and the diverse needs associated with them, there is no universal approach that suits all scenarios when it comes to finding suitable funders. Many experts in grant proposal writing recommend thoroughly exploring all potential information sources. This search should include a wide array of entities, including federal, state, and local governments, foundations, nonprofits, corporations, professional associations, clubs, community groups, and religious institutions.

Each potential funder has its own set of grantmaking interests and priorities. An essential part of the research process is to carefully review how these interests align with the objectives outlined in your funding development plan. Understanding the alignment between a funder's interests and your project's goals can significantly increase the likelihood of a successful application. It is inefficient and counterproductive to pursue funding from sources whose goals do not support or align with the needs of your project.

To streamline this process, it is advisable to employ specific screening criteria to evaluate whether a grant opportunity is worth the effort of application preparation. Typically, these criteria might include the compatibility of goals, the potential for long-term funding, the funder's openness to new applicants, the complexity of the application process, and the typical award size. Such criteria help in assessing the viability of a funding source and ensure that the time spent on grant application is productive and targeted. Table 2.1 provides a (non-exhaustive) criteria approach to evaluating grant opportunities.

Table 2.1: Criteria for Evaluation

Topic or Field	The field in which a funding funder is willing to provide financial support.
Geography	Ensuring that the geographic region selected for the proposal is in an area the funding agency is willing to fund.
Award Type	Confirming that the funding agency provides the desired type of funding assistance that one is seeking.
Financial Range	Matching the needs of the project to the range of the grant awards offered.
Recipient Type	The entity seeking the funds is eligible for an award based on the funder's guidelines.

An example of misalignment between a funding request and a funder could be a scenario where an organization seeks $5,000 for a community garden project from a funder whose usual grants range from $50,000 to $100,000. Similarly, it would be ineffective to request $15,000 for an arts education program from a funding source that generally awards grants to health-based initiatives. In both cases, the disparity in the request and the funder's intentions indicates a fundamental mismatch that would likely lead to the rejection of the proposal. Such situations underscore the importance of ensuring that the funding requirements align with the grantor's awarding intents and capabilities to increase the chances of a successful application.

Historically, funding opportunities could be researched by means of any variety of media such as books, magazines, periodicals, newsletters, bulletins, journals, newspapers, flyers, written announcements, to name only a few. These days nearly all funding opportunities are found online. Some grantmakers publicly advertise that they have funding opportunities available while others rely on internal networking communications instead. Some funding agencies may choose to accept proposals throughout the year, others implement set deadlines for submissions. There are as many possibilities for how a funding opportunity might be managed as there are possible funding agencies to provide awards.

When looking for funding, there are a variety of sources and clearing houses that provide funding opportunities, offering support in a myriad of ways. Table 2.2 gives some resources to help identify potential financial support.

Table 2.2: Sources of Grants

Federal Government	● Grants.gov ● Federal Register ● USA.gov ● Federal Grants Wire ● Small Business Administration ● Grant Watch
State and Local Governments	● Grant Watch ● Iowagrants.gov (each state has a different database) ● Iowa Economic Development Authority
Corporations	● Grant Watch ● U.S. Chamber of Commerce ● Individual company web search
Foundations and Nonprofits	● Candid (Foundation Directory) ● Grant Watch ● Iowa Nonprofit Resource Center ● Northeast Iowa Community Foundation ● Iowa Community Action Association
Publications	● Chronicle of Philanthropy ● Nonprofit Times ● Philanthropy News Digest ● Philanthropy News Network Online ● Nonprofit World Magazine

Table 2.2 is not all-inclusive. Grants are also often available through such avenues as professional associations (e.g. the American Medical Association or the National Society of Accountants), clubs and community groups (e.g. Elks Club, Lion's Club, Daughters of the American Revolution), or religious institutions,

Most funding agencies prefer to contribute to only a part of an applicant's total funding needs rather than providing the full amount. This is a good thing. Securing funding from multiple sources not only builds a diverse supporter base but also reduces the risk associated with relying on a single funding source. Additionally, showing that various organizations recognize and support a project can enhance its credibility and attractiveness to new potential funders.

When preparing to submit a proposal, it is advisable to organize your list of funding sources into three categories. First, include grantors who have already committed funding. Second, list those to whom proposals have been sent and are currently under review. Finally, mention prospective funding agencies to whom you plan to apply but have not yet started the process. This structured approach not only clarifies the funding landscape for the proposal reviewers but also demonstrates thorough planning and organizational capability. One example of how this can be managed is in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3: Sample Grant Management Table

Grantor	**Amount**	**LOI Sent**	**Proposal Sent**	**Decision**	**Notes**
COMPLETE					
Jane and Phil Baker Foundation	$55,000	x	1/15/2024	Yes	
National Institutes of Health	$36,500	x	1/7/2024	Yes	
Centers for Disease Control	$21,500	x	2/1/2024	No	
Northeast Iowa Community Foundation	$10,000	not required	2/12/2024	Yes	
UNDER REVIEW					
Waterloo Community Foundation	$6,500	not required	4/2/2024		
Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation	$75,000	x	3/12/2024		

Iowa Dept. of Management	$12,250	not required	3/30/2024		
Iowa Economic Development Authority	$2,500	not required	4/10/2024		
TO-DO					
Mellon Foundation	$10,000-$500,000	x			
Rockefeller Foundation	$25,000-$500,000	x			
Greater Cedar Rapids Community Foundation	Up to $25,000	not required			
Iowa Department of Health and Human Services	$10,000	x			

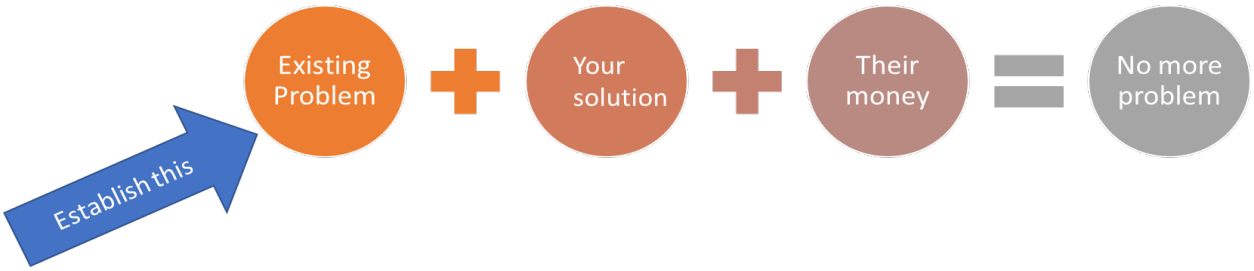
Needs/Problem Assessments

The order of operations in grant writing can seem a bit backward at first. Imagine talking to someone and going into great detail about all of the reasons that you are going to do a thing before you ever tell them what that thing is that you're going to do. This is how grants generally work.

The statement of need/problem is prioritized at the beginning as it establishes the context for problem-solving. A grant writer must present a clear and comprehensive understanding of the problem and subsequently link the proposed solution or project plan back to this initial problem statement. Although grants are typically awarded to address urgent issues, funders increasingly favor proposals that offer innovative and directly responsive programs. Thus, while the severity of the need remains important, the effectiveness and adaptability of the proposed solution often take precedence in the decision-making process of funders.

This is not the time to worry about the needs of the applicant organization. You aren't even actually writing yet. This is the time to conduct thorough background research so you can thoroughly discuss the needs of the community in which the organization works (Fig. 2.4).

Figure 2.4. Linkage Model



Often, the specific requirements of a funder's request for proposals (RFP) will outline the type of information needed in the statement of need/problem, such as socioeconomic, health, education, or programmatic data. However, in some instances, the funder may allow applicants the flexibility to decide which data to include to strengthen their case. The relevance of the context cannot be overstated. For example, if the community issue is a high rate of poverty concentrated in a particular neighborhood, your project aimed at poverty alleviation would naturally target that specific area. Conversely, if your strategy involves initiating an anti-poverty program in a community that, while in need, is not the most deprived, you might choose a neighborhood with a mixed economic profile to increase the chances of your project's success. In such scenarios, it's best to explain the rationale behind choosing one neighborhood over another, detailing why the selected area offers a better opportunity for positive outcomes.

There are two types of data, hard data (numbers, or quantitative information) and soft data (opinions, attitudes and feelings, or qualitative information). It is relatively easy to gather hard data. It is much harder to sort through to find what is valid information and what is relevant to your story. Census data are updated every ten years and often can be updated from local sources. The American Community Survey puts out new data every year. The CDC, NIH, NIMH, and…well, just about any government agency whose letters you can think of produces data and reports on a regular basis. Additionally, practically every business and nonprofit organization now collects data.

When evaluating the credibility of a website, it's helpful to start by examining the last three letters of the domain, such as ".edu" for educational institutions, ".gov" for government sites, ".org" for nonprofits, and ".com" for commercial entities. Typically, ".edu" and ".gov" domains are reliable, but be cautious as some sites may misuse these suffixes to appear credible.

Nonprofit websites often provide valuable information and resources, particularly in areas such as education, health, and social advocacy. However, when assessing the trustworthiness of these sites, it's essential to go beyond the surface and examine the specific agenda and mission of the nonprofit organization behind the website. While nonprofits are generally dedicated to public service rather than profit-making, they do have specific causes and objectives that might influence the presentation and interpretation of information.

For example, a nonprofit focusing on climate change might highlight data that underscores the urgency of their cause, potentially downplaying studies or statistics that suggest less immediate danger. Similarly, a nonprofit dedicated to educational reform may emphasize certain pedagogical approaches that align with their educational philosophy.

To evaluate the trustworthiness of information from a nonprofit website, consider the following:

1. Source Transparency: Does the website clearly state the organization's mission and funding sources? Transparency about who funds them can help you understand potential biases.
2. Evidence and Citation: Check whether the claims made on the site are supported by credible sources. Trustworthy nonprofit websites will reference or link to research or data that substantiates their statements.
3. Balance and Fairness: Does the content on the site acknowledge different viewpoints and complexities, or does it only present one side of an issue? A balanced approach suggests higher credibility.
4. Editorial Oversight: Look for signs of professional standards such as clear, error-free, and consistent content, which indicates strong editorial processes.

Understanding these elements can provide deeper insights into how the nonprofit curates its content and can help you decide how much weight to give the information they provide.

Commercial sites require a careful evaluation to determine their trustworthiness. Commercial websites, including those run by news organizations, are designed to generate profit, which can sometimes influence the presentation and focus of the information they provide. When evaluating the trustworthiness of commercial sites, it's important to critically assess several key factors:

1. Advertising and Sponsorship: Understand the relationship between the site’s content and its advertising. High levels of advertising, especially if the content seems directly influenced by advertisers or sponsors, can signal potential biases. It’s important to discern whether content is editorially independent or shaped by commercial interests.

2. Source of Funding: Knowing who funds the website can provide insights into potential biases. For example, a news site owned by a corporation with specific political or economic interests might reflect those interests in its reporting.
3. Journalistic Standards: Credible news websites adhere to ethical journalism standards, including accuracy, fairness, and impartiality. They should have a clear corrections policy and provide transparency about their editorial process. Check whether the site is affiliated with recognized professional organizations that enforce ethical standards, such as the Society of Professional Journalists in the U.S.
4. Author Expertise and Transparency: Reliable commercial news sites typically provide information about their authors, including their credentials and other works. This transparency helps readers assess the credibility of the content. Look for articles that cite sources or provide links to original research, enabling verification of claims.
5. Content Quality: Evaluate the quality of the information. Articles should be well-written, free of factual errors, and clear of sensationalist or emotionally charged language that might be intended to sway rather than inform readers.
6. Balance and Diversity of Perspectives: Trustworthy sites strive to present multiple viewpoints and cover a range of topics. This diversity helps ensure comprehensive reporting and reduces the risk of biased coverage.

By critically examining these aspects, you can better determine the reliability of commercial websites and distinguish between those that prioritize journalistic integrity and those that may be influenced by commercial interests.

Additionally, always note the publication date. In rapidly evolving fields, older information might be outdated. Ensure the information's accuracy by cross-verifying with other trusted sites. If discrepancies arise between different sources, further investigation is necessary.

Regarding sources like Wikipedia, while it contains a vast amount of information, the open-edit nature means reliability can fluctuate. Information might be inaccurately added either intentionally or inadvertently. Thus, treat Wikipedia as a preliminary research tool rather than a definitive source. Similarly, personal blogs, online forums, and chat rooms should be approached with caution as platforms for initial inquiry. They can provide leads for further research but are generally not reliable for verified information.

Soft data, on the other hand, refers to information that is subjective, qualitative, and interpretative in nature. Unlike hard data, which is quantifiable and derived from direct measurements (such as disease rates, financial metrics, or participation numbers), soft data includes opinions, sentiments, feelings, and perceptions. It’s the type of data that captures the nuances of human emotions and experiences, making it valuable for understanding context, motivations, and behaviors that hard data cannot reveal on its own.

Soft data can come from many places. Here are some examples:

1. Surveys and Questionnaires: These are classic tools for gathering soft data, particularly when it comes to assessing customer satisfaction, employee engagement, or market trends. Surveys and questionnaires can be structured to elicit subjective feedback on a variety of topics, allowing organizations to gauge feelings, preferences, and attitudes.
2. Interviews: Conducting individual or group interviews is another effective method for collecting soft data. Through conversational dynamics, interviews can uncover deeper insights into people's thoughts and feelings about a subject. These are particularly useful in exploratory stages of research or when detailed narratives are needed.
3. Focus Groups: This research technique involves guided discussions with selected participants and is commonly used to explore new products, test new concepts, or gather detailed feedback about experiences. The interactive setting helps to explore different perspectives, uncovering complex reactions that might not be captured through other data-gathering methods.
4. Social Media Monitoring: Social networks are a goldmine for soft data. By analyzing posts, comments, and interactions, researchers can tap into public sentiment and gather spontaneous and unstructured feedback about products, brands, or services.
5. Customer Feedback: Comments, reviews, and testimonials, whether collected through online platforms, customer service interactions, or via feedback forms, provide rich qualitative data. This feedback often reveals what customers value most or their pain points, which can guide improvements or innovations.
6. Ethnographic Research: This involves observing people in their natural environments, which can provide context-rich information and deeper understanding of user behaviors and lifestyle patterns.

Soft data provides context and depth to the numerical precision of hard data. For organizations, combining soft and hard data offers a more holistic view of their operations and markets. For example, while hard data can show a decline in program participation, soft data can help explain why customers are dissatisfied, guiding strategic adjustments.

In grant writing, soft data is instrumental for telling stories. Using the subtleties of community feeling ensures that decisions are not just statistically sound but also reflect a breadth and depth that numbers can't give us. Moreover, in a rapidly changing digital world, soft data becomes essential for adapting to emerging trends and behaviors that are not immediately quantifiable. It allows organizations to stay ahead by innovating based on not just what the numbers say, but also how people feel.

Ultimately, soft data enriches decision-making processes by adding a layer of human insight that hard data alone cannot provide. By carefully analyzing soft data, organizations can achieve greater empathy and effectiveness in their strategies, ensuring they meet their stakeholders'

needs more comprehensively.

Hard Data: Current research indicates that 20% of adolescents in our community are classified as obese, a rate that is 5% higher than the national average, according to the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey.

Soft Data: Interviews with local school nurses reveal that many obese adolescents report feelings of social isolation and low self-esteem, which are not captured by quantitative measures alone. Parents and teachers express concern over the lack of accessible programs that can effectively engage and support these students in making healthier lifestyle choices.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the preparatory phase of grant writing is foundational to crafting a successful proposal. Before a single word of the actual grant is written, considerable groundwork is necessary to ensure alignment between the grant seeker's objectives and the priorities of potential funders. Researching and selecting the right funders is vital; it involves not only identifying those whose funding criteria match your project but also organizing a systematic approach for managing submissions. This organized method ensures deadlines are met, and applications are tailored to each funder's specific requirements.

Equally important is conducting thorough background research on the topic at hand. Understanding the full scope of the problem you aim to address forms the bedrock of your proposal. This phase is about gathering both hard data — statistics and facts that demonstrate the urgency and scale of the issue — and soft data, such as personal stories or expert opinions that convey the human element of the problem. Together, these elements weave a compelling narrative that underpins the need for the proposed project.

The effort invested in this initial stage sets the stage for a robust proposal. By ensuring you have a clear understanding of the funding landscape and a well-researched, compelling case for your project, you position yourself as a credible solution provider to the issue at hand. This preparation not only enhances the quality of your grant proposal but significantly increases the likelihood of achieving funding success. Therefore, the prep work should be viewed not just as a preliminary step, but as a requisite component of the grant writing process that directly contributes to the ultimate goal of securing funding.

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Chapter 3: Developing Project Ideas

In early 2024, the National Book Foundation announced a funding opportunity where nonprofit literary arts organizations could apply for up to $10,000 to support increasing their capacity. This could include anything from fundraising capabilities, to marketing, to training opportunities for staff, to…well, pretty much anything that would enable the organization to increase their reach.

The genesis of any successful grant proposal is a well-conceived project idea. This involves not just the spark of inspiration but the careful cultivation and refinement of ideas to ensure they meet both community needs and funder priorities. It's a stage where creativity meets strategy, allowing for the exploration of innovative solutions to pressing problems while also considering the practical aspects of funding, implementation, and impact. This section delves into the processes of generating project ideas, making a distinction between reactive and proactive grant writing, and getting into the specifics of two different types of brainstorming.

Ensuring that you understand this phase of the process will get you through the, "okay, now what?" part of finding an opportunity such as the one offered by the National Book Foundation.

Reactive and Proactive Grant Seeking

The two primary approaches to grant seeking are reactive and proactive methods. Understanding the differences between these approaches is essential, as it impacts how nonprofits come up with project ideas. Each method has its unique characteristics, benefits, and challenges. By comprehending these differences, a nonprofit can significantly enhance its ability to secure necessary funding and sustain its operations.

Reactive Grant Seeking

Reactive grant seeking involves responding to requests for proposals (RFPs) issued by grantmakers. This approach mirrors common practices in the business and government sectors, where companies or organizations bid on projects by submitting detailed proposals that align with the outlined requirements of the RFP. So, if a city was looking to replace an intersection that has a stoplight with one that manages traffic using a roundabout (aka a traffic circle or rotary depending on your geographic location), they are unlikely to accomplish this using their own city employees. Rather, they put out an RFP that explains what they are looking for and then it is up to private companies to submit proposals, or bids, for how much they would charge the city to do that work for them. Funders do similar things with RFPs for the projects/programs that they would like to see carried out.

Key Steps in Reactive Grant Seeking

1. Identifying Opportunities: Nonprofit organizations are frequently on the lookout for RFPs from various sources, including foundations, government agencies, and other grantmaking entities. These RFPs outline specific issues or problems that the grantmaker aims to address, along with the criteria for proposal submissions.

2. Proposal Development: Once an RFP is identified, the nonprofit develops a proposal that addresses the specified issue, demonstrating how it will execute the project effectively and efficiently. This proposal includes the project plan, budget, and the qualifications of the organization.
3. Submission and Waiting: After the proposal is submitted, the nonprofit waits for the grantmaker to review all submissions and select the most suitable proposals for funding.

Examples and Applications

Regranting is a common form of reactive grant seeking. Larger entities, such as foundations or government units, receive substantial grants and then issue RFPs to distribute portions of these funds to smaller, often local, nonprofit organizations. For example, funds from the tobacco settlement judgment were distributed to community foundations, which then regranted to local organizations focusing on educational or smoking cessation programs.

Another instance is the federal government's effort to involve small faith-based and community organizations (FBCOs) in grant programs. Since many small FBCOs lacked the capacity to manage federal grants directly, larger nonprofits applied for these grants as fiscal agents. Upon receiving the grants, they regranted a portion of the funds to the local FBCOs and managed the administration and reporting processes.

Advantages and Challenges

Reactive grant seeking allows nonprofits to access specific funding opportunities tailored to particular projects. However, it is highly competitive, and success depends on the nonprofit's ability to align closely with the grantmaker's objectives. Additionally, the process can be time-consuming and may not always align with the nonprofit’s strategic priorities.

Proactive Grant Seeking

Proactive grant seeking, on the other hand, involves identifying potential funding sources that align with the nonprofit's mission and goals, and then reaching out to these sources to secure funding. This approach requires a deep understanding of the philanthropic landscape, including the giving patterns and priorities of various foundations and corporations.

Key Steps in Proactive Grant Seeking

1. Research: Nonprofits invest time in researching potential funders, examining their past giving patterns, and understanding their strategic priorities. This helps in identifying the foundations and corporations that are most likely to support the nonprofit’s initiatives.
2. Building Relationships: Establishing and nurturing relationships with potential funders is crucial. This may involve initial meetings, attending networking events, and consistent communication to keep the funders informed about the nonprofit’s work and impact.
3. Tailored Proposals: Proactive grant seekers develop tailored proposals that highlight how their projects align with the funder’s mission and goals. These proposals are often submitted without an RFP, showcasing the nonprofit’s initiatives and seeking support.

Examples and Applications

Proactive grant seeking can be highly effective for long-term funding strategies. For instance, a nonprofit focused on environmental conservation might research foundations dedicated to sustainability and renewable energy. By understanding these foundations' priorities, the nonprofit can propose projects that not only align with their mission but also offer innovative solutions to pressing environmental issues.

Advantages and Challenges

Proactive grant seeking allows nonprofits to align their funding strategies with their long-term goals, potentially leading to more sustainable funding sources. It also helps in building lasting relationships with funders, which can result in ongoing support. However, this approach requires significant effort in research and relationship-building and may not yield immediate results.

Both reactive and proactive grant seeking are essential strategies for nonprofits aiming to secure funding and sustain their operations. Reactive grant seeking is effective for accessing specific, often larger grants through a competitive process, while proactive grant seeking focuses on building relationships and aligning funding sources with the nonprofit's strategic goals. A comprehensive fundraising strategy should incorporate both approaches, balancing the immediate opportunities provided by reactive grant seeking with the long-term sustainability offered by proactive grant seeking. By leveraging both methods, nonprofits can enhance their funding prospects and better achieve their mission and goals.

Generating and Refining Ideas for Grant Proposals

Developing a grant proposal begins with generating innovative ideas, followed by careful refinement to ensure these ideas are impactful and feasible. This phase lays a strong foundation for your project, resonating with both the community it serves and potential funders.

The generation of project ideas is a creative process that often involves brainstorming sessions, engaging with community members, and consulting with experts within your field. Encourage a free flow of ideas without judgment to foster an environment where innovative solutions can emerge. Consider the following strategies:

- **Brainstorming Sessions**: Gather your team for structured brainstorming sessions. Use techniques like mind mapping, the Six Hats or the SCAMPER method (See below for more information) to explore different angles and perspectives. These sessions can generate a wide array of potential project ideas by encouraging team members to think creatively and collaboratively.
- **Community Engagement**: Directly involve community members or the target population in the ideation process. This can provide invaluable insights into their needs, challenges, and the types of solutions they believe would be most effective. Engaging the community ensures that the project is grounded in real-world issues and has the support of those it aims to benefit.
- **Expert Consultation**: Seek advice and input from subject matter experts. Their knowledge can spark new ideas or highlight emerging needs and trends in the field that

your project could address. Experts can provide a broader perspective on potential challenges and opportunities, helping to shape more innovative and effective project concepts.

Once a broad range of ideas has been generated, the next step is to refine these ideas into a coherent and focused project concept. This involves evaluating each idea against criteria such as impact potential, alignment with organizational goals, feasibility, and fundability. Key steps in the refinement process include:

- **Assessing Relevance and Impact**: Evaluate how each idea addresses the identified needs of your target population and the potential for making a meaningful impact. Prioritize ideas that offer innovative solutions to pressing problems. This assessment ensures that the project will make a significant difference in the community.
- **Alignment with Organizational Goals**: Ensure that the project ideas are in harmony with your organization's mission and strategic objectives. This alignment strengthens your proposal and ensures the project is a natural extension of your organization's work. Projects that align well with your organization's goals are more likely to receive support from stakeholders and funders.
- **Feasibility Analysis**: Consider the practical aspects of implementing your project ideas. Analyze resources, capabilities, timeframes, and potential obstacles to assess whether the project can be realistically executed. This analysis helps identify any potential challenges early on and allows for the development of strategies to address them.
- **Funder Compatibility**: Review potential funders' priorities and interests to gauge the compatibility of your project ideas with their funding goals. This step is critical for identifying projects that stand a better chance of receiving support. Understanding the funder's mission and priorities ensures that your proposal is tailored to their interests.

Identifying Existing Needs within the Nonprofit

One of the easiest ways to come up with a starting point for proposals is to take inventory of needs within the organization. Ask yourself questions like:

- Do you have adequate funding for an existing program?
- Do you have funding that is time-limited? If so, when will that funding run out?
- Do you have the material needs covered for your programs, or are you lacking equipment, transportation, or technology?
- Do you have enough paid staff to carry out the mission activities?

Recognizing Programs that Need Expansion

If your nonprofit is staying on top of its current needs, you might be thinking about how to expand programs so that they have a greater reach. Consider the following:

- Do you have programs that are successful which could be built upon?
- Do you have programs with more demonstrated needs than you are currently able to serve?
- What types of resources would allow you to serve more patrons?

Brainstorming the "Nice to Haves," Not Just the "Need to Haves"

When looking at the vision of your nonprofit, dream for the future. Think about the long-term goals of the organization. Many times, when nonprofits are just staying afloat, the vision goes by the wayside. But don't be afraid to visualize the future and become a little idealistic. Ask yourself these questions:

- What would we do if we had $20k, $50k (or fill in the blank) more dollars?
- What could we do with more staff, or another car, van, office (replace with whatever need you have)?
- What are we always wishing we had that always seems out of reach?
- Does the staff have enough training to do their jobs, provide the best service, etc?

Not everything will be a suitable request right at the moment, but taking this pause to brainstorm ideas can help you seek out potential funding opportunities and create a plan to go after them.

Conducting a Search for Funding Opportunities That Align with Your Mission

Once you have identified some of your nonprofit's current or future needs, the next steps are to find suitable funders and to craft a compelling proposal. It's important to come up with an identified need first, then seek opportunities for funding, and not the other way around. Many new nonprofits get into the habit of "chasing dollars" rather than establishing what they need first, then seeking opportunities that align with that need. When you find a funder whose mission aligns with yours, that's a great springboard for your ideas.

There are many search options to help find grant funders that align with your mission. Networking with other nonprofit leaders, using online search tools, and subscribing to email updates from known funders are just a few resources. To make your search for funders more efficient and productive, check out Instrumentl's intelligent matching feature with a 14-day free trial.

Reviewing Applications, 990s, and Other Reports from Funders

When you find a potential funder, check out the application questions and requirements. This will give you a better understanding of the projects they will likely fund and the data that you'll need to make a strong proposal. For example, look at the following types of information on the application:

- Do they fund general operations or only projects?
- Are there specific focus areas on which they concentrate?
- If awarded, how long is the grant period?

Reviewing 990 reports from funders, which are year-end reports that grantmaking foundations must file, can provide insights into who they have awarded funds to and the types of projects and amounts funded in the past. This information can serve as a good starting point for your proposal.

Describing How Funding an Identified Need Would Help Your Organization and Those You Serve

When you create a grant proposal, the reviewer should clearly see how the requested amount is going to help with the capacity of your organization. If you know that you need a vehicle, for example, select a request amount appropriate to that price tag. Then, describe to the reader how this vehicle would help the nonprofit as a whole and/or its staff. Reviewers appreciate knowing the impact that their contribution will have.

Strong proposals also clearly discuss how the request amount will help the patrons you serve, even if that's by way of helping the staff. For example, describe how this vehicle will allow staff to deliver more food, transport rescued animals, or visit far-away homes—whatever need it is serving in your nonprofit. Funders will appreciate seeing how the request connects to the greater mission.

Conclusion

Generating and refining ideas is a dynamic and critical phase in the development of a grant proposal. It requires a balance of creativity, strategic thinking, and practical considerations. By fostering an environment that encourages innovation, actively engaging with your community and experts, and rigorously evaluating your ideas against criteria of impact, feasibility, and funder alignment, you can develop a project concept that is compelling, actionable, and poised for success. This thoughtful approach to ideation and refinement is what ultimately transforms a good idea into a great project ready for funding.

Brainstorming

Effective brainstorming is one of the most important tools when it comes to generating ideas and solutions, whether you are working individually or as part of a team. In this section, we will explore three powerful brainstorming techniques: Mind Mapping, the Six Thinking Hats method, and the SCAMPER method. Mind Mapping, a visual tool, helps organize and connect ideas through a central concept, promoting creativity and clarity. The Six Thinking Hats method encourages participants to explore different perspectives systematically, and the SCAMPER method prompts creative thinking by challenging individuals to Substitute, Combine, Adapt, Modify, Put to another use, Eliminate, and Rearrange aspects of a concept or problem. These are just a few examples of many of the brainstorming methods that are out there, however they represent diverse and structured approaches to brainstorming. Learning techniques like these will help writers generate fresh, innovative solutions and ideas for grant proposals.Mind Mapping

Mind Mapping

A mind map is a tool used to represent ideas and concepts visually. In other words, it is a graphical way to illustrate connections between various pieces of information or ideas. Mind maps are used for brainstorming, problem-solving, decision-making, and organizing information, and can be a great way to develop project ideas.

Mind maps typically start with a central concept or idea, from which related subtopics radiate. These subtopics can then branch out further into more specific details or related ideas. The hierarchical and associative connections between ideas are emphasized by lines or arrows, while keywords, symbols, images, and colors can be used to enhance memory and organization.

Example of a Mind Map

Imagine a nonprofit organization is developing ideas for a grant proposal. They may create a mind map to organize their thoughts and processes.

Central Idea: Grant Proposal Development for Nonprofit Organization

First-Level Branches (Main Categories):

Community Needs Assessment

- Local Issues
- Beneficiary Demographics
- Surveys and Data Collection
- Key Stakeholders

Project Design

- Goals and Objectives
- Activities and Interventions
- Timeline
- Resources Needed

Budget and Funding

- Cost Estimates
- Funding Sources
- Budget Justification
- In-Kind Contributions

Partnerships and Collaboration

- Potential Partners
- Roles and Responsibilities
- Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs)
- Community Support

Evaluation and Impact

- Metrics and Indicators
- Data Collection Methods
- Reporting
- Long-Term Impact

Sustainability

- Future Funding
- Capacity Building
- Scalability
- Community Ownership

Each of these branches would then extend into more specific sub-branches. For instance, under "Project Design," there might be further branches for "Goal Setting," "Specific Activities," "Detailed Timeline," etc.

Optional Additional Elements:

- **Images:** Pictures representing community activities, charts, dollar signs, partnership logos, etc.
- **Colors:** Different colors to distinguish between the various branches and levels of hierarchy.
- **Connections:** Lines or arrows to show how different subtopics interrelate, such as connecting "Local Issues" with "Goals and Objectives" or "Future Funding" with "Sustainability."

The mind map helps the nonprofit organization visualize the structure of their grant proposal and the connections between different components, making it easier to identify potential gaps, overlaps, or areas for new development. It can be used as a starting point for discussion and further detailed planning.

Six Thinking Hats

The Six Thinking Hats technique is a method, developed by Edward de Bono, for guided discussion and brainstorming that involves metaphorically "wearing" six different hats, each representing a distinct type of thinking. By systematically focusing on each of these hats, an individual or group can explore various perspectives, leading to more well-rounded and effective decision-making. Here's a breakdown of what each hat represents:

- **Blue Hat: "The Conductor's Hat"** Focuses on controlling the thinking process and managing the discussion. This hat is used to set agendas, summarize progress, and reach conclusions.
- **Green Hat: "The Creative Hat"** Encourages creative thinking and the generation of new ideas. This hat is all about innovation and exploring alternative possibilities.
- **Red Hat: "The Hat for the Heart"** Represents emotions and intuition. Participants can express their feelings and gut reactions without needing to justify them logically.
- **Yellow Hat: "The Optimist's Hat"** Emphasizes positive thinking and exploring the benefits and value of ideas. This hat looks at the bright side and identifies potential gains.
- **Black Hat: "The Judge's Hat"** Involves critical judgment and identifying risks and flaws. This hat is used for caution and careful evaluation of ideas.

- **White Hat: "The Factual Hat"** Focuses on gathering information and analyzing data. This hat deals with facts, figures, and objective data analysis.

How to Use the Six Thinking Hats Technique for Grant Writing

Step 1: Define the Focus

Start by clearly defining the problem, idea, or topic that needs brainstorming. For instance, if you are writing a grant proposal to secure funding for a community garden project, the focus could be on identifying the project's main objectives, the community needs it addresses, and the expected outcomes.

Step 2: Select Participants

Choose a diverse group of individuals who bring different perspectives, expertise, and roles to the discussion. This diversity will enhance the brainstorming process and ensure a comprehensive exploration of ideas. For example, include community members, gardening experts, local business owners, and grant writing specialists.

Step 3: Introduce the Six Hats

The facilitator introduces the concept of the Six Thinking Hats and explains the meaning and role of each hat. Participants should understand the thinking styles associated with each hat and the purpose they serve during the session. For example, explain that the Green Hat will focus on creative solutions for garden layout and sustainability practices.

Step 4: Assign Hat Roles

The facilitator assigns specific hat roles to participants. Each person is responsible for wearing a particular hat for a given period. This ensures that all perspectives are covered during the brainstorming session. For instance, assign the White Hat to the participant who will gather and present data on local soil quality and weather conditions.

Step 5: Hat Rotation

Participants switch roles by changing hats at designated intervals. This rotation ensures that everyone has the chance to contribute from different perspectives and prevents individuals from becoming fixated on a single thinking style. For example, after 15 minutes, the person wearing the Red Hat (focusing on emotions and community sentiment) will switch to the Black Hat (focusing on potential risks and challenges).

Step 6: Hat Exploration

While wearing a specific hat, participants share their thoughts, ideas, observations, or questions related to the topic. The facilitator guides the discussion, ensuring that the focus remains on the thinking style represented by the current hat. For example, during the Yellow Hat phase,

participants might discuss the positive impact of the garden on local food security and community cohesion.

Step 7: Summarize and Analyze

At the end of the session, the facilitator summarizes the key insights, observations, ideas, and conclusions from each thinking style. This summary helps to consolidate the collective understanding, identify patterns, and inform subsequent decision-making processes. For example, compile a summary highlighting the creative solutions, potential risks, factual data, and emotional responses discussed during the session.

Benefits of Using the Six Thinking Hats for Grant Writing

Enhanced Creativity

The Green Hat encourages participants to think outside the box and generate innovative ideas. For instance, participants might suggest unique garden designs, partnerships with local schools for educational programs, or innovative methods for water conservation.

Balanced Thinking

By systematically considering all perspectives—facts, emotions, risks, benefits, and process control—the technique ensures balanced and fair thinking. This comprehensive approach results in more robust and well-rounded grant proposals. For example, by wearing the Black Hat, participants can identify and address potential risks like vandalism or maintenance challenges, ensuring the proposal is realistic and thorough.

Improved Collaboration

The structured framework of the Six Thinking Hats facilitates effective collaboration by ensuring that all participants can contribute to the discussion without conflicts or interruptions. This inclusivity fosters a more cohesive team effort. For example, community members and experts can share their viewpoints openly, leading to a richer and more diverse set of ideas.

Efficient Decision-Making

The method enables faster and more efficient decision-making by systematically analyzing different aspects, risks, benefits, and alternative possibilities. This streamlined approach helps reduce the time spent on deliberation and enables timely outcomes. For example, quickly identifying the most feasible and impactful solutions for the community garden project.

Reduced Bias and Subjectivity

Participants are encouraged to set aside personal biases and judgments and focus on the specific thinking style that their appointed hat represents. This objectivity leads to more rational and well-founded decisions. For example, the White Hat ensures that decisions are based on accurate data and evidence, rather than personal opinions or assumptions.

Increased Productivity

The structured and organized approach of the Six Hats process keeps discussions concentrated on the overall goal. By channeling efforts towards a common objective, participants can maintain focus throughout the session, leading to heightened productivity. For example, by having clear roles and focused discussions, the team can efficiently develop a comprehensive and compelling grant proposal.

Conclusion

Incorporating the Six Thinking Hats technique into the grant writing brainstorming process can significantly enhance the quality and effectiveness of grant proposals. By encouraging diverse perspectives, fostering creativity, and ensuring balanced thinking, this method helps teams develop well-rounded and compelling proposals that stand a better chance of securing funding. For grant writers looking to improve their brainstorming sessions, the Six Thinking Hats technique offers a powerful and structured approach to achieving success.

SCAMPER Technique

The SCAMPER technique is a creative brainstorming method that helps individuals and teams generate innovative ideas by prompting them to think about existing concepts in new ways. SCAMPER is an acronym for Substitute, Combine, Adapt, Modify, Put to another use, Eliminate, and Rearrange, each representing a different strategy for thinking about improvements or alternatives. By systematically applying these prompts to a product, process, or problem, participants can uncover fresh perspectives and potential solutions. For instance, substituting one component with another might lead to a more efficient design, while combining elements from different sources could result in a novel product. Adapting an existing idea to a new context or market might reveal untapped opportunities. Modifying aspects of a concept can enhance its appeal or functionality, and considering other uses can broaden its application. Eliminating unnecessary parts can simplify and streamline, and rearranging components can lead to more effective configurations.

This technique can be valuable when it comes to brainstorming and developing innovative ideas in grant writing. When applying SCAMPER to grant writing, you might substitute one element of your project with a more effective alternative, combine different ideas to create a more comprehensive approach, or adapt a successful strategy from another field to your project. Modifying certain aspects can make your proposal more appealing to funders, while thinking about how to put your project's outcomes to other uses can demonstrate its broader impact. Eliminating non-essential components can streamline your proposal, making it more focused and easier to understand, and rearranging parts of your plan can lead to a more logical and persuasive narrative. Using SCAMPER, grant writers can think creatively and develop robust, compelling proposals that stand out to potential funders.

Substitute

The "Substitute" component of the SCAMPER technique encourages us to consider what elements of a product or process can be replaced to achieve a different or improved outcome. This might involve substituting materials, people, rules, or even the use of the product itself. By experimenting with different substitutions, we can identify changes that enhance functionality or efficiency. This trial-and-error approach allows for creative problem-solving by asking questions such as: What else could be used instead? Who else could fulfill this role? What other elements, processes, approaches, or forces could be applied? Could this take place in a different setting? By exploring these possibilities, we open up new avenues for innovation and improvement.

Example: Innovative food items often use the substitute technique–consider the “cronut”, a combination of croissant and donut that hit the NYC food scene in 2013. But also imagine a nonprofit organization running a community garden project aimed at providing fresh produce to low-income families. The "Substitute" component of the SCAMPER technique could be applied to improve this project.

For instance, the organization might consider substituting the type of crops grown. Instead of traditional vegetables like tomatoes and lettuce, they could substitute with more culturally relevant crops that better meet the dietary preferences of the community they serve. This could involve growing vegetables that are staples in the diets of the local immigrant population, thereby increasing engagement and satisfaction.

Alternatively, the nonprofit could substitute volunteer roles. If the project currently relies on community volunteers for all tasks, they might substitute some of these roles with skilled horticulturists or agriculture students who can provide expert knowledge and improve crop yields.

Combine

The "Combine" component of the SCAMPER technique asks us to consider how different features, uses, or components can be merged to create a superior or more comprehensive product. This might involve synthesizing features from various projects or programs to develop a more holistic solution. When applied this way, it might mean bringing together different team members to collaborate and combine their work for greater synergy. By thinking about how two or more parts of a product or process can be integrated, we can generate innovative outcomes and enhance overall effectiveness. Typical questions to consider include: Where are there overlaps in missions and goals? What ideas, purposes, units, or appeals might I combine? This approach allows for creative combinations that can lead to novel solutions.

Example: You might be reading this on one of the greatest examples of combining features that has ever happened, the smart phone. A phone, computer, calculator, television, radio, and more…all in one product? Brilliant. Now consider an organization that runs youth education and community health programs. Applying the "Combine" component could create a more impactful and holistic initiative.

For example, the organization could combine the youth education program with the community health program to develop a comprehensive after-school health and wellness curriculum. This new program could integrate educational activities with health workshops, teaching students about nutrition, exercise, and mental health alongside their academic subjects.

By combining the expertise of educators and health professionals, the program could offer hands-on learning experiences, such as cooking classes that teach healthy eating habits, or fitness sessions that double as physical education. The collaboration could also extend to including parents and community members, creating a support network that reinforces the lessons learned by the youth.

Furthermore, the combined program could utilize resources more efficiently. Shared facilities, joint training sessions for staff, and unified outreach efforts could reduce costs and maximize the reach and effectiveness of both initiatives.

Adapt

What aspects of a product or process can be adjusted to enhance its performance? This involves thinking about how solutions to one problem might be adapted to address another issue, or how a product or process can evolve to meet changing contexts or needs. By identifying which parts can be modified, we can improve functionality and relevance. Key questions to explore include: Does the past offer a parallel? What else is similar to this? What other ideas does this suggest? What could be adapted for use as a solution? Is there a model that we could copy? Who might I emulate? By adapting elements thoughtfully, we can achieve innovative and effective improvements.

Example: Readers of a certain age may remember a period of time where “Netflix” meant picking out what you wanted to watch and then waiting on the DVD to arrive in the mail so you could watch it. Not too long thereafter, the technology became available to stream these videos directly. Netflix adapted their model and began focusing on their streaming service.

Imagine a nonprofit organization that runs a successful job training program for adults. Applying the "Adapt" component of the SCAMPER technique could expand the program's impact by tweaking it to address another community need. For instance, the organization could adapt the job training program for high school students who are at risk of dropping out. By slightly modifying the curriculum and structure to suit younger participants, the program can help these students gain valuable skills and work experience, potentially keeping them engaged in their education and improving their future job prospects.

The adaptation might involve adjusting the training schedule to fit around school hours, incorporating mentorship from industry professionals who can inspire and guide the students, and adding elements that address the unique challenges faced by teenagers, such as balancing school and work or preparing for college applications. Additionally, the program could adapt some of its content to be more relevant to the interests and career aspirations of the youth. This might mean including modules on emerging industries or technology skills that are particularly appealing to younger generations.

By adapting the existing job training program to serve at-risk high school students, the nonprofit can leverage its proven methods and resources to make a significant difference in a new demographic, ultimately broadening its impact on the community.

Modify

The "Modify" (or sometimes, "Minimize/Magnify") component of the SCAMPER technique encourages us to change aspects of a project or program to achieve different outcomes. This could mean magnifying certain parts to highlight their importance or minifying elements to enhance overall efficiency. Consider modifying the structure, scope, or focus of the project to see how these changes impact its effectiveness and impact. Typical questions to explore include: What other approach or scale might we adopt? What might we add or remove? By thoughtfully modifying elements of a project or program, we can create improved versions that better meet the goals and needs of stakeholders.

Example: Consider a nonprofit organization that operates a mentorship program for young entrepreneurs. Applying the "Modify" component could help enhance the program's effectiveness and reach.For instance, the organization might magnify the networking aspect of the program. They could create larger-scale networking events or conferences, inviting successful entrepreneurs, investors, and industry experts to interact with the mentees. This could provide more significant opportunities for the young entrepreneurs to build valuable connections, gain insights, and find potential collaborators or sponsors for their ventures.

Or, as an alternative, the organization could minimize the mentorship sessions to focus on more frequent, short, and intensive coaching interactions rather than less frequent, longer meetings. This modification could make the mentorship more dynamic and responsive to the immediate needs of the young entrepreneurs, allowing for quicker adjustments and more agile development of their business ideas.

Additionally, the program could modify its content by incorporating new topics such as digital marketing, sustainability practices, or leveraging social media for business growth. These updates would keep the program relevant to current market trends and the evolving needs of new businesses.

By modifying these elements thoughtfully, the organization can create a more impactful, relevant, and efficient mentorship program that better supports the development and success of young entrepreneurs.

Put to Another Use

This piece has us consider how a project or program can be utilized in different contexts or fields. This involves considering the potential benefits of applying the project in a new industry or for a different purpose than initially intended. By reimagining the use of the project or program, we can uncover new opportunities and expand its impact. Typical questions to guide this process include: What new ways are there to use this? Might this be used in other places?

What if it was modified? By thinking creatively about alternative applications, we can maximize the value and relevance of our projects and programs.

Example: The ‘put to another use’ technique can inspire creative ways to serve a larger audience. For instance, a literacy program for immigrants might consider adapting to also serve young parents. By integrating literacy training with parenting classes, for example, the program can help parents improve their own skills while also learning how to support their children's early literacy development. This dual-focus approach could enhance the educational outcomes for both generations in addition to the new Americans that were being served before. By reimagining the potential applications of the literacy program, the nonprofit can maximize its resources, reach new audiences, and create a broader, more versatile impact on the community.

Eliminate

The "Eliminate" component focuses on improving a project or program by removing unnecessary elements. Simplifying or streamlining components can often enhance overall efficiency and effectiveness. Consider what might happen if certain parts were eliminated or minimized. Typical questions to guide this process include: What might I understate? What might I eliminate? What might I streamline? What might I make smaller, lower, shorter, or lighter? By thoughtfully eliminating redundant or non-essential elements, we can create a more focused and efficient project or program that better serves its purpose and meets the needs of stakeholders.

Example: The same readers who remember getting deliveries from Netflix may remember inserting CDs into a drive in their laptops. This was largely how one would download new software, watch a movie, or even make music mixes to listen to later. But then–computers stopped coming with these drives. While it was tough for many to get used to at first, technology had moved forward such that it was now possible to download programs and software directly from the internet. Furthermore, streaming of video and music had become more common so there was less of a need in that department. The big benefit for the computer companies was that by eliminating that drive, they were able to save a significant amount of space, allowing for thinner and lighter computers.

We can apply this same principle to programs and projects. Think about a nonprofit organization that operates a comprehensive after-school program for children, which includes various activities such as tutoring, sports, arts and crafts, and computer skills training. Applying the "Eliminate" component of the SCAMPER technique could help streamline the program to improve its efficiency and effectiveness.

For instance, the organization might consider eliminating redundant or low-impact activities. If feedback and data show that certain activities, like a specific arts and crafts project, are not as engaging or beneficial as others, these can be removed. This allows the program to focus more on high-impact activities like tutoring and computer skills training, which have shown significant benefits in improving academic performance and digital literacy. Additionally, the organization could eliminate complex administrative processes that slow down program operations.

Simplifying registration procedures, reducing paperwork, and utilizing digital tools for communication and tracking can make the program more accessible and easier to manage.

By eliminating unnecessary components and streamlining processes, the nonprofit can create a more focused, efficient, and impactful after-school program that better serves the needs of the children and the community.

Rearrange

The "Rearrange" component has us explore how changing the sequence or order of a project or program can produce different outcomes. By rearranging, flipping, or swapping parts, we can discover new patterns and improve effectiveness. Consider what might happen if components were interchanged, if the process worked in reverse, or if the sequence were altered. Typical questions to guide this exploration include: What might be rearranged? What other pattern, layout, or sequence could be considered? Can parts of the program/project be interchanged? Could roles be reversed in some way? By experimenting with different arrangements, we can uncover innovative approaches and optimize our projects and programs.

Example: An organization may look at elements of a program such as the order of operations. For instance, consider a nonprofit that helps prepare people to take the U.S. Citizenship exam and become active, knowledgeable citizens. In this case the organization might consider rearranging the sequence of the training modules. If the current sequence starts with basic facts for the exam and progresses to advanced topics like how to file taxes and how to vote, they could experiment with integrating practical, hands-on experience earlier in the program. By rearranging the sequence, participants might gain immediate context for their learning, making the theoretical components more relevant and easier to grasp.

Conclusion

In grant writing, using SCAMPER can lead to the development of robust and compelling proposals. By systematically applying each SCAMPER prompt, grant writers can enhance the creativity and thoroughness of their proposals, making them stand out to potential funders. This approach ensures that all aspects of a project are considered, from innovative solutions to potential challenges, ultimately leading to more successful grant applications.

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Chapter 4: Letters of Inquiry

Writing a grant proposal is hard work. And some are very hard work. One of the worst feelings is pouring yourself into a grant and clicking that submit button only to be told that the funder is not the right fit for your project or program. Thus, a Letter of Inquiry (LOI) is a key component in the realm of grant-seeking, serving as an initial link between potential funders and those seeking funding. This preliminary communication tool is designed to gauge a funder's interest in a proposed project or program, saving time and streamlining the grant application process for both parties. You don't want to spend hours developing and writing a proposal for a funder who doesn't line up with your cause and has no chance of funding your project.

The purpose of an LOI extends beyond mere introduction; it boils down the mission of the applying organization, the objectives of the project seeking funding, and notably, how the initiative aligns with the funder's goals and priorities. It should be brief, but despite its length, an LOI should convey the significance, anticipated outcomes, and funding requirements of the project with clarity and impact. This strategic summary not only serves to inform but also to engage the funder's interest, setting the groundwork for a potential partnership.

The advantages of utilizing an LOI in the grant-seeking process are many. For applicants, the LOI represents a time-efficient approach to present their case without the extensive resource investment typically required for a full grant proposal. This preliminary step offers an opportunity for early feedback, potentially saving applicants from pursuing unsuitable funding avenues. Funders benefit from this arrangement by being able to sift through a larger volume of inquiries, identifying those proposals that best match their funding objectives with greater ease. Moreover, an LOI offers the chance to make a compelling first impression, a critical aspect in the competitive realm of grant funding.

Crafting an LOI poses its unique set of challenges, however. The constrained format demands exceptional clarity and conciseness to distill complex project ideas into a compelling narrative that resonates with the funder's interests. The high volume of LOIs received by funders also means that standing out from the crowd requires not only a clear alignment with the funder's goals but also a demonstration of the project's unique value and potential for impact.

As such, mastering the art of writing an effective LOI is a valuable skill for any grant seeker, laying the foundation for successful funding relationships and the realization of impactful projects.

The Usual Structure of a Letter of Inquiry

Even though the content is going to vary based on what the funder wants, there is a general format that you can start with. You want to be appropriately formal. Address the name of the individual at the foundation who will be receiving the letter personally and professionally. You want the funders to know that you are not simply blanketing the whole world with inquiry letters,

but have actually put time into researching their organization and the appropriateness of our request. Avoid “Dear Sir/Ma’am” or “To Whom It May Concern” if at all possible.

“Dear Ms. Gates,”

An LOI should continue with an introductory paragraph that includes essential information such as your name, position, organization, the program seeking funding, and the amount requested. This part should be brief. It should also be able to stand alone. If a reviewer has no time to do anything but read the first paragraph of each request, they should be able to figure out who you are, what you do, and what you want right away. Be clear and concise and don’t waste their time.

My name is Jayme Renfro and I am the Development Director of the [XYZ Nonprofit Organization]. We are a 501(c)3 organization located in [City, State]. I am writing to request funding from [Foundation Name] for our proposal to [brief program description] in the amount of $[X] over 2 years.

Following this, the body paragraphs should dive into the specifics of your program - the need it addresses, the target demographic, and how it plans to tackle the identified problem through measurable objectives and planned activities.

The mission of [XYZ Nonprofit Organization] is to provide [the things you provide]. Our target populations include [be specific]. Our programming is focused on the [people or places]. Currently, we run [# of programs] with [# of individuals] served annually. Through our services, we have provided [give some solid outcome data here].

Currently, in [geographic area] and among [target population], there is a clear and urgent need for [explain the need here]. We know this need exists from [explain how you know the need exists.]. If this need goes unmet, [explain repercussions and consequences of the problem].

Our program [program title] proposes to provide the following services: [list them here]. These services will assist [#] of [target population] with the [need] by [explain the activities you will undertake to provide services]. With the implementation of our services through [program title], we expect to see [list your program outcomes here-be specific!].

The total program costs for year one are $____, of which $ _____ will be provided by other funders. We are requesting $____ from [Foundation Name] through this letter of inquiry. This money will be used to [Explain the general use of requested funds here].

To wrap up, the conclusion should reiterate your gratitude for the funder's consideration and express your openness to further discussions, providing your contact details for easy correspondence.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to introduce [XYZ Nonprofit Organization] and [program title] to you for funding consideration. We appreciate the support you provide to the [population or geographic area] community. If you would like to discuss further details, I can be reached on [days available] at [times available] by phone at [phone number] or email at [email address]. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Jayme Renfro
Development Director
XYZ Nonprofit Organization
jrenfro@xyznonprofit.org

So, Can I Just Use That One?

Probably not, because the real answer to what an LOI should contain is that it should contain exactly what the funder asks for it to contain. Most funders will tell you what it is that they want, and it may not be exactly what is in the sample. It is true that generally, an LOI will concisely outline your project proposal, its objectives, and its anticipated outcomes, giving funders a clear picture of how your mission aligns with theirs. Different funders ask for different specific details, however, and you don't want them thinking that you sent them a form letter.

The Commonwealth Fund, for example, asks that the LOI contain the following:

- Statement of problem and purpose of grant
- Description of project's targeted audience
- Project design, including schedule and work plan
- Description of project's expected outcomes

- Estimated total project cost and total amount requested
- Organization staffing and financial resources

They even provide a sample letter for applicants to use as an example. The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, on the other hand, doesn't even require a letter exactly. Their website contains a form with a space to provide a short description of your "project, why it is needed, whom it will serve, and what will be accomplished during a specific period of time." Similarly, the Anschutz Family Foundation asks for a copy of your IRS 501 (c)(3) documentation, as well as:

- An overview of what your organization does, including:
    - Programs and services
    - Number served
    - Geographic focus
    - Target and beneficiary populations
    - Current funding sources already secured, and those being approached
- Your request of the Anschutz Family Foundation

Notice that even though each of these may seem like a generic way for them to ask for a general description of your project and a plea for money, and it may feel like it would be easier to just write one letter to send to everyone, this would be a mistake. Many agencies, foundations, charities and donors are bogged down by the number of requests that they receive. There are so many great organizations and projects out there, but they can't possibly fund them all. Thus, they may be looking for a reason to put letters in the "sorry, but no" pile, and not including information that they had asked for may just be that reason.

Crafting a Standout Letter of Inquiry in Three Steps

There are two things that you can count on when it comes to how funders decide which proposals to fund. First, they want to partner with organizations that align with their mission. Funders, whether they are foundations, corporations, government entities, or individual philanthropists, often have a vision that extends beyond the simple act of giving money. Their ultimate objective is to catalyze positive change within communities and address issues that align with their core values and mission. To achieve this, they seek to establish partnerships with nonprofit organizations that demonstrate not only a shared commitment to these goals but also the capability and strategic approach to make a meaningful impact.

Funders are increasingly looking for organizations that do more than propose worthwhile projects; they are looking for partners who can articulate a clear vision of how a project addresses community needs, the specific outcomes they aim to achieve, and how these outcomes contribute to broader societal change. This requires organizations to have a deep understanding

of the issues at hand, a strong connection to the communities they serve, and an evidence-based approach to their work.

The second thing you can be sure of is that they want to be inspired by what the applicant does and is proposing. Funders, in their quest to make a meaningful impact through their contributions, are not just looking for projects that align with their goals—they are seeking inspiration. This desire for inspiration stems from a deep-rooted belief in the potential for innovative and passionate endeavors to instigate significant change. When an applicant presents a proposal, what funders are often hoping to find is a narrative that not only meets the criteria for funding but also moves them, offering a vision that is both compelling and transformative.

The inspiration funders seek can manifest in various forms. It might be found in the novelty of the approach an organization is proposing, where a fresh perspective on an old problem sparks interest and excitement. Innovation, especially solutions that creatively address complex challenges, can be a powerful source of inspiration, suggesting new pathways for impact that had previously been unexplored.

Equally, inspiration can come from the passion and commitment exhibited by the applicants. Funders are drawn to organizations that demonstrate a deep commitment to their cause, as this passion often translates into perseverance and resilience in the face of obstacles. An applicant that communicates a clear, passionate vision for their project can inspire funders to invest not just in the idea, but in the people behind it, trusting in their dedication to bring about real change.

You might be wondering how to do this, and the truth is that a lot of it boils down to practice. There are some guidelines to follow that will get you started.

Thoroughly Understand the Grant Opportunity

Your journey to crafting an effective Letter of Intent (LOI) begins with a foundation of thorough research and preparation. Diving deep into the grantor's guidelines, criteria, and overall mission is crucial to understanding what they seek in potential grantees. This initial step ensures that your nonprofit and its proposed project not only align with the grantor's priorities but also stand out by precisely addressing their specific interests. Tailoring your LOI to mirror the funder's objectives involves organizing your program's logic model to present its components concisely and clearly, leaving a lasting impression on the reader.

Moreover, establishing direct contact with the grantor, when appropriate, can be invaluable. Reaching out for clarifications or further insights about the grant opportunity signifies your genuine interest and proactive approach. This step can dispel any uncertainties and allow you to refine your LOI, ensuring it resonates more strongly with the grantor's expectations. Such personalized engagement demonstrates your commitment to aligning with the funder’s goals and can significantly bolster your application's appeal.

Central to your LOI should be a personalized approach that places the funder's interests at the forefront. While it's important to highlight your organization's strengths and achievements, the core of your message must illustrate how your project aligns with the funder's vision for change.

Integrating data and compelling narratives to showcase the real-world impact of your initiative is key. Funders are driven by the desire to see their investments lead to meaningful, tangible change. By vividly depicting the difference your project can make through both quantitative evidence and storytelling, you underscore your dedication to bringing about significant improvements in your community or field.

The process of writing a compelling LOI that captures the attention of potential funders is multifaceted. It requires a blend of strategic research, personalized communication, and a clear demonstration of impact. By meticulously preparing your proposal, engaging with funders to understand their goals, and emphasizing how your project aligns with their vision, you set the stage for a successful grant application. This approach not only increases your chances of securing the needed funds but also establishes the foundation for a fruitful partnership with your funder, aimed at achieving lasting positive change.

Personalize your LOI

Personalizing your approach when crafting an LOI is necessary in order to capture the attention and support of potential funders. It's important to prioritize the funder's interests over a broad presentation of your organization's merits. Your LOI should clearly articulate how your project aligns with the funder's goals, demonstrating a deep understanding of their vision and how your initiative contributes to their objectives. This alignment signifies not just a request for funding but a partnership towards a common goal.

Showcasing the real-world impact of your project is fundamental here. Funders are keen to see the tangible results of their investments. By incorporating data and compelling narratives within your LOI, you illustrate the significant difference your project can make. These stories and statistics bring your project to life, showcasing your commitment to creating meaningful change. Such evidence speaks volumes, highlighting the potential success and reach of your initiative in ways that resonate with funders' desires to contribute to substantial, positive transformations.

Making explicit references to the funder or foundation within your LOI adds another layer of personalization. Mention their mission, priorities, or any previous projects similar to yours, showing that you have invested time in understanding their specific interests and how they intersect with your project. Highlighting how their past initiatives relate to your proposed work demonstrates not only your thorough preparation but also positions your project as a continuation or complement to their ongoing mission.

Lastly, emphasizing the anticipated outcomes of your project is as crucial as detailing its objectives and activities. Funders are drawn to projects that offer a clear vision of their impact. By using real-life stories, data, and evidence to depict the positive changes your project aims to achieve, you paint a vivid picture of the potential transformations. This focus on outcomes rather than just activities underscores the significance of your project, making it more appealing to funders looking to make a meaningful difference.

Review and Revise Before Submission

When preparing your Letter of Intent (LOI), it's crucial to allow yourself enough time not just to write but to thoroughly review and revise your document. This meticulous process ensures that your LOI is free of errors and effectively communicates both your organization's mission and the significant potential of your project. Precision in articulation and a clear alignment with the funder's goals can significantly increase your chances of capturing their interest. An LOI that is well-crafted and error-free speaks volumes about your organization's professionalism and dedication to your cause.

After you've submitted your LOI, it's important not to fall into a passive waiting game. Instead, adopting a proactive approach can make a difference. If you haven't heard back within a reasonable period, a polite follow-up can be a strategic move. This not only shows your genuine interest and enthusiasm for the project but also your commitment to pursuing a partnership with the funder. A thoughtful follow-up can keep your proposal at the forefront of the funder's mind and demonstrate your proactive nature, potentially giving you an edge in the competitive grant-seeking process.

With a solid grasp on crafting an impactful LOI, including the nuances of preparation, submission, and follow-up, you're well-equipped to develop a letter that not only stands out to funders but also lays the foundation for a fruitful partnership. This understanding is necessary for navigating the initial stages of the funding process successfully, setting the stage for your organization's projects and initiatives to thrive.

Figure 4.1. Sample LOI

This example demonstrates how an LOI can be personalized to align with a specific funder's interests and mission. It emphasizes the synergy between the nonprofit's project and the foundation's goals, underscoring the potential for a partnership rather than merely seeking financial support.

Dear Future Earth Foundation Team,

We, at Green Spaces Now, a registered 501(c)(3) in Dubuque, IA have long admired the Future Earth Foundation's commitment to creating sustainable urban environments. It's clear that our shared vision for a greener future aligns perfectly with your foundation's goals, especially in the realm of enhancing urban biodiversity and community well-being through environmental projects. We are writing to request 5-year funding for our "Urban Greening for All" project.

"Urban Greening for All," aims to transform underutilized city spaces into vibrant community gardens and tree-lined areas, directly echoing the Future Earth Foundation's mission to promote environmental sustainability and community health. This project not only

seeks to increase urban green spaces but also to foster a deeper connection between city residents and their natural environment, encouraging sustainable urban living practices.

By collaborating with the Future Earth Foundation, "Green Spaces Now" aspires to amplify the impact of our collective efforts in urban sustainability. This initiative is not just a request for funding; it represents an opportunity for partnership in driving meaningful, long-lasting change in our communities. We are excited about the potential to work together towards our common goal of a healthier, greener urban future.

We look forward to the possibility of discussing this project further and exploring how a partnership with the Future Earth Foundation can bring "Urban Greening for All" to life, creating lasting benefits for our city's environment and its residents.

Warm regards,
[Your Name]
[Your Position]
Green Spaces Now

Logic Models

Logic models serve as visual tools that map out the connection between the activities of a program and its anticipated outcomes, illustrating the cause-and-effect relationship between resources utilized, actions taken, and the changes these efforts are expected to produce. These models, sometimes referred to as program theories or theories of change, detail the rationale behind each chosen activity and how it contributes to achieving the program's goals.

These are not generally required, especially at the LOI stage, however incorporating a logic model into a Letter of Intent (LOI) or grant proposal can significantly enhance the application's clarity and effectiveness for several reasons. A logic model visually outlines how your program intends to achieve its goals, linking activities to outcomes in a straightforward, easy-to-understand manner. This clarity is invaluable in grant proposals, where you need to quickly and effectively communicate complex information to funders who may not be familiar with the specifics of your project.

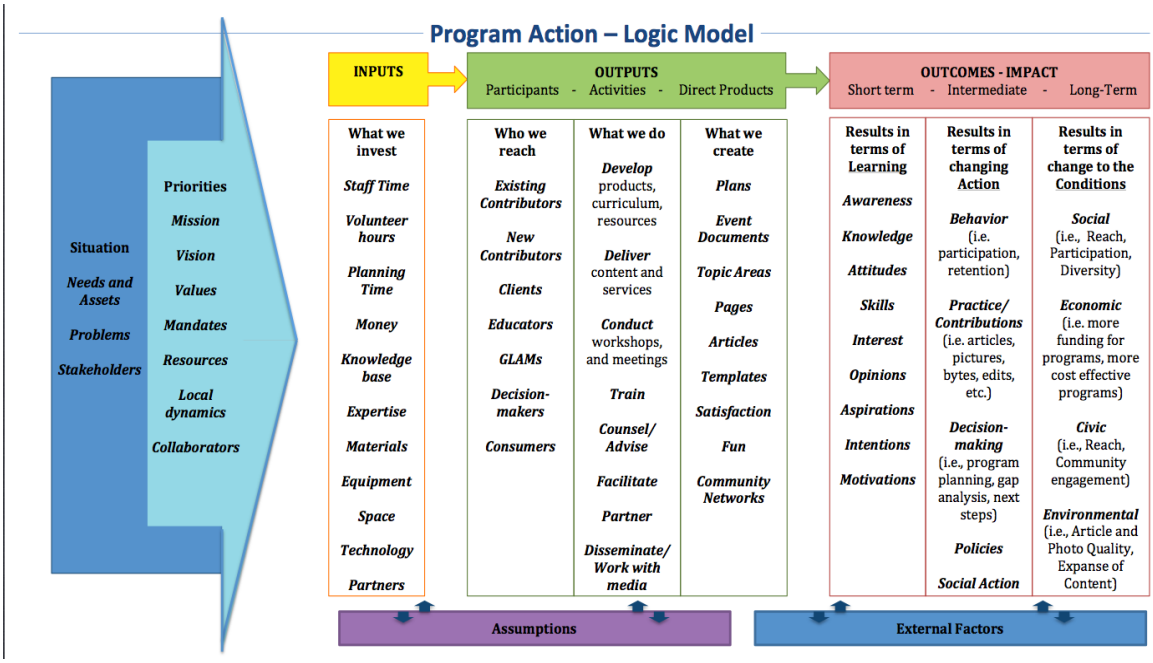
A logic model can also help align your project's objectives with the funder's priorities by clearly showing how the anticipated outcomes of your project contribute to broader goals or issues the funder cares about. This alignment is often a critical deciding factor in the funding decision process.

The structure of a logic model is flexible; it need not follow a linear progression if the program's logic is more dynamic. While flow charts are commonly used to represent these models, various formats like networks, concept maps, or wheels can also effectively convey the relationships within a program. Key components to include in any logic model are:

- Inputs: These are the resources, including personnel and material efforts, that fuel the program, along with any constraints that might act as barriers.
- Activities: The specific actions undertaken with the resources to drive the desired change.
- Outputs: Tangible evidence that the planned activities were executed, such as event attendance figures or the number of volunteers trained.
- Outcomes: The significant changes or results that stem from the program's activities.

Logic models vary in complexity to suit the program's scope, offering a macro view rather than an exhaustive detail of every element. A well-crafted model succinctly captures the essential components of an initiative, making it accessible and understandable to stakeholders without oversimplifying the program's strategic nuances. Some are large and complex, even necessitating nested models inside of the main model. Some are much more simple and straightforward (Fig 4.2). For the purposes of an LOI and the required brevity, you will want to employ a simple version.

Figure 4.2. Sample Logic Model and LOI



https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Learning_and_Evaluation/Logic_models#/media/File:Wiki_exampled_Logic_Model.png

Dear Future Learners Foundation,

With a shared vision to transform the educational landscape for underprivileged children, "Read to Succeed" seeks your partnership to launch our "Every Child Reads"initiative. This program is designed to improve literacy rates among children ages 6-10 in underserved communities, aligning with your foundation's commitment to educational equity. Enclosed is a logic model that succinctly outlines our strategic approach to achieving this goal.

Logic Model Summary:
Inputs: Volunteer educators, donated books, community spaces for reading sessions, and initial training materials.
Activities: Conducting weekly reading sessions, distributing reading materials to children, providing literacy training for volunteers, and organizing family literacy workshops.
Outputs: 100 children enrolled in the program, 500 books distributed, 20 volunteers trained, and 10 workshops held annually.
Outcomes: Short-term: improved reading skills among participating children, as evidenced by pre- and post-program assessments. Intermediate: Increased frequency of reading at home.

Long-term: higher literacy rates in the community and improved academic performance in schools.
Impact: Contributing to educational equity by ensuring that every child, regardless of background, has the fundamental skill of reading, thereby opening doors to lifelong learning opportunities and personal development.

Our "Every Child Reads" initiative is more than a program; it's a movement towards creating a literate, empowered future generation. We believe that with the support of the Future Learners Foundation, we can turn the tide on literacy in underserved communities. The enclosed logic model details how targeted inputs and carefully planned activities will produce tangible outputs and meaningful outcomes, leading to our ultimate impact of improving literacy and academic success for children.

We are eager to discuss this proposal further and explore how we can collaborate with the future Learners Foundation to make literacy accessible to all children.

Warmest regards,
[Your Name]
Director, Read to Succeed

Conclusion

Writing a grant proposal is undoubtedly a demanding task, and facing rejection after investing significant effort can be disheartening. To mitigate this, a Letter of Inquiry (LOI) serves as a crucial tool in the grant-seeking process, acting as a preliminary communication that helps both applicants and funders determine mutual alignment. By succinctly conveying the project's mission, objectives, and alignment with the funder's goals, an LOI saves valuable time and resources, ensuring that full proposals are only developed for genuinely promising opportunities.

The purpose of an LOI extends beyond a simple introduction; it sets the stage for a potential partnership by effectively communicating the project's significance, anticipated outcomes, and funding requirements. This approach benefits both parties: applicants can avoid wasting time on unsuitable opportunities, and funders can efficiently sift through numerous requests to identify those that best match their priorities.

Crafting a standout LOI involves clear, concise communication and a deep understanding of the funder's mission. By addressing the funder directly and tailoring the letter to reflect the funder's specific interests, applicants can make a compelling case for their project. This initial step, though challenging, is a valuable skill for grant seekers, laying the groundwork for successful funding relationships and impactful projects.

Figure 4.3. Sample LOI 2

[Program Officer]

[Title]

[Funding Organization Name]

[Address]

Dear [Program Officer],

[Your nonprofit] is seeking support from [funding organization] through the [RFP] for its innovative new [program or project description].

[Your program's staff] will [engage in program activities] and reach [target population] in [target area] to connect them to [projected program outcome]. We respectfully request [amount of money] to [program expenditures] integral to making this project a success.

Since [Your nonprofit] was established in [year] as the [important milestone for your nonprofit], we have expanded our programs and initiatives to develop [significant features of your nonprofit that you want to highlight].

We have a strong history of [insert your track record of success here, in 1-2 sentences] and the opportunity from the [funding organization] is deeply aligned with our vision of empowering our [target area].

[Your target area] is [description of target area/population your program(s) are serving]. According to recent Census data, [insert short 1-2 sentence statement of need highlighting quantitative data]. [Your nonprofit]'s vision is to [insert brief overview of mission/vision]. [Insert a few lines about how the programs/initiatives you are looking for support your mission/vision].

[Insert 1-2 sentences about projected improvements to your target area/population, focusing on quantitative descriptions].

The total cost of our [program/initiative] for [project time period] is [amount]. [Include a description of any committed funding that has already been dedicated to your project]. Your contribution of [insert amount of request] will provide the funding we need to launch this program, and [include what the support from the funding organization will be used to cover]

Our [name of project] is an innovative solution to [the name of the problem your program/initiative is seeking to address] we have identified in our community. We know that the [funding organization] shares the same mission to [describe shared characteristics between

your nonprofit and the funding organization] and that you share our passion for [describe a shared vision for the future]. By providing [short description of activities] in [target area] we will make genuine improvements to [area your nonprofit is seeking to change].

We appreciate your time and consideration and look forward to exploring ways that our organizations can partner together. If you have any questions, or if you would like to schedule a tour of our agency's current programs and services, please contact me at thisisme@nonprofit.org or call me at ###-###-####.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

[Title]

[Your nonprofit].

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Chapter 5: The Components of a Grant Proposal

While there is quite a bit of variation when it comes to what, exactly, funders will ask for in any given RFP, you will quickly begin to notice that they are more alike than not. Most funders ask applicants to structure their proposals with general information at the beginning, and then the finer details coming later. They tend to look similar to this:

1) Title
2) Executive Summary
3) Organizational information
4) Needs statement
5) Project Narrative
6) Budget
7) Budget Narrative
8) Evaluation Plan

If you can get yourself into the habit of thinking about these eight components, you will be prepared to get started writing proposals for most funders, even if some of the categories have different names or if some of the specifics vary.

Executive Summaries in Grant Writing

In the realm of grant writing, the executive summary holds a pivotal role, serving as the gateway to the rest of your proposal. It's the first (and sometimes the only) section read by funders, making its clarity, conciseness, and persuasiveness critical for capturing their interest and conveying the essence of your proposal. This section encapsulates the what, why, how, and the expected impact of your project in a brief yet comprehensive manner, offering a snapshot that can either entice the reader to delve deeper or decide that the proposal isn’t aligned with their funding priorities.

An executive summary is essentially a condensed version of your proposal, designed to provide a quick overview of the most important aspects of your project. It should stand on its own, offering clear insights into your project's objectives, methodologies, potential impact, and how it aligns with the funder's goals. The goal is to make a compelling case for your project in a limited space, summarizing the critical points that will be expanded upon in the detailed proposal.

Functions of Executive Summaries

The executive summary within a grant proposal plays a multifaceted role, acting as both the introduction and the persuasive core of your application. Its primary functions—to engage and persuade—are critical in setting the stage for a successful appeal for funding.

Engaging the Reader is paramount. The opening lines of your executive summary are your first opportunity to capture the funder's attention. This is where you must succinctly articulate the core problem your project aims to tackle and the innovative solutions you propose. Crafting this section with a compelling narrative or striking statistics can immediately draw the reader in, setting the tone for the rest of the document. It's about creating a connection from the outset, ensuring the funder feels invested in learning more about your project and its potential to make a difference.

Providing a Clear Overview involves distilling the essence of your proposal into a digestible format. This section should give the reader a bird's-eye view of your project, including its objectives, who it serves, the strategies you plan to employ, and what you hope to achieve. It's about clarity and precision—outlining your plan in a way that is both comprehensive and concise, leaving no doubts about the scope and ambition of your project. This overview sets the stage for the detailed exposition to follow, offering a roadmap of what the funder can expect.

Demonstrating Alignment with the funder's mission and priorities is crucial. Funders seek projects that not only promise impactful outcomes but also resonate with their own goals. In this section of the executive summary, it's important to explicitly link your project's objectives with the funder's values and priorities, illustrating a synergy that makes your proposal a fitting candidate for their support. This alignment reassures funders that investing in your project is a direct contribution to their overarching mission, making your proposal not just a request for funds but a partnership opportunity.

Persuading the Reader is the ultimate goal of the executive summary. Beyond merely stating facts and figures, this section should weave a compelling narrative about why your project stands out. Highlight the uniqueness of your approach, the feasibility of your plan, and the significant, lasting impact your project promises to deliver. Persuasion here is about painting a picture of success and transformation, one that appeals not just to the logical aspects of grantmaking but to the emotional and visionary aspirations of the funder. It's about convincing the reader that your project not only deserves funding but is also an opportunity for them to be part of something truly transformative.

The executive summary is not just an introductory note but a strategic element designed to engage, inform, align, and persuade. By effectively fulfilling these functions, it elevates your

grant proposal from a mere application to a compelling case for investment, paving the way for a positive response from potential funders.

Crafting an Executive Summary

Writing an effective executive summary requires careful consideration and strategic planning. Here are some guidelines to help you craft a summary that resonates with potential funders:

Start with a Strong Hook: Initiating your executive summary with an impactful statement or striking statistic immediately draws attention to the significance of the issue at hand. This could be a surprising fact that sheds light on the magnitude of the problem, or a poignant story that encapsulates the human element affected by the issue. The aim is to evoke a response that makes the problem impossible to ignore, compelling the reader to consider the necessity of your project. This hook is not just an opener; it's the emotional or intellectual tug that primes the reader for everything that follows.

Articulate the Need: Following the hook, it's crucial to delve deeper into the need or issue your project intends to address. This involves painting a clear picture of the current situation, supported by data or narratives that underline the urgency and relevance of your intervention. Establishing this need goes beyond stating the problem; it's about showing why your project is necessary now, highlighting any gaps in current efforts and how your initiative will fill them. This section lays the groundwork for everything else, setting the stage for your proposed solution.

Describe Your Solution: With the stage set, it’s time to introduce your proposed solution in a manner that is both concise and comprehensive. Detail the activities, strategies, and interventions you plan to undertake, explaining how they directly address the identified need. This is where you outline your approach, providing a snapshot of the project's design and the innovative methods you'll employ. It’s important to convey confidence and feasibility, assuring the reader that your solution is not just theoretical but actionable and likely to succeed.

Highlight Key Details: Bringing focus to the specifics, this part of the summary covers who will benefit from the project (target population), where it will be implemented (location), the project's timeframe (duration), and the individuals or teams responsible for its execution (key personnel). These details offer a lens into the project's scope and operational framework, giving the funder a clear sense of who is involved and what committing to your project means in practical terms.

Showcase the Expected Impact: This section is about vision—the potential outcomes and the long-term impact of your initiative. Here, you illustrate the transformative potential of your

project, describing the changes you anticipate and the lasting benefits these changes will bring. Use this space to tie your activities to their expected results, demonstrating the value and sustainability of your project. Whether it's community empowerment, environmental restoration, or improved health outcomes, make sure to articulate how your project will make a tangible difference.

Align with the Funder's Goals: Critical to your executive summary is demonstrating alignment with the funder's mission and funding priorities. This connection should be explicit, showing how your project's objectives dovetail with the funder's aspirations. It's about illustrating partnership potential—how supporting your project is not just an act of philanthropy but a strategic move that advances the funder's goals. This alignment reassures funders that their investment will contribute to a cause they are passionate about, enhancing the appeal of your proposal.

Keep it Concise and Compelling: Despite the depth of information you need to convey, it's essential that your executive summary remains succinct and engaging. Strive for clarity and simplicity, avoiding technical jargon that might obfuscate your message. The goal is to craft a narrative that is accessible to readers unfamiliar with your field, ensuring your summary not only informs but also captivates. This balancing act between brevity and substance is key to crafting an executive summary that leaves a lasting impression, motivating funders to delve deeper into your proposal.

Figure 5.1. Sample Executive Summary

Executive Summary for "Brighter Futures Tutoring Program"
In the heart of our urban community, 65% of children from low-income families fall below the national literacy standards by the fourth grade, a startling statistic that underscores a growing educational crisis. "Brighter Futures," a non-profit organization dedicated to educational equity, proposes the "Brighter Futures Tutoring Program" to address this urgent need.

The Need: Our community's children face significant educational disparities, exacerbated by a lack of access to quality after-school learning support. This gap in resources contributes to lower literacy rates among economically disadvantaged students, impacting their academic achievement and future opportunities. The "Brighter Futures Tutoring Program" aims to bridge this gap, providing targeted literacy and numeracy support to students in grades 1-4.

Our Solution: We plan to implement a comprehensive after-school tutoring program, leveraging the expertise of certified teachers and trained volunteers. Our activities include one-on-one tutoring sessions, group reading activities, and family literacy workshops, designed to not only improve literacy and numeracy skills but also to foster a love for learning. This solution is backed by research that emphasizes the effectiveness of personalized and engaged learning experiences in improving academic outcomes.

Key Details: The program will directly benefit 200 students annually from our urban community, with the tutoring sessions held at local schools and community centers to ensure accessibility. Our project will span three years, allowing us to measure significant improvements in literacy and numeracy levels. The initiative will be led by our experienced educational director, Jane Doe, along with a dedicated team of 10 certified teachers and 50 community volunteers.

Expected Impact: Anticipated outcomes include a 30% improvement in literacy and numeracy test scores among participating students, increased engagement in learning activities, and enhanced parental involvement in children's education. Long-term, we expect to see an improvement in high school graduation rates and better preparedness for higher education and employment opportunities among these students.

Alignment with Funder's Goals: The "Brighter Futures Tutoring Program" aligns closely with the "Educate Tomorrow" Foundation's mission to support educational initiatives that promote equity and opportunity for underprivileged children. Our program not only addresses an immediate educational need but also lays the foundation for long-term societal benefits, directly contributing to the Foundation's goals of fostering educational success and lifelong achievement.

Conclusion: The "Brighter Futures Tutoring Program presents a compelling opportunity for the "Educate Tomorrow" Foundation to make a significant impact in the lives of children in our community. With your support, we can turn the tide on literacy and numeracy disparities, lighting the path to brighter futures for hundreds of students. We are committed to this cause and eager to partner with the foundation to bring about meaningful, lasting change.

Statements of Need

Writing a Statement of Need (also known as a Needs Statement) for a grant proposal is a task that involves outlining the specific problem or opportunity that your project aims to address. This section is your chance to make a compelling argument for why your project is necessary and to persuade funders that their support can make a significant difference. A well-crafted Statement

of Need not only demonstrates a clear understanding of the issue at hand but also positions your organization as the solution.

To start, you will want to begin with a deep dive into the problem through extensive research, including data collection, literature review, and community engagement. This groundwork will give you an intimate understanding of the issue, including its origins, those it impacts, and the existing gaps in solutions.

Start your narrative by concisely defining the problem, using precise language supported by factual evidence such as statistics, research findings, or quotations from those affected. This should vividly illuminate the issue, underlining its urgency and relevance. Next, talk about the broader impacts of the problem if left unresolved, detailing its effects on individuals, communities, or the environment. This not only highlights the magnitude of the issue but also the potential of your intervention.

Identifying a gap in current efforts to tackle the problem is crucial. Whether it's a shortage of resources, a lack of services, or an emerging challenge, pinpointing this gap underscores the necessity of your proposed project, positioning it as a vital response to an unmet need. Linking your initiative's objectives with the funder's mission and priorities at this juncture can significantly elevate your proposal, showcasing it as not merely beneficial but a strategic fit for the funder's aspirations.

While the inclusion of data and statistics is fundamental, weaving in personal stories or testimonials can imbue your Statement of Need with relatability and emotional resonance, making the issue more tangible. Though the primary focus is on articulating the need, giving a nod to your proposed solution prepares the ground for the detailed proposal that follows, maintaining a positive and proactive tone.

It's important to keep your statement clear and succinct to ensure it remains accessible to those unfamiliar with the specificities of the issue, avoiding information overload or technical jargon. An effective Statement of Need strikes a delicate balance, offering sufficient detail to fully convey the gravity of the problem while engaging the reader's interest and empathy. This section lays the foundational narrative for your proposal, emphasizing the critical nature of your project and galvanizing funders to contribute to your cause.

Figure 5.2. Sample Statement of Need

Statement of Need

In the rural town of Meadowfield, a staggering 75% of households lack access to high-speed internet, a critical tool for education, employment, and healthcare in today's digital world. This statistic, drawn from the latest regional connectivity report, underscores a profound disparity impacting over 5,000 residents hindering students' ability to participate in online learning, limiting job opportunities for adults, and restricting access to essential health services.

The consequences of this digital divide are far-reaching, affecting not just individual households but the broader community. Students fall behind in their studies, local businesses struggle to compete, and access to timely healthcare information is severely compromised. Without intervention, Meadowfield risks further isolation and economic stagnation, widening the gap between rural and urban areas. Despite efforts to address this issue, existing initiatives have fallen short, primarily focusing on urban centers, leaving rural communities like Meadowfield underserved. The absence of high-speed internet access represents a critical gap in modern infrastructure, one that "Tech Connect" aims to fill through our "Meadowfield Connects" project.

Our initiative aligns closely with the TechFuture Foundation's mission to eliminate barriers to technology access. By partnering with us, the Foundation has the opportunity to make a tangible impact on the lives of Meadowfield's residents, transforming the community into a thriving, connected hub of opportunity and growth.

The narrative of Sarah, a high school student who must travel 30 miles to the nearest library for internet access to complete her homework, illustrates the urgent need for our project. Stories like hers are all too common in Meadowfield, emphasizing the necessity of our work. "TechConnect" proposes to deploy high-speed internet infrastructure throughout Meadowfield and launch a series of digital literacy workshops, targeting students, job seekers, and seniors. We anticipate not only bridging the digital divide but also fostering a community that is more informed, engaged, and resilient.

Our solution, while ambitious, is feasible with the support of the TechFuture Foundation. Together, we can turn the tide on digital disparity, offering Meadowfield a brighter, more connected future. Our project not only addresses an immediate need but also lays the groundwork for long-term community development, embodying the transformative impact the Foundation seeks to achieve through its funding initiatives.

Project Description

Crafting a project description for a grant application is a crucial step in articulating your initiative's objectives, methods, and expected outcomes to potential funders. This section of the application offers a detailed overview of what you plan to achieve, how you intend to achieve it, and why your project is the best candidate for the grant. Here's a structured approach to writing an effective project description:

Start with a Clear Objective

Begin by stating the primary goal of your project in clear and concise terms. This should encapsulate what you aim to accomplish, providing direction for the rest of the description. Your objective should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART), setting the stage for a detailed explanation of your project's components.

Writing, “Our ‘Read and Rise’ program will increase reading levels in kids by hosting after school programs” is not specific enough for our purposes. Instead, you want your objective to be SMART. A better version could look like, “By the end of the first quarter of 2024, our literacy program, 'Read and Rise,' will increase reading proficiency levels by 20% for 100 children aged 6-9 in Maplewood Village through the implementation of a comprehensive after-school reading and tutoring program, as measured by pre- and post-program standardized reading tests." This objective statement is:

- **Specific**: It clearly states the intended outcome (increase reading proficiency levels), the target group (100 children aged 6-9 in Maplewood Village), and the means to achieve the goal (through an after-school reading and tutoring program).
- **Measurable**: The objective specifies that success will be measured by a 20% increase in reading proficiency, as determined by standardized reading tests conducted before and after the program.
- **Achievable**: The goal is realistic and attainable, considering the program's resources and the targeted improvement scale.
- **Relevant**: Improving literacy among children is directly related to the organization's mission to enhance educational outcomes in rural communities.
- **Time-bound**: The objective includes a clear timeline, stating that the goal will be achieved by the end of the first quarter of 2024, providing a deadline to focus efforts and measure progress.

This SMART objective not only outlines a clear, achievable goal but also provides a framework for evaluating the program's success, ensuring that the initiative is targeted and time-sensitive.

Context and Background

Next, provide a brief background to set the context for your project. In crafting the context and background for your project within a grant proposal, it's essential to lay a comprehensive groundwork that not only defines the scope of the issue at hand but also illuminates your deep grasp of its complexities and implications. This narrative foundation serves not merely as an exposition but as a compelling argument for the urgency and relevance of your proposed intervention.

You will have done a lot of this in your statement of need, however here is where you start to bring your project into the narrative. Start with a broad overview that encapsulates the problem or need your project seeks to address. This might involve citing recent studies, statistics, or trends that paint a vivid picture of the current situation. For instance, if your project aims to address food insecurity in urban neighborhoods, you could present data on the number of families affected, the rising costs of living, and the health consequences of inadequate nutrition. Such data serves to underscore the severity of the issue, making a case for why it demands immediate attention.

Diving deeper, your background should explore the root causes of the problem, offering insights into its origins and perpetuating factors. This could involve a discussion of economic disparities, systemic barriers, or environmental factors contributing to the issue. Demonstrating this level of understanding signifies to funders that your organization has a nuanced grasp of the problem and is thus well-positioned to tackle it effectively.

Equally important is an analysis of previous efforts to address the issue. This might include a review of similar projects, highlighting what has worked, what hasn't, and most crucially, why. Discussing the limitations and successes of past initiatives offers a dual benefit: it evidences your comprehensive research and preparation, and it identifies gaps or opportunities in the current approach that your project is uniquely positioned to fill.

For instance, if prior interventions in food insecurity were primarily focused on emergency food distribution, you might identify a gap in long-term solutions like community gardening or nutrition education. This not only justifies the necessity of your project but also positions it as a strategic evolution in addressing the issue, offering a new direction that builds on, rather than duplicates, existing efforts.

Finally, the context and background section should subtly begin to weave in the rationale for your specific approach to the problem, setting the stage for the detailed project description to follow. By laying out the issue in detail and framing your project as both necessary and innovative, you prime the reader for the solutions you will propose, ensuring they are seen as both justified and essential.

Detailed Project Activities

This section is the heart of your project description, where you detail the specific activities or interventions you plan to implement. Describe the steps you will take to achieve your project's objectives, including methodologies, strategies, and key tasks. Be clear about who will carry out these activities, the timeline for implementation, and any resources or tools you will use. This is your chance to showcase the feasibility and thoughtfulness of your approach.

Expected Outcomes and Impact

In the Expected Outcomes and Impact section of your grant proposal, you transition from detailing the what and the how of your project to illuminating the why. Here is where you articulate the changes your project will bring into reality, both in the short and the long term. Specificity is key with this section: the more concrete and measurable your anticipated outcomes and impact are, the more persuasive your proposal becomes.

Begin by detailing the short-term outcomes you expect to see as a direct result of your project's activities. These are the immediate benefits or changes that will occur during or shortly after the project implementation period. For example, if your project involves installing a community garden in an urban food desert, short-term outcomes might include the number of community members who engage with the garden, the volume of produce harvested, and improvements in participants' knowledge about nutrition. Each of these outcomes should be linked to the specific needs or problems your project aims to address, demonstrating a clear path from action to effect.

Equally important is the discussion of your project's long-term impact. This encompasses the broader, sustained changes you aim to achieve in the community or field where you're working. Continuing with the community garden example, the long-term impact might involve reductions in rates of food insecurity among participants, measurable health improvements due to better nutrition, or even broader community cohesion as neighbors come together around the garden. When possible, bolster your claims with data or evidence from similar initiatives, lending credence to your predictions about the project's potential for lasting change.

This section of your proposal should serve as a persuasive argument for the value and significance of your work. It's an opportunity to showcase not just the immediate benefits of your project but also its capacity to catalyze enduring positive change. By clearly and specifically detailing the expected outcomes and broader impact, you're not only providing funders with a vision of what success looks like but also demonstrating your project's alignment with their goals for societal improvement. This alignment, underscored by a compelling evidence-based narrative of anticipated change, can significantly enhance the appeal of your proposal, positioning your initiative as a worthy investment in the eyes of potential funders.

Figure 5.4. Short and Long-Term Impacts

Expected Outcomes and Impact of the Digital Leap Program

Short-term Outcomes:

- Within the first year of implementation, the Digital Leap Program will distribute laptops and provide high-speed internet access to 250 students across five rural schools, ensuring that every participant has the necessary tools for digital learning.
- By the end of the second quarter, we anticipate conducting digital literacy workshops for 300 students and their families, significantly enhancing their understanding of digital tools and safe internet practices.
- Initial assessments will show a 40% improvement in students' digital literacy skills within six months of participating in the program, as measured by pre- and post-workshop evaluations.

Long-term Impact:

- Over the next three years, the Digital Leap Program aims to decrease the digital divide in our target rural areas by 50%, as evidenced by increased access to digital resources and higher proficiency in digital skills among students.
- The long-term educational outcomes for participating students will include higher rates of homework completion, improved academic performance, and greater participation in online learning opportunities. These impacts will be tracked through school performance records and feedback from educators and families.
- The program is expected to foster greater educational equity, with our target student population achieving academic results on par with their urban counterparts. This alignment will be a crucial step towards closing the achievement gap caused by the digital divide.

Contribution to Solving the Identified Need:

The Digital Leap Program directly addresses the critical need for digital access and literacy in rural areas, where students face significant barriers to participating in the increasingly digital landscape of education. By providing the necessary tools and training, we're not just equipping students for immediate academic success; we're empowering them for lifelong learning and adaptability in a digital world.

This initiative aligns with the broader mission of "TechBridge Youth" to bridge educational disparities, and it resonates with the goals of the grantor to support educational equity and access to technology. With the support of this grant, the Digital Leap Program will serve as a scalable model for reducing the digital divide in rural communities, demonstrating a significant, sustainable impact on educational outcomes and digital inclusivity.

Evaluation Plan

The next section generally consists of an overview of how you will measure the success of your project. Your evaluation plan should outline the metrics or indicators you will use to assess your project's outcomes and impact. Explain how you will collect and analyze data, and how you will use this information to make adjustments and improve your project over time. This demonstrates to funders that you are committed to accountability and continuous improvement.

There are different ways that you can evaluate your program. There are quantitative methods such as pre- and post-program surveys, activity logs, community data analysis…anything that is using numerical data to demonstrate whether your program has met its goals or not. There are also qualitative methods for evaluation. This includes things like focus groups, interviews, and community feedback. Quantitative data can be analyzed using statistical software to identify significant changes after the implementation of your program. Qualitative data can be analyzed thematically to extract key insights and narratives about the program's effectiveness and areas for improvement.

In this section you should also include your plans for reporting. Findings from the evaluation should be compiled into a report detailing the outcomes achieved against objectives, the program's strengths and weaknesses, and recommendations for future initiatives. This report can be shared with the funding body and also with other stakeholders as a good form of communication and transparency.

More information on evaluation can be found in Chapter 8.

Alignment with Funder's Goals

Throughout your project description, continue to make it clear how your project aligns with the funder's priorities and mission. Demonstrating this alignment can significantly increase your chances of success, as funders are more likely to support projects that contribute to their overarching goals. Do not be afraid to use their own words from their RFP or website in your proposal!

Organization Information

When crafting a grant proposal, weaving in detailed information about your organization is crucial for several reasons. It not only meets a basic requirement but also offers a strategic avenue to underscore your credibility, showcase your capacity, and make a persuasive argument for why your organization is uniquely positioned to execute the proposed project.

Start with a brief history of your organization, emphasizing its origins, key milestones, and evolution over time. This narrative should reflect growth, adaptability, and a sustained

commitment to your mission, enriching the proposal with context and depth. Highlighting significant achievements, recognitions, or awards your organization has received can further bolster your credibility, painting a picture of an entity that is both impactful and recognized for its contributions.

The core of your organization's identity—its mission and vision—should be clearly articulated. These statements should encapsulate the essence and aspirations of your organization, aligning seamlessly with the goals of the potential funder. This alignment is not incidental but a deliberate demonstration of shared values and objectives, enhancing the synergy between your project and the funder's priorities.

An overview of your organizational structure and leadership provides a window into your operational capacity. Detailing the roles, expertise, and experience of key team members not only highlights your organizational capabilities but also personalizes your proposal, allowing funders to appreciate the human capital behind your project.

Your organization's past achievements and the measurable impact of its work are testament to your ability to deliver meaningful outcomes. Illustrating this track record with specific examples, data, or narratives not only lends weight to your proposal but also serves as tangible evidence of your effectiveness and efficiency in achieving your goals.

Discussing financial health and management practices is integral to establishing trust and transparency. Providing information on financial oversight, audits, or certifications reassures funders of your organization's stability and its adeptness at managing funds responsibly, a critical consideration for any grant-making entity.

Finally, mentioning existing partnerships and collaborations showcases your organization's ability to leverage broader networks and resources, underscoring a collaborative spirit that is often helpful for the success of complex projects.

Conclusion and Supporting Materials

The types of supporting materials that you will be expected to include will vary by the grant and the funder. In general though, these items give the funder tangible evidence of your organization's credibility, capacity, and readiness to manage the proposed project. Some materials that you might be asked for include:

Financial Documents:

- Financial Statements: Recent financial statements (balance sheet, income statement) to demonstrate your organization's financial health.

- Organization's Budget: An overall budget of your organization for the current and/or upcoming fiscal year.
- Audit Reports: The most recent audited financial statements, if available, to verify financial stability and transparency.

Legal and Administrative Documents:

- IRS Determination Letter: For U.S.-based nonprofits, the 501(c)(3) determination letter proving tax-exempt status.
- Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws: Documents that outline the legal basis of the organization and its governance structure.
- Board of Directors List: Names and affiliations of board members, highlighting their expertise and governance role.

Programmatic Information:

- Annual Report: The most recent annual report, showcasing past year's achievements, impact, and financial summary.
- Program Descriptions: Detailed descriptions of current or past programs relevant to the proposed project, demonstrating experience and capacity.

Support Letters:

- Letters of Support: Letters from community leaders, partners, stakeholders, or beneficiaries that attest to your organization's impact, reputation, and capacity to deliver the proposed project.
- Partnership Agreements: If the project involves collaboration with other organizations, letters of commitment or MOUs (Memoranda of Understanding) indicating the roles and contributions of each partner.

Staff and Organizational Capacity:

- Staff Biographies: Brief bios of key project personnel, highlighting qualifications and relevant experience.
- Organizational Chart: A diagram that outlines your organization's structure, illustrating the chain of command and how the project team fits within it.

Additional Materials:

- Case Studies or Success Stories: Documentation of successful past projects, including outcomes and evaluations, to illustrate your organization's effectiveness.
- Research and Data: Relevant research or data that supports the need for the proposed project and demonstrates thorough understanding of the issue.
- Media Coverage: Articles or reports featuring your organization's work, enhancing credibility and public recognition.

The inclusion of these materials should be tailored to each grant application, ensuring alignment with the funder's requirements and interests. Thoughtfully selected supporting materials can significantly strengthen your application, providing a comprehensive picture of your organization's capabilities, achievements, and the proposed project's potential for success.

The conclusion of a grant application serves as the final opportunity to reinforce your project's significance, your organization's capacity to execute it, and the potential impact of funding. While succinct, it should be powerful and compelling, effectively summarizing the key points of the proposal and leaving a lasting impression on the funder. Here's what a strong conclusion should contain:

Reiteration of the Need and Project's Objectives: Briefly recap the critical need or problem your project addresses and restate the main objectives of your initiative. This serves to remind the funder of the urgency of the issue and the clear, targeted goals your project aims to achieve.

Summary of the Proposed Solution and Its Feasibility: Highlight the key elements of your proposed solution, emphasizing its innovative aspects or proven methods, and reassure the funder of its feasibility. This includes mentioning your organization's readiness, the project's well-thought-out plan, and the expected outcomes.

Emphasis on the Impact: Reinforce the potential impact of the project, focusing on how it aligns with the funder's priorities and the broader benefits it will bring to the target population or field. Be sure to articulate the long-term positive changes that your project aims to catalyze, painting a vivid picture of the future that funding can help realize.

Statement of Partnership and Appreciation: Acknowledge the value of the potential funding partnership, expressing appreciation for the funder's consideration and underscoring how their support is crucial for the project's success. This is an opportunity to position your organization not just as a grantee but as a partner in achieving shared goals.

Call to Action: While subtler than in commercial pitches, your conclusion should still include a gentle call to action, encouraging the funder to support your project. This can be framed as an invitation to join your organization in making a tangible difference, offering the funder a stake in the anticipated successes.

Contact Information and Offer to Provide Further Details: Conclude by providing your contact information and expressing your willingness to discuss the proposal in more detail or provide additional information if needed. This openness not only facilitates further engagement but also demonstrates your organization's transparency and eagerness to collaborate.

Figure 5.5. Sample Conclusion

As we conclude our proposal for the "Green Spaces, Healthy Places" initiative, we wish to reemphasize the critical need for accessible green spaces in our urban communities. Our project aims to transform five underserved areas in Downtown Middleton into thriving community gardens and parks. These spaces are not just plots of land but are the future sites of

education, wellness, and environmental stewardship that our city desperately needs.

Our approach, backed by research and successful models from similar urban areas, proposes a sustainable and community-driven solution to the lack of green spaces. With a detailed plan for community involvement, environmental education programs, and sustainable design, we are confident in the feasibility and long-term success of this initiative. The anticipated outcomes—improved community health, increased biodiversity, and stronger environmental awareness—align closely with the mission of the Green Future Foundation.

The impact of the "Green Spaces, Healthy Places" initiative extends beyond the immediate beneficiaries. By fostering a culture of health and sustainability, we are setting a precedent for other urban areas to follow, contributing to a broader movement towards greener, healthier cities. This project presents an opportunity for the Green Future Foundation to be at the forefront of this transformative change.

We deeply appreciate the Green Future Foundation's consideration of our proposal and are excited about the prospect of partnering with you to bring this vision to life. Your support is crucial for the realization of these green spaces, which promise not only to beautify our urban landscape but also to enhance the well-being of our community members.

Should there be any questions, or if further information is required, we are more than willing to provide detailed discussions or additional documentation. Please feel free to contact us at [contact information]. Together, we can create a lasting legacy of health, sustainability, and community vitality through the "Green Spaces, Healthy Places" initiative.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

A well-crafted conclusion serves as the capstone of your grant application, capturing its essence while highlighting the synergy between your project and the funder's objectives. It should leave the reader convinced of the value and urgency of your proposal, motivated to support your cause, and confident in your organization's capacity to deliver impactful results.

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Chapter 6: Writing the Proposal

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to ask for grant funding. Our organization needs funds to help kids with their education. We need $50,000 to keep our afterschool program running.

We have had success and can do more. We need money for tutors and other materials.

Please donate if you can. Further information is on our website.

Thanks,

Dodo McBird
drizz420@gmail.com

Kids are great. Education is important. After school programs have been shown to be an effective way of helping kids and increasing their educational outcomes. This letter, however, is a mess.

Writing effective grant proposals requires a combination of strategic thinking, careful planning, and, most importantly, strong writing skills. While searching for grant sources, identifying appropriate alliances, engaging in conversations with funders, and calculating budget line items are all crucial steps in the grant-seeking process, they do not overshadow the necessity for grant writers to, well, write (and write well).

Central to writing well is understanding your audience and consistently keeping their wants and needs in mind throughout the writing process. This audience-centric approach ensures that the proposal is tailored to meet the specific interests and criteria of the funders, making it more likely to stand out among numerous submissions.

Secondary, but equally important, are the grammatical, structural, and stylistic elements of writing. Effective communication in grant proposals depends on clear, concise, and engaging language that conveys the project's goals, methods, and impacts without unnecessary complexity. Proper grammar, logical structure, and a consistent style contribute to a professional and polished presentation, which can significantly influence the funders' perception of the proposal.

In this chapter, we will delve into the writing itself. We will explore strategies for understanding and addressing your audience, techniques for maintaining clarity and engagement in your writing, and best practices for ensuring grammatical and structural excellence. By mastering these aspects, you will be better equipped to craft compelling proposals that resonate with funders and increase your chances of securing the necessary support for your projects.

Quality Writing for Grant Proposals: The Key to Success

If you were reviewing grant applications and read, “There is a need to rethink the way school lunch works in Iowa” on one and “The need to rethink school nutrition programs is immediate. Persistently high food and labor costs, ongoing procurement challenges and the end of pandemic-era financial assistance, have dramatically increased financial pressures”, which one would you be more drawn to?

The importance of a well-written research proposal cannot be underestimated. Your research is only as good as your proposal. A poorly written or poorly conceived research proposal will doom even an otherwise worthy project. On the other hand, a well-written, high-quality proposal will increase your chances for success. This chapter explores the essential elements of writing well for grant proposals, emphasizing clarity, audience awareness, organization, and style.

Understanding Your Audience

Every writer should keep their potential audience in mind during the writing process. Reviewers will use only the information contained in the application to assess it. Therefore, the applicant should ensure the application and responses to the program requirements and expectations are complete and clearly written. Do not assume that reviewers are familiar with the applicant's organization or the specific details of the project. Keep the review criteria in mind when writing the application.

Consider the agency’s mission, goals, and values. How does your proposal align with these? Tailor your vocabulary, the amount of background information you provide, and how you frame your goals to match the needs and expectations of your audience. Think about what kind of information will be most persuasive to them: data, testimonials, recommendations, or historical precedents. Construct your argument in a way that resonates with your readers and meets their expectations.

Clarity and Simplicity

When you write a grant, write simply and straightforwardly. State the ideas and concepts clearly, using shorter sentences, and select easily understandable words when there are options. Your writing won’t have more authority because you use bigger words. It will have authority because you have a deep understanding of your topic. Remember, grant reviewers read several proposals a day. The easier yours is to read, the more quickly they can grasp the concepts and, ultimately, the more positive their response to the proposal will be.

Avoiding Common Mistakes

Many people have pet peeves about certain uses of grammar, trite sayings, or current jargon. One might be bothered by a split infinitive (inserting an adverb between “to” and a verb as in “to boldly go”); another might think, “If I read the phrase ‘a seat at the table’ one more time…”; and still another might be weary of the overuse of “youth” to describe teenagers or adolescents or the

use of “impact” as a verb. Be mindful of these potential annoyances and strive for clear, precise language.

It’s also important to be aware of unintentional habits from oral language that creep into your writing. To your ear, it may sound perfectly acceptable to use phrases and words that people use all the time, but writing is a more formal mode of communication and merits your attention to correct usage. Keep stylebooks, writing manuals, grammar textbooks, and a dictionary close to your computer for frequent use. When your work is corrected by a professor or an editor, learn from your mistakes. Commit the error to memory so you don’t repeat it.

Organization and Logic

Many applications fail because the reviewers cannot follow the thought process of the applicant or because parts of the application do not fit together. Be organized and logical. Divide your proposal into predictable sections and label them with clear headings. Follow exactly the headings and content requirements established by the granting agency’s call for proposals.

Grant proposals should be direct and to the point. This isn’t a place for flowery metaphors or subtle literary allusions. Your language should be uncluttered and concise. Match the concepts and language your readers use and are familiar with. Your readers shouldn’t have to work hard to understand what you are communicating.

Consistency and Accuracy

Provide accurate and honest information, including candid accounts of problems and realistic plans to address them. If any required information or data is omitted, explain why. Make sure the information provided in each table, chart, attachment, etc., is consistent with the proposal narrative and information in other tables.

Utilizing Visual Aids

Visual aids like graphs, tables, and drawings can enhance the clarity and impact of your proposal. Winning grant proposals often look different from typical academic journals. Sentences are shorter, with key phrases underlined or bolded to make them stand out. Lists are printed in bullet style. The writing is more energetic, direct, and concise. The subject matter is easy to understand, with fewer highly technical terms. These elements help reviewers quickly grasp the essential points and understand the proposal's significance.

Crafting a Strong Argument

Think closely about how you construct your argument in relation to your readers. Be brief, concise, and clear. Make each point understandable. Use numbered lists to organize your ideas within your proposal. For example, “This project’s three main goals are…” or “This plan will involve four stages…” Using numbers in this way may not be eloquent, but it is an efficient way to present your information in a clear and skimmable manner.

Tailoring Each Proposal

Because grant funding is so competitive, you will likely be applying for several different grants from multiple funding agencies. Design each proposal carefully to respond to the different interests, expectations, and guidelines of each source. While you might scavenge parts of one proposal for another, never use the exact same proposal twice. Additionally, when you apply to more than one source at the same time, think strategically about the kind of support you are asking from each organization. Do your research to find out which source is more likely to support a request for materials and which is more interested in covering the cost of personnel.

Success in grant writing is a matter of style and format as much as content. The best-written proposal will not win money for a weak idea, but many good ideas are not funded because the proposal is poorly written. A well-crafted proposal, tailored to the audience, clear and concise, and logically organized, significantly increases your chances of securing funding. By mastering these elements, you can ensure your proposals stand out and effectively convey the importance and feasibility of your projects.

Be the Authority

A proficient grant writer must not only excel in the art of proposal writing but also possess an in-depth understanding of the subject matter at hand. Whether the topic is cancer research, K-12 education, technology, counseling, or law enforcement, the writer must become an expert in the relevant field. This expertise allows the writer to present the project with authority, ensuring the proposal is both credible and compelling.

Expertise in the subject matter is crucial for several reasons. First, it enables the writer to articulate the nuances and complexities of the project effectively. A deep understanding of the field helps in identifying key issues, challenges, and opportunities, which can then be addressed convincingly in the proposal. For instance, a grant proposal for new cancer research must reflect an up-to-date knowledge of current studies, breakthroughs, and gaps in the existing research.

Second, subject matter expertise allows the writer to anticipate potential questions or concerns from reviewers. By understanding the intricacies of the field, the writer can proactively address these points within the proposal, demonstrating thorough preparation and foresight.

While some grant writers may possess the necessary background to quickly absorb new information, others may find certain topics, such as medical research, beyond their immediate grasp. In such cases, it is advisable to collaborate with subject experts. These collaborations can provide the depth of knowledge required to craft a persuasive proposal. Working with experts ensures that the proposal is factually accurate, scientifically sound, and aligned with current trends and best practices in the field.

The language used in grant proposals is as important as the content. One crucial aspect is the choice of auxiliary verbs. Using “will” instead of “would” conveys a sense of certainty and commitment. For example, “ABC nonprofit will train tutors” versus “ABC nonprofit would train tutors” makes a significant difference. The former indicates a definite plan of action, while the

latter suggests that the action is contingent upon receiving funding, implying a lack of firm commitment.

Grantmakers often extract objectives from proposals verbatim for inclusion in grant agreements. Statements using "will" are straightforward and translate well into contractual obligations, such as "ABC will serve three hundred children by December 2024." This clarity and commitment in language assure the funders of the organization's dedication to executing the proposed project.

Beyond mastering the subject matter and choosing the right words, effective grant writing also involves presenting information in a clear, organized, and engaging manner. The proposal should be structured logically, with each section building on the previous one to create a cohesive narrative. Key points should be highlighted, and technical jargon should be minimized or clearly explained to ensure accessibility for all reviewers.

Engaging storytelling techniques can also enhance the proposal. By framing the project within a compelling narrative, the writer can capture the reviewers' attention and make a more memorable impression. This involves not just presenting facts and figures but also illustrating the real-world impact of the project, perhaps through case studies or testimonials.

Successful grant writing requires a combination of subject matter expertise, precise language, and compelling storytelling. Writers must immerse themselves in the topic, collaborating with experts when necessary, to ensure the proposal is both authoritative and persuasive. The careful use of language, particularly the commitment implied by "will" statements, further strengthens the proposal. By integrating these elements, grant writers can create proposals that stand out and effectively communicate the potential impact of their projects.

Creating an Interesting and Compelling Grant Proposal

Crafting a compelling grant proposal is much like telling a captivating story. Your proposal should present the facts in an engaging manner, leading the reader—the grant reviewer—through a narrative that aligns with their expectations and priorities. By telling a cohesive story, you can hold the reviewer's attention and make your project stand out. This chapter will guide you through the steps of creating an interesting and compelling grant proposal, emphasizing the importance of storytelling, clarity, and alignment with funder priorities.

The Power of Storytelling

At its core, grant writing is storytelling. A compelling story can effectively deliver your key points, making your proposal more memorable and persuasive. Start by deciding the main idea you want the reader to take away from your story. This central theme should be clear and consistently supported by the details you include.

Consider the following elements of storytelling when writing your grant proposal:

1. **Main Idea**: Identify the core message or the primary takeaway you want to convey. This will guide the narrative and ensure that every detail supports this central theme.

2. **Goals, Obstacles, and Outcomes**: Describe your goals, the obstacles you face, and the desired outcomes. This mirrors the plot structure of a story, where there is a problem, actions taken to overcome the problem, and a resolution. These elements are crucial for helping the funder understand why your project is worthy of support.
3. **Decision and Motivation**: Explain the decision that propelled you to seek the desired outcome. This shows your motivation and helps the reader empathize with your cause.
4. **Context**: Start your narrative with the who, where, when, and a hint of direction. Introduce the people involved, the location of your project, and the timeframe. This sets the stage and provides the context needed for the reader to follow your story.

Building the Narrative

A good story keeps the reader engaged and leads them to the conclusions you want them to draw. Here's how to structure your narrative effectively:

1. **Introduction**: Begin with a strong opening that captures attention. Introduce the main characters (e.g., your organization or the beneficiaries), the setting (e.g., the community or area you serve), and the central issue. For example:
    - "Founded in 2020 by Kevin and Pat Jones, Michael's Heart is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit focused on helping parents who lose a child unexpectedly understand the importance of organ donations. Michael's Heart is based in St. Lake City, Utah, and is named after our deceased son, Michael, whose life was abruptly ended by a hit-and-run driver. Our sorrow transformed into a mission to donate Michael's heart, saving another child's life."
2. **Problem Statement**: Clearly outline the problem your project aims to address. Use vivid details and facts to paint a compelling picture of the current situation. For instance:
    - "Each year, hundreds of families in our community experience the devastating loss of a child. Many of these families are unaware of the lifesaving potential of organ donation. Without intervention, these opportunities to save lives are missed, and the grieving process is prolonged."
3. **Goals and Objectives**: Define your project's goals and objectives. Make them specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART). Describe the actions you will take to achieve these goals. For example:
    - "Our goal is to increase organ donation awareness among grieving families in St. Lake City. We will conduct 12 community workshops over the next year, reaching at least 200 families. These workshops will provide crucial information about organ donation and support resources."
4. **Methods and Strategies**: Detail the methods and strategies you will use to achieve your goals. Explain why these methods are effective and how they will be implemented. For example:
    - "Our workshops will be facilitated by trained grief counselors and medical professionals. We will partner with local hospitals, schools, and community centers to reach our target audience. Each workshop will include personal stories from donor families, educational materials, and interactive Q&A sessions."
5. **Evaluation and Impact**: Describe how you will evaluate the success of your project and the impact it will have. Include both qualitative and quantitative measures. For instance:

    - "We will track the number of workshop attendees and survey participants before and after the sessions to measure changes in awareness and attitudes toward organ donation. Success will be demonstrated by a 30% increase in the number of families registering as organ donors."
6. **Conclusion**: End with a strong conclusion that reinforces your main message and leaves a lasting impression. Summarize the key points and highlight the significance of your project. For example:
    - "Michael's Heart is committed to transforming grief into hope through organ donation. With your support, we can educate and empower families to make lifesaving decisions, honoring their loved ones while giving others a second chance at life."

Practical Tips for Compelling Writing

1. **Use Clear and Concise Language**: Avoid jargon and overly complex language. Write in a clear, straightforward manner that is easy for reviewers to understand.
2. **Engage with Details**: Use descriptive and colorful details to bring your story to life. However, avoid overloading your narrative with unnecessary information. Balance detail with brevity.
3. **Stay Factual and Honest**: Never fabricate or exaggerate details. Your proposal must be truthful and accurate. Misrepresentation can lead to loss of credibility and funding.
4. **Use Visual Aids**: Incorporate graphs, tables, and images to support your narrative and break up text. Visual aids can make complex information more accessible and engaging.
5. **Organize Logically**: Follow a clear, logical structure. Use headings and subheadings to guide the reader through your proposal. Ensure each section flows naturally into the next.
6. **Tailor to the Funder**: Align your proposal with the funder's priorities and criteria. Research the funder's mission, goals, and values, and reflect these in your narrative.
7. **Highlight Success Stories**: Include case studies or success stories to illustrate the impact of your work. Personal stories can make your proposal more relatable and compelling.

Creating an interesting and compelling grant proposal requires more than just presenting facts. It involves weaving a narrative that engages the reader, aligns with their values, and clearly demonstrates the need and impact of your project. By focusing on storytelling, clarity, and alignment with funder priorities, you can make your proposal stand out and increase your chances of securing funding. Remember, a well-told story not only holds the reader's attention but also inspires them to support your cause.

Editing and Proofreading

Crafting a grant proposal is a meticulous process that extends far beyond the initial writing phase. Mistakes such as spelling errors, sloppy citing, mislabeled figures, and unfinished sentences are inexcusable and can frustrate reviewers, potentially jeopardizing your chances of securing funding. Therefore, using a spelling and grammar checker is essential, but it's not enough. A writer often becomes too close to their work to notice all errors, making editing and proofreading critical functions. Engaging others in these tasks can significantly enhance the quality of your proposal.

Editing: Shaping Your Narrative

Editing is the first crucial step after completing the initial draft of a grant proposal. It involves a comprehensive review to ensure clarity, coherence, and persuasive strength. Here are key aspects of the editing process:

1. **Reworking Sections for Better Flow and Impact**: Editing involves revising sections to enhance readability and logical progression. This might mean reordering paragraphs, refining transitions, and ensuring each section builds on the previous one.
2. **Ensuring Consistency in Terminology and Tone**: Consistent use of terminology and a uniform tone throughout the proposal can make it more professional and easier to follow. This consistency also reinforces the proposal's credibility.
3. **Clarifying Objectives and Outcomes**: The proposal must clearly articulate its goals and expected outcomes, aligning them with the funder's criteria. Ambiguous or vague statements can weaken your argument.
4. **Strengthening the Argument**: Editors focus on enhancing the proposal's persuasive elements, ensuring that the rationale for funding is compelling and well-supported by evidence.
5. **Adjusting the Structure**: Adhering to the funder's guidelines regarding structure and format is crucial. Editors ensure that the proposal is organized in a way that meets these guidelines and facilitates easy navigation for reviewers.

Editing is an iterative process that may require multiple rounds to refine the proposal's content and structure. This thorough approach ensures that the proposal presents a strong, coherent case for funding.

Proofreading: The Final Polish

Proofreading is the last step before submitting the proposal and focuses on correcting surface errors. It ensures the document is professional and error-free. Key tasks include:

1. **Correcting Typographical and Grammatical Errors**: Proofreaders meticulously check for spelling mistakes, incorrect grammar, and punctuation errors that can undermine the proposal's professionalism.
2. **Checking Consistency in Formatting**: Consistent formatting, such as uniform headers, footers, and font sizes, contributes to a polished appearance. Proofreaders verify that the proposal adheres to these standards.
3. **Ensuring Adherence to Style Guides**: Compliance with specific style guides or submission guidelines is crucial. Proofreaders ensure that the document meets all specified requirements.
4. **Verifying Accuracy in References and Citations**: Accurate and properly formatted citations are essential. Proofreaders check that all references are correct and consistent with the required citation style.

Proofreading requires a meticulous eye for detail, as even minor errors can detract from the proposal's credibility and impact the funding decision.

Engaging External Reviewers

Given the challenges of self-editing, it is beneficial to involve external reviewers in the process. These reviewers can provide fresh perspectives and identify errors that the writer may have overlooked. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) suggests requesting colleagues or mentors to review a draft early in the process. These early proofreaders can focus on macro issues such as the overall organization and logical flow of the narrative.

Additionally, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) recommends enlisting someone not involved in the preparation of the application to review it. This person can concentrate on micro issues like word choice, sentence structure, and typographical errors.

The Distinction Between Editing and Proofreading

While the lines between editing and proofreading may blur, understanding their distinct roles is crucial for producing a high-quality proposal. Editing shapes the narrative, ensuring it is clear, compelling, and logically structured. Proofreading, on the other hand, polishes the document by eliminating surface errors and ensuring consistency and professionalism.

In the competitive field of grant submissions, every detail matters. Errors, whether minor typos or significant inconsistencies, can detract from the proposal's overall quality and reduce its chances of success. Editing and proofreading are essential steps that ensure the final document is polished, coherent, and compelling. By recognizing the importance of both processes and engaging external reviewers, grant writers can significantly enhance their proposals, increasing the likelihood of securing the desired funding. In essence, thorough editing and meticulous proofreading are the final touches that can make the difference between acceptance and rejection.

More Tips

Explain Acronyms and Terminology

In the realm of grant applications, clarity is paramount. The potential for securing funding often hinges on how well an application communicates its objectives, needs, and potential impacts. One crucial aspect of effective communication in grant writing is the careful use of language, particularly when it comes to acronyms, terminology, and jargon.

Grant applications are typically reviewed by a diverse panel of experts who may not share the same background or specialization as the applicant. Using unexplained acronyms and specialized terminology can create barriers to understanding, potentially alienating reviewers who are not familiar with the specific language of the field. By explaining acronyms and avoiding jargon, applicants ensure their proposals are accessible to all reviewers, regardless of their specific expertise. This inclusivity can significantly enhance the readability of the application, making it easier for reviewers to grasp the key points and appreciate the proposal's value.

When applicants take the time to explain acronyms and terminology, they demonstrate a commitment to clear and transparent communication. This effort builds trust and credibility with

the review panel. It shows that the applicant is considerate of the reviewers' time and is dedicated to making their application as comprehensible as possible. Conversely, an application riddled with unexplained acronyms and jargon can come across as careless or, worse, as an attempt to obscure a lack of substance with complex language. Clear communication fosters trust, which is essential for convincing reviewers of the proposal's merit.

Studies have shown that people understand and retain information better when it is presented clearly and without unnecessary complexity. When reviewers encounter unfamiliar acronyms and jargon, they may struggle to follow the narrative of the proposal, leading to misinterpretations or overlooked key points. By using plain language and providing explanations for necessary technical terms, applicants can ensure that their proposals are not only understood but also remembered. This increased comprehension and retention can make a significant difference in a competitive grant application process.

Many grant applications involve multidisciplinary projects that require collaboration across different fields. In such cases, clear communication becomes even more critical. Explaining acronyms and terminology ensures that all collaborators, regardless of their discipline, can understand the project's objectives and methodologies. This clarity facilitates smoother collaboration and fosters a more cohesive team effort. Additionally, it demonstrates to the grant reviewers that the project is well-organized and has accounted for the diverse expertise required for successful execution.

Granting agencies often provide specific guidelines for how applications should be prepared and submitted. These guidelines frequently emphasize the importance of clear and concise language. By adhering to these instructions, applicants show that they respect the funding agency's requirements and are capable of following directions—an important quality for managing the grant if awarded. Ignoring these guidelines by using unexplained acronyms and jargon can result in the application being viewed unfavorably, regardless of the project's potential.

Voice

Using active voice is a crucial component of effective communication, particularly in grant writing. Active voice, characterized by clear, direct sentences where the subject performs the action, brings numerous benefits to writing, enhancing clarity, engagement, and persuasion. These attributes are especially vital in grant applications, where the goal is to convince reviewers of the proposal's value and feasibility.

Consider these examples:

- Active: "We will conduct the research."
- Passive: "The research will be conducted by us."
- Active: "Our team will implement the program."
- Passive: "The program will be implemented by our team."

These examples illustrate how active voice makes sentences clearer and more direct, which is essential in grant writing.

Clarity and Directness

Active voice promotes clarity and directness, making it easier for readers to understand the message. In grant writing, where the stakes are high, and the competition is fierce, conveying ideas clearly and concisely is essential. Sentences in the active voice are straightforward, reducing ambiguity and confusion. For example, "The team will conduct the research" is more direct and easier to understand than "The research will be conducted by the team." This directness helps reviewers quickly grasp the main points, improving their overall comprehension of the proposal.

Engagement and Readability

Active voice makes writing more engaging and dynamic. Sentences written in the active voice are typically shorter and more to the point, which helps maintain the reader's interest. In the context of a grant application, where reviewers may be reading through numerous proposals, keeping their attention is critical. Engaging writing can make a proposal stand out, increasing the likelihood that reviewers will remember it. For example, "We will develop a new community outreach program" is more compelling than "A new community outreach program will be developed." The active construction captures attention and keeps the reader focused.

Persuasiveness

Using active voice enhances the persuasiveness of writing. Active sentences often convey confidence and decisiveness, which are important qualities in grant applications. Funders want to support projects that demonstrate clear objectives and a strong plan of action. By using active voice, applicants can present their projects assertively, instilling confidence in the reviewers. For instance, "Our organization will reduce carbon emissions by 20% within two years" is a strong, persuasive statement compared to "Carbon emissions will be reduced by 20% within two years." The active voice emphasizes the applicant's commitment and capability to achieve the proposed outcomes.

Accountability and Ownership

Active voice also underscores accountability and ownership, which are critical in grant writing. It clearly identifies who is responsible for each action, making it easier for reviewers to understand the roles and responsibilities within the project. This clarity helps demonstrate that the applicant has a well-thought-out plan and that the team is prepared to execute it effectively. For example, "Our team will analyze the data and publish the findings" clearly shows who will perform these tasks, whereas "The data will be analyzed and the findings published" leaves the responsible parties ambiguous.

Positive Impression

Using active voice creates a positive impression of the applicant and their proposal. It suggests that the applicant is proactive, organized, and capable of delivering results. In contrast, passive voice can sometimes come across as vague or evasive, which might raise doubts about the applicant's preparedness or the feasibility of the project. Active voice conveys a sense of action and progress, which is exactly what funders are looking for in a proposal.

Points of View

Choosing between first and third person narration in grant writing is a common dilemma. High school English teachers and college professors often emphasized that the first person was inappropriate for research papers, leaving many wondering if the same rule applies to grant writing. While it might seem unnatural to use only the third person in grant proposals, the truth is that both styles have their merits and can be effectively combined.

Understanding the Differences

First person narration uses pronouns like "we" to refer to the applicant, making the proposal feel more personal and relatable. On the other hand, third person narration refers to the applicant organization as "it," which can lend a formal and professional tone to the writing. Each style has its advantages and potential drawbacks, depending on the context and the relationship with the funder.

When to Use First Person

First person narration can make your proposal more engaging and personable. This approach is particularly useful when you have established relationships with local grantmakers. Using "we" can foster a sense of collaboration and shared mission, making the proposal more relatable. For instance, stating "We aim to reduce homelessness in our community by 20% over the next year" is direct and conveys a sense of commitment and involvement.

However, solely using first person can sometimes appear too informal, especially for formal applications or when dealing with unfamiliar funders. Additionally, overusing "we" and "our organization" can cause the reviewer to lose track of who the applicant is, especially in longer proposals.

When to Use Third Person

Third person narration, while more formal, offers clarity and specificity. Referring to your organization by name repeatedly can help reinforce your brand and ensure that the reviewer remembers who you are. For example, "Churches United for the Homeless seeks funding to expand its shelter services" clearly identifies the organization and its goals.

This formality, however, can sometimes create a sense of distance between the writer and the reader. It might come across as stiff or impersonal, especially if overused. Additionally, longer organizational names can make the text cumbersome and harder to read.

The Case for Blending Both Styles

In practice, a blend of first and third person narration often works best. Combining the warmth and engagement of first person with the clarity and formality of third person can make your proposal more dynamic and readable. This approach allows you to enjoy the benefits of both styles while mitigating their respective drawbacks.

For example, you might use first person to describe your organization's mission and impact: "We have helped over 500 families find stable housing." Then switch to third person for specific project details: "Churches United for the Homeless now seeks $100,000 to expand its housing program."

Practical Tips for Blending

1. **Consistency**: While blending, ensure consistency within each section. Avoid switching between first and third person in the same paragraph or sentence, as this can confuse the reader.
2. **Strategic Placement**: Use first person for general statements about your organization's mission, vision, and accomplishments. Use third person for specific details about projects, budgets, and formal requests.
3. **Clear Identification**: When using third person, be clear and consistent in how you refer to your organization. If your organization has a long name, consider using a consistent abbreviation that is defined early in the proposal.
4. **Cover Letter**: Always write your cover letter in the first person, regardless of the narrative style used in the proposal. This creates a personal connection with the reader from the outset.

Example of Blending in Action

Consider the following blended approach:

First Person: "Over the past decade, we have focused on reducing recidivism rates in our community. Our dedicated team has developed comprehensive programs that provide education and support to former inmates."

Third Person: "The Department of Community Outreach now seeks additional funding to expand these successful initiatives. With an increase in support, the Department can extend its services to more individuals in need."

This blend provides a personal touch while clearly identifying the organization and its needs.

Ultimately, the choice between first and third person narration in grant writing is not a strict one. Both styles have their advantages, and the best approach is often a blend of the two. By strategically combining first and third person narration, you can create a grant proposal that is both engaging and professional, ultimately increasing your chances of securing funding. Remember to be consistent, clear, and mindful of your audience's expectations, and your proposal will stand out for all the right reasons.

Inclusive Language

Inclusive language is a crucial aspect of effective communication, particularly in the context of grant writing. It ensures that all individuals and communities are represented respectfully and

accurately, promoting equality and reducing the potential for marginalization. Here are key reasons and strategies for using inclusive language in grant writing:

Gender

Unless your program is gender-specific, it's essential to avoid language that excludes any gender. Using gender-neutral words like "who," "one," or "they" is a simple yet effective strategy. For example, instead of writing "Each participant should bring his notebook," use "Each participant should bring their notebook." Removing pronouns altogether, when possible, can also work, such as "Each participant should bring a notebook." Always refer to individuals by their preferred pronouns to respect their identity and foster an inclusive environment.

Race and Ethnicity

Ethnic and racial groups must always be capitalized and as specific as possible. If you are writing about a diverse group of non-White individuals, the term "people of color" is more appropriate than "minorities."

Ability

Unfortunately, many words used to describe disability or people with disabilities are disempowering. Always use people-first language when describing physical or mental conditions. There are similar issues when discussing older adults. Some terms can denote frailty or weakness, even unintentionally.

Sexual Orientation

Avoid writing statements that assume sexual orientation or gender identity altogether, unless it's part of your participant demography. Describe relationships using inclusive terms such as partner, spouse, and family rather than gendered or hetronormative definitions, like husband or wife.

The Impact of Inclusive Language

How we talk and write about people and communities significantly impacts perceptions and relationships. Inclusive language acknowledges that terminology evolves and emphasizes the importance of using current, respectful terms. Don't assume you know the most inclusive language, even if you belong to the community you're writing about. Seek input from team members and community experts to ensure accuracy and sensitivity. According to the Linguistic Society of America, using inclusive language "avoids past pitfalls or habits that may unintentionally lead to marginalization, offense, misrepresentation, or the perpetuation of stereotypes."

The concept of inclusive language is dynamic, continually evolving as communities' voices grow louder and societal awareness increases. There's always room for improvement, both on an individual level and within the broader movement for inclusivity. Standards for inclusive language shift as more attention is given to how communities prefer to be addressed. Grant

writers should stay informed about these changes to ensure their language remains respectful and up-to-date.

People-first language and gender-neutral language are key components of inclusive writing. People-first language prioritizes the individual over their condition or circumstance, for example, “person with a disability” rather than “disabled person.” Gender-neutral language avoids assumptions about gender, using terms like “postal worker” instead of “postman.” These guidelines help prevent the reinforcement of negative biases and stereotypes, promoting an appreciation of diversity and individual differences.

While emotional or charged language might seem compelling, it can sometimes reinforce harmful stereotypes. Instead, grant writers should focus on presenting clear, factual information about the challenges faced by the communities they aim to serve. Describing practical and logistical barriers, rather than individual shortcomings, paints a realistic picture and avoids placing blame on individuals. This approach also makes the situation more relatable and understandable for funders.

The most accurate and respectful language is often best determined by the people it describes. Terms evolve rapidly, and what was acceptable a few years ago may no longer be appropriate. Engage with stakeholders and community members to ensure the language used aligns with their preferences and values. Review materials from advocacy organizations and grantmakers’ publications to understand the preferred terminology and reflect that in your writing.

Guiding Principles of Inclusive Language

Several broad principles can guide the use of inclusive language:

1. **Acknowledge Privilege and Power Dynamics:** Use language that counters narratives contributing to marginalization. Describe external factors affecting communities, such as discrimination and lack of resources.
2. **Focus on Facts:** Provide a realistic depiction of challenges without sensationalizing or oversimplifying. Highlight systemic issues rather than individual faults.
3. **Consult the Source:** Always validate your language choices with the communities involved, recognizing that terminology and preferences change over time.

Using inclusive language in grant writing is essential for accurately and respectfully representing diverse communities. It promotes equality, reduces marginalization, and enhances the effectiveness of communication. By following inclusive language principles, grant writers can ensure their proposals are not only clear and compelling but also aligned with the values of respect and inclusivity that are vital in today’s diverse society.

Cover Sheets

The cover materials are the first thing grant reviewers see when they pick up your application, so it's essential to ensure each part is complete, well-presented, and correctly placed. For foundation and corporate requests, you will often use a common grant application form when the funder

does not provide a specific format. It's crucial to follow the funder's instructions exactly and use the common form as directed without modifications.

For federal grant applications, the Application for Federal Assistance, commonly referred to as SF-424, is a mandatory document and is sometimes required by state agencies as well. This form standardizes the data needed for federal funding requests. In addition to this, an abstract or executive summary is typically required by all types of funders. This section should provide a brief, clear summary of your project, outlining the main points and expected outcomes. Some federal and state grant applications also request a table of contents, but not all do. Always check the specific guidelines of the funding agency and adhere strictly to their instructions. Do not modify PDF forms or alter the format in any way.

Regardless of the specific template, several key pieces of information are commonly requested. These include details about your organization, such as its name, tax-exempt status, year founded, date of application, address, telephone number, fax number, director, and a contact person with their title. This information gives the funder a basic overview of your organization's eligibility. Clearly stating the amount of funding you are requesting is critical, as this immediately informs the funder of your needs and expectations. It's also wise to submit tailored proposals to multiple funders to maximize your chances of securing the necessary funds.

Most foundation and corporate grants cover a one-year period, though some may provide multi-year support. Specify whether your request is for general operational support, startup funds, technical assistance, or other needs, and use the appropriate terminology. A project or program title adds a personal touch to your request, so make sure it is consistently used throughout all documents.

When outlining the total project budget, include the overall costs to execute your program, factoring in both in-kind and cash contributions. Indicate the start date of your organization's fiscal year, which can vary, so check with your financial team. Provide the total operating budget for your organization for the current fiscal year and summarize your mission statement succinctly to fit within the cover form's space constraints.

After completing the grant application narrative, summarize the project or grant request. This summary should concisely convey your project's purpose and goals, effectively capturing the essence of your proposal.

Accuracy is critical, so double-check that all forms, particularly PDFs, are filled out correctly and adhere to the required format. Ensure consistency in terminology and titles throughout your application to avoid any confusion. Before submitting, thoroughly review all cover materials for completeness and accuracy. By carefully preparing and presenting your cover materials, you create a positive first impression and increase the likelihood of securing funding. These elements not only convey essential information but also demonstrate the professionalism and readiness of your organization.

Executive Summaries and Cover Letters

The final steps before submitting a grant proposal are writing the executive summary or abstract and the cover letter. So, even though they may come first in your proposal, they should be written last. These sections are often your first opportunity to make an impression, and the concise writing required can be challenging. Writing these last allows you to select the key points from the entire proposal, ensuring your summary and cover letter highlight the most important aspects.

The executive summary or abstract provides a brief overview of your project. This section should concisely capture the essence of your proposal, summarizing the project's goals, methods, and anticipated outcomes. As this might be the first and sometimes only part read initially, it needs to be clear and compelling.

Cover letters are required by some grantmakers, especially foundation and corporate funders, and serve two main purposes: summarizing the project and making the funding request upfront, and expressing gratitude to the potential funder for considering your proposal. While government funders rarely ask for cover letters anymore, foundations and corporations might.

Writing Tips for Cover Letters

1. **Timing**: Write the cover letter last. After completing the full proposal, you'll have a clear understanding of the project's key points, making it easier to summarize effectively in the cover letter.
2. **Addressing the Letter**: Use the date you plan to send the grant application. Ensure consistency in dates across all documents. Address the cover letter to the specific contact person, including their name, title, and the funder's full address. Verify this information through a phone call, email, or online search to avoid mistakes.
3. **Greeting**: Start with a formal greeting, such as "Dear Mr./Ms./Mrs. [Last Name]." Double-check the preferred title of the contact person. If unsure, contact the funder's office for clarification. Some individuals prefer gender-neutral titles, so when in doubt, it's best to ask.
4. **Introduction**: The first paragraph should be short and focused. Introduce your organization by its legal name, then yourself with your job title. Clearly state the amount of money you are requesting and briefly explain why your organization needs it. Include a sentence or two about what your organization does.
5. **Organizational Details**: In the second paragraph, provide brief details about your organization's corporate structure and the date it was founded. Explain how your organization's mission aligns with the funder's priorities. Support your claims with a sentence that includes research-based evidence demonstrating the need for your organization's work.
6. **Conclusion**: Wrap up with a summarizing paragraph that reflects on what the funding partnership could achieve for your project's target audience. Use a creative closing statement, such as "Awaiting your response" or "With great hope," to convey optimism and gratitude.

7. **Signature**: Sign the letter with your first name, inviting a personal connection. Below your signature, type your full name and job title. Typically, the executive director or board president should sign the letter.
8. **Attachments**: At the bottom of the letter, include a note such as “ATTACHMENTS” or “ENCLOSURES” in capital letters. This indicates that additional documents, like the full grant proposal, are included in the packet.

The cover letter should be brief and to the point, reflecting a deep understanding of the funder and the proposal. Avoid simply repeating information from the grant request. Instead, let your passion and understanding of the project shine through. By carefully crafting these final pieces, you set a positive tone for the rest of your proposal.

Style

Formatting

When preparing a grant proposal, it’s essential to follow the outline provided in the grantmaker’s guidelines or Request for Proposal (RFP) exactly. This attention to detail ensures that your application meets the funder's expectations and facilitates easier review. Here are some key strategies for adhering to these guidelines and crafting a compliant, clear proposal.

First, structure your proposal by numbering or lettering sections exactly as they appear in the grantmaker’s guidelines. For instance, use formats like 1, 2, 3 or I, II, III for main sections, and A, B, C for subheadings. This mirroring of the funder's structure helps reviewers quickly locate and assess the information they need. If the guidelines include instructions in bullet form under a heading, identify these instructions with callouts in bold or italic type, ensuring that each question is clearly addressed.

When creating headings and subheadings, simplify the grantmaker's instructions to make them easily identifiable. For example, if the instructions state, “Identify the need in your community for a technology center,” you can shorten this to “Statement of Need” or “Need for Project.” Extract the core elements of questions for subheadings; for example, “How have you involved constituents in the development of your project?” can become “Constituent Involvement.”

In terms of presentation, unless specified otherwise, use a twelve-point serif font such as Times New Roman or Palatino for the body of the narrative, as these fonts are considered the most readable. Sans serif fonts can be used for headings and subheadings to clearly delineate sections and enhance readability. This typographic distinction helps to make the document more navigable and visually appealing.

Pay close attention to page margins, which are often specified by the grantmaker. If not, the standard is one inch on all sides. If you are allowed to bind the document in a three-ring binder or folder, increase the left-side margin by half an inch to accommodate the binding. This adjustment ensures that the text is not obscured by the binding mechanism.

Line spacing is another important consideration. Government RFPs typically specify whether to use single or double spacing between lines. If no instructions are provided, single spacing is usually acceptable. To improve readability, leave a line space between paragraphs rather than indenting the first line. Additionally, include a line space between the end of one subheading and the beginning of the next within the document.

By following these guidelines, you demonstrate your ability to comply with funder requirements and present a professional, organized proposal. This attention to detail not only helps your application stand out but also makes it easier for reviewers to evaluate your project's merits. In sum, adhering strictly to the grantmaker's guidelines and presenting a clear, well-structured proposal significantly enhances your chances of securing funding.

Length

In the world of grant writing, almost all proposals come with strict word or page limits. Adhering to these limits is crucial, as most funding agencies will not consider proposals that exceed them. Brevity is essential in grant proposals; excessively long sentences and unnecessary repetition can discourage readers. To achieve maximum readability, sentences should be concise and all non-essential information should be excluded. Following instructions meticulously is imperative.

Most foundations share the perspective of a diligent high school English teacher: the proposal should be as long as necessary to make your points effectively, but no longer. Foundation staff and trustees, like everyone else, do not enjoy wading through voluminous, highly technical documents. Ideally, your concept paper should be ten pages or fewer. Grant proposals are generally not thrilling reads, so it is vital to keep them succinct and engaging.

Requests for Proposals (RFPs) often come with strict rules regarding page counts. With the rise of eGrants—electronic submissions mandated by the government—these limits can extend to word or character counts. Failure to adhere to these limits can lead to your proposal being discarded outright. If an RFP requires a ten-page limit and you submit twelve, the extra pages might be discarded, and you could lose crucial points for the missing sections. Even if your initial sections score highly, exceeding the page limit can be detrimental to your overall score compared to the competition.

As foundations increasingly move to electronic submissions, they often restrict narratives by the number of allowable words or characters. Utilize the tools in your word processing software to ensure your narrative does not exceed these limits. Double-check after pasting sections into online forms to ensure that the entire entry is visible before submission. While it can be challenging to condense your case statement or project description to a limited number of characters, this practice forces you to focus on what is most important. It helps you (a) tell the reader only what they need to know, (b) emphasize the most critical aspects of your program, and (c) speak with authority on the subject.

Grant reviewers are typically very busy and have limited time, so they appreciate proposals that are easy to understand and quickly get to the point. They can become frustrated if they have to struggle to comprehend the proposal or to discern the project's objectives. If a proposal fails to engage them from the very first page, they may not read further. In cases where reviewers must

provide a written critique, they will likely begin looking for reasons to justify not funding the proposal.

Senior reviewers consistently highlight "clear" and "concise" as top characteristics of good grant writing. Brevity is not just a matter of style; it is a key aspect of successful grantsmanship. In the spirit of Mies van der Rohe's famous dictum about modern architecture: "Less is more." This principle applies equally well to grant writing. By ensuring your proposal is concise and to the point, you increase its readability and enhance your chances of securing funding.

Headers/Footers

When preparing a grant proposal, it's crucial to include a header or, preferably, a footer with the page number on every page of the narrative. For longer applications, you may also need to number appendix documents sequentially. This can be accomplished by running existing documents, like an audit, through your printer to add just the footer. This practice not only ensures that your documents are well-organized but also facilitates the creation of a table of contents for extensive grant applications.

Including the name of your organization, the project name, and the location of the nonprofit in the footer of each page is essential. This practice helps prevent mix-ups and ensures that each page is easily identifiable. Here's a cautionary tale to illustrate the importance of this practice: Years ago, two nonprofits from different states, both named “The Bridge,” applied for the same federal grant. One organization scored high and was awarded funding, but due to a clerical error, the grant agreement and the first check were sent to the wrong Bridge. By the time the mistake was discovered, the government had no appeal process, and the funds had already been expended. The successful applicant was left without the promised funding due to this error. The lesson here is clear: make sure every page of your narrative contains identifying information to ensure that your project, nonprofit, and location are unmistakably identified.

Even when preparing documents for online submission, retaining footers and headers in your drafts is important. Systems like eGrants, used by the federal government, collate different sections into one packet for distribution to reviewers. Therefore, having consistent headers and footers ensures that your documents remain organized and identifiable throughout the review process.

In practice, including headers or footers with necessary information serves multiple purposes. It enhances the professionalism of your proposal, making it easier for reviewers to navigate and reference specific sections. It also reduces the risk of errors during the review process, as each page is clearly marked with essential details.

To implement this, ensure that your footer includes the following:

- The name of your organization
- The project name
- The location of your nonprofit
- Page numbers

This setup helps in maintaining clarity and consistency throughout your document. In case of long documents or numerous appendices, this approach simplifies the process of locating and verifying information, which is critical during the review.

Finally, always double-check that your headers and footers are correctly formatted and consistent across all documents before submission. This attention to detail reflects the professionalism and thoroughness of your organization, qualities that can positively influence reviewers' perceptions and increase your chances of securing funding.

In summary, always include identifying information on every page of your grant proposal. This simple yet effective practice ensures clarity, prevents mix-ups, and maintains the professional integrity of your submission. By doing so, you safeguard your application against errors and enhance its readability and organization, ultimately supporting a stronger case for your funding request.

Photos and Graphics

When crafting a grant proposal, it's important to avoid unnecessary beautification. Elements such as photos, color type, fancy bindery materials, or any other embellishments that do not contribute to the clarity and conciseness of the proposal should generally be avoided. The primary focus should be on presenting your content in a clear, straightforward manner.

If an organizational structure or a process plan is better understood through a graphic, by all means, use a graph or illustration. However, when including graphics, ensure that you reduce the narrative content accordingly to make space for these visuals. This not only justifies the use of illustrations but also maintains a balance between text and graphics. Color type, while visually appealing, is an unnecessary expense in terms of toner or copying costs. Even graphs and charts can be effectively printed in grayscale or with different patterns to distinguish various elements.

If you need to attach existing color documents, such as a program brochure or an annual report, ensure you include one for every copy of the proposal unless the funder's instructions specify otherwise. Sometimes, a foundation will request one set of attachments and several copies of the main proposal. It's crucial to adhere to these guidelines to avoid any missteps.

Charts can be extremely useful for presenting timelines, goals, objectives, or other data that is more easily understood in a visual format. However, keep these charts in black and white, and use bold, italics, and underscoring to differentiate information. This approach ensures that your charts are clear and professional without the need for color.

A few practical tips about using charts: First, tables sometimes do not transfer well in online submissions. To preserve the formatting of your charts, save your document in Adobe PDF format before submitting it. This will help maintain the integrity of the chart parameters. Second, if the Request for Proposal (RFP) specifies that the document must be double-spaced, this requirement applies to all parts of the document, including charts, unless otherwise instructed. Be sure to follow this guideline to ensure compliance.

In essence, while visuals and formatted text can enhance the readability of your proposal, over-embellishing can detract from its professionalism and clarity. Focus on ensuring that your content is presented as clearly and concisely as possible, using graphics and charts only when they add significant value and understanding to your narrative.

By keeping your proposal straightforward and avoiding unnecessary beautification, you help reviewers focus on the substance of your application. This approach not only saves costs but also ensures that your proposal maintains a professional and serious tone, increasing the likelihood of it being well-received by the funders.

Finalizing Your Grant Application Package

Before you can consider your grant application complete, it's crucial to focus on the finishing touches. Adhering to the funder's packaging and formatting guidelines is essential; failing to do so can result in losing valuable technical review points, potentially disqualifying your application before it even gets a chance. This section outlines the final steps you must take to ensure your grant application is ready for submission.

Most government grant applications, and even some foundations and corporations, now require an application package or online upload checklist. This checklist details everything needed for a complete application package. Use this checklist to ensure you include each section the funder expects to find when they review your submission. Some funders even require you to include this checklist within your application package, specifying its exact placement.

Not all private-sector funders (foundations and corporations) provide these comprehensive checklists. If your funder doesn't offer one, creating your own checklist is a practical solution. Based on the funder's instructions, type out a list showing the order of the application materials. Determine the first document the funder needs to read upon opening your package, and continue the list until it includes all necessary forms, narrative sections, and attachments. Be sure to note the recommended length for each section or the entire narrative.

Creating your own checklist serves multiple purposes. It provides peace of mind, ensuring you haven't missed any required components. It also guides you through the completion of the funding package, signaling when it's ready for submission. Even if you've already reviewed your checklist twice, it's worth going through it a third time. Triple-checking ensures you haven't overlooked any critical details.

Once your checklist is complete, ensure every item on it is meticulously prepared and formatted according to the funder's specifications. Pay attention to details like font size, margin widths, and document formatting, as these seemingly minor aspects can impact your application's reception.

Next, assemble your application package in the precise order dictated by the checklist. This order often starts with the cover letter, followed by the executive summary or abstract, the detailed proposal narrative, budget details, and any required attachments or appendices. Ensure each document is properly labeled and paginated, making it easy for reviewers to navigate.

Consider the physical presentation if submitting a hard copy. Use a binder or folder to keep documents organized and protected. For electronic submissions, make sure all files are correctly formatted and named according to the funder's guidelines. Double-check that all hyperlinks and embedded documents work correctly.

Finally, take a moment to reflect on your application from the perspective of a reviewer. Is it clear, concise, and compelling? Does it align with the funder's mission and priorities? Have you demonstrated the impact and feasibility of your proposed project? Addressing these questions can help you make any last-minute adjustments to strengthen your application.

Sample Cover Letter

[Your Name]
[Your Title]
[Your Organization's Name]
[Organization's Address]
[City, State, ZIP Code]
[Email Address]
[Phone Number]
[Date]

[Contact Person's Name]
[Contact Person's Title]
[Funders' Organization's Name]
[Organization's Address]
[City, State, ZIP Code]

Dear [Contact Person's Title and Last Name],

I am writing to request your support for [Your Organization's Name] through a grant of $[Requested Amount]. Our organization is dedicated to [briefly describe the mission of your organization], and we are seeking funding for our [specific project or program name], which aims to [briefly describe the project's goals and objectives].

[Your Organization's Name], founded in [Year], is a [your organization's legal status, e.g., 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization] based in [Location]. We have been serving the community for [number of years] and have achieved significant milestones, including [mention a few key accomplishments or impacts]. Our mission aligns closely with [Funder's Organization's Name]'s commitment to [mention how your project aligns with the funder's mission or funding priorities].

The [Project Name] will [briefly describe the need your project addresses, the approach you will take, and the expected outcomes]. Specifically, our project will [mention key activities and anticipated results]. Research indicates a critical need for [mention relevant data or statistics to support your project's necessity]. By addressing this need, we aim to [summarize the long-term impact of your project].

We are confident that with your support, [Your Organization's Name] can make a significant difference in [mention the target community or population]. Enclosed with this letter, you will find our detailed grant proposal, which includes a comprehensive overview of the project, budget details, and supporting documentation. We have also included all necessary forms and appendices as requested in your guidelines.

Thank you for considering our application. We greatly appreciate the opportunity to present our project for your review. We look forward to the possibility of partnering with [Funder's Organization's Name] to achieve our shared goals. Should you have any questions or require further information, please do not hesitate to contact me at [Your Phone Number] or [Your Email Address].

With great hope,

[Your Handwritten Signature (if submitting a hard copy)]

[Your Typed Full Name]
[Your Title]

Attachments: [List of attachments, e.g., Grant Proposal, Budget, Appendices]

Sample Foundation Proposal Cover Sheet

Foundation for Animal Welfare Grant Application Cover Sheet

Date:_____

Organization Name:_____

Address:_____

Phone:_____ Website:_____

Executive Director/Chief Operating Officer:_____

Phone:_____ Email:_____

Project Contact Person:_____

Phone:_____ Email_____

Project Name:_____

Project
Description:_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Total Project Cost: $_____
Total Amount Requested: $_____
Total Operating Budget: $_____

Authorizing Signature(s):

_____ _____ _____
Signature, Executive Director Date Printed Name

_____ _____ _____
Signature, Board Chairperson

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Chapter 7: Budgets

Here is the deal: If your budget doesn’t add up, you're not getting the grant. Even with the best idea, a perfectly laid out plan, and the top team assembled, your proposal will fail if you cannot demonstrate its financial feasibility. This underscores the fact that a well-structured grant budget is more than the mere fulfillment of a formal requirement; it is a pivotal tool that can decisively influence the outcome of your grant application.

A robust grant budget serves multiple essential functions. First, it acts as a testament to your organization's dedication to sound financial management, assuring funders that their investment will be judiciously utilized. Such demonstration of financial responsibility is not merely about tracking dollars and cents but about reinforcing the trust that funders place in your initiative.

Further, a well-prepared budget establishes the feasibility and sustainability of your project. It allows you to thoroughly evaluate your project's financial health, pinpoint potential shortfalls, and convincingly demonstrate its long-term viability to your funders. This financial planning helps in laying a foundation that supports not just the current project but also paves the way for future endeavors.

Finally, a transparent and well-prepared budget builds trust with funders. It showcases your commitment to accountability and transparency, setting the stage for enduring collaborations. In grant writing, a clear and concise budget is not just about numbers—it's about building relationships based on trust and shared goals. Through this chapter, we will delve into how to craft such a budget, one that aligns perfectly with both the strategic objectives of your project and the expectations of your funders.

Understanding Grant Requirements

The first step in writing a budget for a grant is to thoroughly understand the funding body’s specific requirements. This stage is essential, as each grantor will have different financial guidelines, restrictions, and expectations that can significantly influence how you structure your budget. Start by obtaining and studying the grant application guidelines in detail. These documents usually outline what costs are allowable, which are not, and any limits on certain types of expenses, such as indirect costs, travel, or equipment. Knowing these details upfront can save you from costly missteps in budget preparation.

Each funding body has its own set of rules regarding financial matters. For example, the Russell Sage Foundation only allows indirect costs of up to 15%, rather than the standard negotiated rates many organizations have, and the Commonwealth Fund won’t fund projects that support more than 50% effort of university faculty members. It is essential to identify and understand these limitations to make certain that your budget aligns with the funder’s rules and thus stands a better chance of being approved.

In order to truly understand what the funder is looking for you will want to do the following:

Review the Grant Guidelines Carefully

Begin by closely examining the grant application guidelines. Typically, these documents detail the expenses that are permitted, those that are not, and any restrictions on specific categories of costs, including indirect costs, travel, or equipment. It's important to make notes of any special categories or unusual stipulations that deviate from the norm, as these can impact your budgeting strategy. Additionally, some funders provide a budget worksheet that you can use, which can greatly simplify the process of aligning your budget with their specific requirements. Being familiar with these specifics from the start can prevent expensive errors in the preparation of your budget.

Identify Specific Financial Rules and Limitations

Each funding body has its own requirements and they can vary widely. It is essential to identify and understand these rules to make sure that your budget aligns with the funder's wishes.

Understand Cost Matching or Sharing Requirements

Many grants require the recipient to match a portion of the funding or to provide a detailed plan of how funds from other sources will complement the grant. This could involve financial contributions from your organization or third-party funding. Neglecting this area, if it is required, is generally enough to disqualify your application.

Clarify Reporting and Auditing Expectations

Knowing what financial reporting will be required during and after the grant period can impact your budget planning. For example, if the funding body requires detailed, periodic auditing of expenses, you may need to budget for audit costs or appropriate personnel.

Seek Clarification When Needed

If any aspect of the funding body's financial guidelines seems ambiguous, do not hesitate to seek clarification. Contacting the grantor directly to ask questions can uncover critical insights and prevent misunderstandings that could potentially derail your grant proposal.

By thoroughly understanding and carefully adhering to the funding body's requirements, you can craft a budget that not only meets the formal criteria but also effectively supports your project's goals. This initial step guarantees that your proposal is built on a solid foundation, enhancing your chances of securing the grant.

While allowable expenses can vary significantly between different grantors and types of grants, there are some "usual suspects" in terms of what you might expect to see. Here are some common examples to give you a general idea:

Typical Allowable Expenses

- **Personnel Costs**: Salaries and wages for staff who will be directly involved in the project, including fringe benefits such as health insurance and retirement contributions.

- **Equipment**: Costs for equipment necessary to carry out the project. This usually covers items that have a useful life of more than one year and exceed a certain cost threshold specified by the funder.
- **Supplies**: Expendable materials and supplies directly related to the project.
- **Travel**: Costs for travel essential to the project, which could include transportation, lodging, and per diem expenses for staff attending conferences, conducting fieldwork, etc.
- **Subcontracts**: Costs associated with subcontracting part of the project to another entity.
- **Consultant Fees**: Fees for external experts who provide specialized services for the project.
- **Indirect Costs (Overhead)**: These are expenses that support the overall operations of your organization but are not directly linked to a single project, such as administrative support, utilities, and facility maintenance. The allowance for indirect costs can vary greatly and is often negotiated with the funder.

Typical Non-Allowable Expenses

- **Capital Improvements**: Major renovations or construction projects may not be covered unless they are essential to the project's success and specifically allowed by the grant.
- **Entertainment Costs**: Expenses for social activities, ceremonies, receptions, or other entertainment are generally not funded.
- **Alcoholic Beverages**: Purchase of alcoholic beverages is almost universally prohibited in grant budgets.
- **Fundraising Costs**: Expenses related to fundraising events or activities are usually not allowable.
- **Bad Debts**: Writing off bad debts or covering losses from other projects is not permitted.
- **Certain Types of Travel**: First-class airfare or luxury accommodations might be restricted under the grant's travel policies.
- **Membership Fees**: Costs related to membership in clubs or social organizations are typically disallowed.

Understanding these general categories will help in drafting a budget that aligns with typical funding guidelines, but always refer to the specific guidelines provided by your grantor. They might have unique rules or exceptions that apply to your particular situation or field of work.

Key Components of a Grant Budget

A well-organized grant budget is a critical component of a successful funding application. It not only demonstrates the financial feasibility of your project but also conveys your meticulous planning and organizational capability.

There are two parts to most grant budgets, the spreadsheet and and the budget justification. The spreadsheet is a form, either provided by the granting agency or prepared by the grant writer, that identifies the major budget categories and lays out your plan for the financial award. The justification portion is a narrative that explains WHY you are making the requests, and HOW each of the items aligns with your project's goals.

Although there will be some variation between funders, some budget categories are considered standard–personnel, equipment and supplies, travel, contractors and sub-awards, and indirect costs.

Personnel Costs

This section includes all expenses related to staffing for the project, and is often the largest portion of the financial request. It details the salaries, wages, and fringe benefits for individuals who will directly contribute to the project's objectives. This can be broken down by position (e.g., project manager, research assistant) including the percentage of time each staff member will dedicate to the project, which helps justify the cost. Figure 7.1 is an example of a very simple budget spreadsheet and you can see that this proposal budgets for two people.

Provide information for all of the roles on the project, regardless of whether or not the individual's salary will be funded by the award. Committing effort to a project without being funded for it can be considered cost-sharing, which will be covered later in this chapter.

The budget justification for personnel should include:

- The name of the individual or TBA for roles that have not been filled
- Role title on this project
- Amount of effort devoted to the project. Some federal proposals ask for this to be expressed in months, otherwise it should be calculated in terms of percentages
- A very brief description of the role responsibilities in relation to the specific goals of the project

Equipment and Supplies

Here, you list all the equipment and supplies necessary to achieve the project goals. Equipment usually refers to durable items with a useful life longer than one year and a purchase price that exceeds a certain threshold. Supplies are consumable items like office materials, lab supplies, or software that are essential to project activities. Pricing should be current and sourced responsibly to reflect cost efficiency. In the example in Figure 7.1 they have proposed a budget of $1,250 for supplies.

Travel

This section outlines all travel costs associated with the project. It typically includes transportation, accommodation, meals, and other incidental expenses. The travel should be directly linked to project activities, such as data collection, dissemination of results, or essential meetings, and should comply with the grantor's travel policies. The sample proposal in Figure 7.1 includes one trip to a professional conference for the Principle Investigator.

Other Direct Costs

These are additional project-specific costs not covered under the previous headings. Examples include:

- Consultant Services: Fees paid to individuals or entities that provide expert advice or services.
- Subawards/Subcontracts: Costs associated with outsourcing part of the project work to another institution or company.
- Participant Support: Costs for stipends, travel reimbursements, and other support costs for participants in workshops or training activities related to the project.

The example in Figure 7.1 has $1,700 budgeted under “other” and a separate category for a subcontractor. The specifics of what is included in the “other” category will be found in the budget justification later, however some budget spreadsheets will include more detail.

Indirect Costs

Also known as Facilities and Administrative (F&A) costs, these are not directly attributable to the project but are necessary for its execution. Indirect costs include administrative expenses, utilities, depreciation of buildings and equipment, and maintenance expenses.

The rate at which these costs are calculated is usually either specified in the grant guidelines or through a Negotiated Indirect Cost Agreement (NICRA). The NICRA is a formal agreement between an organization and the federal government that specifies how the organization will calculate their indirect costs. These are negotiated prior to applying for an award. The NICRA rate is the ceiling for what you are able to use for indirect costs. If the award calls for a lower rate, an applicant should use what the grant requirements call for.

If an organization does not have a NICRA and the grant guidelines do not specify the rate at which indirect costs should be applied, there is something called the “de minimis rate”. The de minimus rate is 10% of the budgeted direct costs.This is the rate that the federal government allows for proposals from organizations that do not have a NICRA and is often used by other funding entities as well.

Figure 7.1 Sample Budget Spreadsheet

PERSONNEL	
Dr. Smart	$207,441
Research Assistants	$13,500
FRINGE BENEFITS	
	$73,434
TRAVEL	

APSA Conference	$2,675
SUPPLIES	
	$1,250
OTHER	
	$1,700
SUBCONTRACTS	
Dr. Doolittle	$129,200
INDIRECT	$70,800
TOTAL	$500,000

Total Cost and Justification

The culmination of the budget is a summary of total costs combined with a detailed justification. This justification explains why each item and its cost are necessary to the project's success, providing context and rationale that can strengthen the funding application.

Figure 7.2 Sample Budget Justification

This is a narrative description of all expenses included in the Budget Form. Funding in the amount of $500,000 is requested for this three-year project.

PERSONNEL

Principle Investigator: Dr. J. Smart, Professor of Political Science at the University of Northern Iowa, will serve as PI for this project. She will provide oversight of project activities, be responsible for the supervision of all staff and students, and oversee the disbursement of grant funds. Dr. Smart will coordinate the research team and will be responsible for completing and submitting all deliverables to the funding agency. Along with Dr. Doolittle, she will develop all survey instruments, and will be directly involved in all aspects of data collection and analysis.

Funds are requested for Dr. Smart for two course releases in year 1, and one course/year in years 2 and 3.

Undergraduate Research Assistants (RAs): This project requires two RAs. The RAs will be upper-class undergraduate students at UNI. The RAs will assist in field work and data collection. Each student will work 15 hours per week for 30 weeks, at a rate of $15/hour.

FRINGE BENEFITS

Fringe benefits are calculated based on current rates. For full-time faculty members, the fringe benefit rate applied for release time during the academic year is 38.60%.

TRAVEL

A key component of the proposed studies dissemination strategy is the presentation of project findings throughout the study period. Funds are requested to help cover the cost of the PI to attend the American Political Science Association conference in year 1. The costs associated with conference attendance include airfare, lodging, registration, and meals and incidentals, and estimated as follows:

Conference registration = $575
Estimated round trip airfare = $600
Meals: $55/day x 5 days
$225/night x 5 nights hotel
$120 ground transportation from home/office to airport to hotel and back

SUPPLIES

Software and License
The proposed project will utilize qualitative, as well as quantitative data requiring specialized analytical software. Funding for $1,250 is requested for veryfanceesoftware , which will be installed on desktops or laptops that will be used by the PI and RAs.

OTHER COSTS

Duplication and Printing
$1,200 is requested each year to cover costs of printing the survey instruments. This estimate is based on 1,200 pages of survey per month, @ .10 each. Surveys will be collected monthly for 10 months each year.

Publication Costs
$500 in year 3 year to produce high-quality reports at an estimated cost of $25/copy. Reports will be available to sponsor and collaborators.

SUBCONTRACTS

A Subcontract will be issued to the University of Somewhere Else, under the direction of Dr. O.P. Doolittle. Throughout the proposed research study, Dr. Doolittle will organize fieldwork, organize storage and retrieval of data for the research team at USE, work with Dr. Smart to organize collection of pre/post measures, supervise data entry, and help with project reports.

Total subcontract
costs are estimated as follows:
Year 1: $50,000
Year 2: $50,000
Year 3: $29,200

INDIRECT COSTS

UNI's federally negotiated Facilities and Administrative costs are 35.4%. A copy of the institution's indirect cost rate agreement can be found at https://rsp.uni.edu/facilities-and-administrative-fa-or-indirect-costs

Budget Summary

This concise overview allows the grant reviewer to quickly grasp the financial aspects of the proposal. It includes total direct costs, total indirect costs, and the grand total of all costs associated with the project.

The example shown in Figures 7.1 and 7.2 is a very simple one, made to illustrate the sections included in a typical grant budget.

Including all these sections in your grant budget not only demonstrates thorough planning but also ensures compliance with the funder's requirements. A detailed and well-justified budget significantly enhances the credibility of your proposal, showcasing your project as well-conceived and financially feasible.

Figure 7.3 Budget Development Process

Step-by-Step Process of Budget Development

Find and Understand the Funding Call
- Identify specific requirements
- Double-check funding limits
- Look for cost-sharing provisions

Outline the Project Needs
- List all necessary resources
- Align resources with project activities

Estimate Costs
- Research prices and rates

- Calculate accurate cost estimates for each item

Draft the Budget

- Use spreadsheet software for accuracy and clarity
- Format according to the grantor's template if there is one

Justify the Expenses

- Write a budget justification or narrative
- Explain why each cost is necessary for project success

Review and Revise

- Check for compliance with grant guidelines
- Make certain that the budget aligns with the project's goals
- Seek feedback from experienced colleagues or mentors

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

When developing a budget for a project, whether it be for a grant application, business project, or any financial planning scenario, there are several common pitfalls that can jeopardize the integrity and success of the proposal. Recognizing and avoiding these pitfalls is crucial for ensuring a robust and credible budget. Here are some of the key mistakes to watch out for:

Underestimating or Padding the Budget

One of the most common mistakes in budget development is inaccurately estimating the funds required. Underestimating costs can lead to a shortfall in funds, which might cripple the project before it achieves its objectives. Conversely, padding the budget – intentionally overestimating expenses to create a financial cushion – can undermine the credibility of the proposal. Funders and financial analysts are skilled at identifying such discrepancies and may view them as a lack of honesty or poor planning, potentially leading to a loss of trust and denial of funding.

Omitting Indirect Costs

Indirect costs are expenses not directly tied to a specific project activity but are necessary for the overall operation, such as administrative services, utilities, and rent. Failing to account for these costs can result in an incomplete budget, misleading the stakeholders about the true cost of the project. This oversight can cause financial strain as the project consumes resources allocated for other purposes. Always double check that indirect costs are clearly identified and justified in the budget.

Failing to Provide a Clear Rationale for Expenses

Each line item on a budget should be accompanied by a justification, explaining why the expense is necessary for the project's success. A common pitfall is presenting a budget list without explaining the expenditures. This can lead to skepticism from funders or oversight boards, who may suspect budget padding or misallocation of funds. To avoid

this, articulate the purpose of each cost and how it contributes to the project's objectives, enhancing transparency and increasing the likelihood of budget approval.

In Figure 7.4 you can see how the first narrative only partially follows the directions and doesn't provide much rationale for the listed expenditures. Now, look at the second version. The inclusion of more information about what, precisely, the money will be used for makes for a much better budget justification.

Neglecting to Adhere to Formatting and Submission Guidelines

In addition to content requirements, budget proposals typically come with specific formatting and submission guidelines which may dictate the structure, content, and file format. Overlooking these guidelines can lead to the rejection of the budget proposal on procedural grounds, regardless of its substantive merits. It is important to read and follow these guidelines precisely. Compliance with these rules reflects your attention to detail and respect for the funding process.

Avoiding these common pitfalls in budget development is not just about ensuring the numbers add up correctly but also about demonstrating professionalism and capability in managing financial resources. A well-prepared budget, free from these errors, greatly increases the likelihood of project approval and successful funding.

Figure 7.4

A. Personnel – List each position that pertains to the proposal. The cost calculation should show the employee's annual salary rate and the percentage of time devoted to the project.

1. Program Director: $50,000/year @ 20% = $10,000. The Program Director currently oversees the program and will spend 20% of her time on the proposed program.

2. Program Coordinator: $35.00/hour x 4 hours/day x 5 days/month x 12 months = $8,400.

B. Travel – Explain the reason for travel expenses for students and/or faculty (e.g., student travel to the partner institution, student field trips or site visits, staff travel to conference, etc.) and show the number of people traveling and unit costs. Identify the location of travel.

1. Student Exchange:
- 5 students x $500 airfare from U.S. to Mexico = $2,500
- 5 students x 10 days x $40 per diem = $360
- 5 students x 10 nights x $50.00 lodging = $2,500

C. Equipment - List non-expendable items to be purchased. Explain how the equipment is necessary for the success of the project and, if requested, the procurement method to be used. The organization's own capitalization policy for equipment can be used unless the funder provides one of its own to follow.

One computer package including laptop, printer, scanner, and word processing software will be purchased. The computer will be housed in the administrative office and will be networked into the office network.

A. Personnel – List each position that pertains to the proposal. The cost calculation should show the employee's annual salary rate and the percentage of time devoted to the project.

1. Program Director: $50,000/year @ 20% = $10,000. The Program Director currently oversees the program and will spend 20% of her time on the proposed program. The Program Director currently oversees the program and will spend this time hiring, training, and supervising staff, as well as coordinating and managing the grant. The Program Director's time and efforts spent on the proposed program will be covered by grant funds in year 1.

2. Program Coordinator: $35.00/hour x 4 hours/day x 5 days/month x 12 months = $8,400. The coordinator will be responsible for programmatic needs, reporting and evaluating the program, as well as providing direct services to clients.

B. Travel – Explain the reason for travel expenses for students and/or faculty (e.g., student travel to the partner institution, student field trips or site visits, staff travel to conference, etc.) and show the number of people traveling and unit costs. Identify the location of travel.

1. Volunteer travel: Volunteers will travel to Mexico City, Mexico in order to participate in training and to conduct site visits.

- 5 volunteers x $500 airfare from U.S. to Mexico = $2,500
- 5 volunteers x 10 days x $40 per diem = $360
- 5 volunteers x 10 nights x $50.00 lodging = $2,500

C. Equipment - List non-expendable items to be purchased. Explain how the equipment is necessary for the success of the project and, if requested, the procurement method to be used. The organization's own capitalization policy for equipment can be used unless the funder provides one of its own to follow.

One computer package including laptop, printer, scanner, and word processing software will be purchased. The computer will be housed in the administrative office and will be networked into the office network. The office currently only has one computer that cannot be used in the field. The new computer package will be used in the field for maintaining client databases and performing administrative work connected to the project.

Conclusion

Crafting a well-structured and accurate budget is foundational to the success of any grant proposal. It requires meticulous preparation, adherence to the funder's guidelines, and a deep understanding of both allowable costs and potential financial restrictions. By starting with a thorough review of the grant guidelines, making detailed notes on any special categories, and utilizing tools such as provided budget worksheets, you can create a budget that not only meets the funder's criteria but also supports the financial needs of your project. Remember, a clear and rational budget not only demonstrates your project's feasibility but also reflects your organization's competence and reliability. This diligence in budget preparation can significantly enhance your credibility with funders and increase the likelihood of your project's approval, ensuring that you secure the necessary funding to achieve your objectives.

Resources

The EPA has developed an online training course to assist their grant applicants in budget development. Although it is specific to the EPA, there are many general principles that can be taken from the modules that they provide. https://www.epa.gov/grants/how-develop-budget

The CDC Foundation prepared a document to prepare applicants to create budgets for federal grants. It includes handy tips for making sure everything is included and good examples of allowable/unallowable items. https://www.cdcfoundation.org/federal-grant-budget-how-to?inline

The Office of Grant Management for the National Endowment for the Humanities published some general guidance on how to calculate indirect costs. https://www.neh.gov/sites/default/files/inline-files/General%20Guidance%20on%20Calculating%20Indirect%20Costs%20%281%29.pdf

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Chapter 8: Writing an Effective Evaluation Plan

An evaluation plan is a significant component of any grant application. It outlines how you will assess the success of your grant-funded project. An effective evaluation plan not only meets the requirements of funders but also provides valuable insights for your organization, helping you improve your project and future initiatives.

While funders typically require an evaluation plan, there are important benefits for your organization:

- Identifies what worked and what didn't.
- Provides data to improve your project and future work.
- Demonstrates accountability and transparency to stakeholders.

Writing an evaluation plan for a grant requires a dive deep into your project to clarify and solidify the intended outputs and outcomes. Outputs are direct results or products which are generally expressed numerically (such as the number of clients served by a program). Outcomes, on the other hand, are longer-term. These would include changes in attitude, behavior, knowledge, or skills, for example.

An evaluation should clearly address several key questions: How will you determine if your organization has achieved its planned objectives? How will you recognize if there has been an outcome or result from the project? What insights does the organization hope to gain from the project? How will you share what you've learned so that others can replicate a successful project or take an alternative path if the project does not meet its goals?

External vs. Internal Evaluations

An internal evaluation is conducted by the applicant themselves, whereas an external evaluation is performed by a third-party evaluator who is not part of the applicant organization. Requests for Proposals (RFP) generally specify whether an internal or third-party evaluation is required. If the evaluation format is not specified, the choice between internal and external evaluation is left to the organization. So long as processes and data are transparent and straightforward, internal evaluations are both common and acceptable. For example, you probably don't need an external evaluator to determine the effectiveness of a project teaching new Americans how to file their taxes. This can be evaluated internally through pre- and post-tests of tax filing skills, participant satisfaction surveys, and self-reports on how many participants were able to successfully file that year's taxes.

Third-party evaluators are experts that you should bring in when it is required, when the evaluation is overly burdensome or complex, or when the funder is interested in questions that are outside of your organization's scope. As outside evaluators can be expensive, if it is not in your budget to use one it is often possible to hire an evaluator to help you design an evaluation, and then have the organization implement it. Evaluators can also be hired to assist with just the analysis phase.

Types of Evaluation

There are several types of evaluations. The most common are formative, process, outcome, and impact. The type of evaluation you choose depends on the information you are hoping to gather.

Formative Evaluation

Formative evaluation is an ongoing process that takes place during the implementation of a project or program. Its primary goal is to monitor the progress of the project and provide continuous feedback that can be used to improve the project as it unfolds. This type of evaluation helps ensure that the project stays on track, meets its objectives, and addresses any issues that arise along the way.

Key Characteristics of Formative Evaluation

- Timing: Conducted during the project's development and implementation phases.
- Purpose: To improve the project's design and performance by identifying strengths and weaknesses.
- Focus: On the process of implementation rather than the final outcomes.
- Feedback: Provides immediate information that can be used to make adjustments and improvements.

Components of Formative Evaluation

1. Monitoring: Regularly tracking the progress of the project activities. This involves collecting data on various aspects of the project, such as participant engagement, resource utilization, and adherence to the project plan.
2. Assessment: Evaluating the effectiveness of the project activities in achieving the desired objectives. This involves analyzing the collected data to identify areas where the project is succeeding and where it may need adjustments.

3. Feedback: Providing timely and actionable feedback to project staff and stakeholders. This feedback helps inform decision-making and enables the project team to make necessary adjustments to improve the project's effectiveness.

Benefits of Formative Evaluation

- Improvement: Helps refine and improve the project while it is still in progress, leading to better overall outcomes.
- Adaptability: Allows the project team to respond to challenges and changes in the environment, ensuring that the project remains relevant and effective.
- Stakeholder Engagement: Engages stakeholders in the evaluation process, fostering a sense of ownership and commitment to the project's success.
- Resource Efficiency: Ensures that resources are being used effectively and efficiently by identifying and addressing issues early on.

Examples of Formative Evaluation Methods

- Surveys and Questionnaires: Collecting feedback from participants and stakeholders about their experiences and satisfaction with the project.
- Focus Groups: Conducting group discussions with participants to gain deeper insights into their perceptions and experiences.
- Interviews: Interviewing key stakeholders and project staff to gather detailed information about the project's implementation and effectiveness.
- Observation: Observing project activities and interactions to assess their effectiveness and identify areas for improvement.
- Data Analysis: Analyzing quantitative data, such as participation rates and resource utilization, to monitor progress and identify trends.

Example Scenario

An after-school tutoring program has been launched to help middle school students struggling with math and reading. The program aims to enhance their academic skills through personalized tutoring sessions held twice a week. The program will run for six months and is expected to serve 50 students from various schools in the district. A formative evaluation for this program might involve:

- A program coordinator observes 10% of the tutoring sessions each month, noting adherence to lesson plans and student engagement.

- Weekly student satisfaction surveys include questions like, "How clear was today's lesson?" and "How engaged did you feel during the session?"
- Monthly interviews with tutors ask about their experiences, any difficulties they encounter, and suggestions for improving the sessions.
- Bi-weekly focus groups with students discuss their overall experience, including any difficulties they are facing and suggestions for making the sessions more effective.
- Mid-program grade comparisons involve collecting students' math and reading grades from their schools and comparing them to baseline grades recorded at the program's start.

Process Evaluation

Process evaluation is a type of evaluation that focuses on the implementation of a project or program. It examines the activities, resources, and procedures used to deliver the program, assessing how well the program is being executed according to the plan. The goal of process evaluation is to understand how the program works, identify any problems in its delivery, and ensure that it is being implemented as intended.

Key Characteristics of Process Evaluation

- Timing: Conducted during the implementation phase of a project.
- Purpose: To assess the fidelity, quality, and efficiency of the program's implementation.
- Focus: On the processes and activities involved in delivering the program rather than on the final outcomes.

Components of Process Evaluation

1. Implementation Fidelity: Evaluates whether the program is being delivered as planned. This involves checking if the activities and interventions are being conducted as specified in the program design.
2. Quality of Delivery: Assesses the quality of the program's implementation. This can include evaluating the skills and effectiveness of the staff delivering the program, the appropriateness of the materials used, and the overall participant experience.
3. Participant Engagement: Measures how well participants are engaging with the program. This includes tracking attendance, participation levels, and participant feedback.
4. Context: Examines the external factors that may influence the program's implementation. This can include environmental, organizational, and community factors that impact the program's success.
5. Resources: Assesses the adequacy and use of resources allocated to the program. This includes funding, personnel, materials, and time.

Benefits of Process Evaluation

- Improvement: Identifies areas for improvement in the program's delivery, allowing for adjustments to be made in real-time.
- Accountability: Ensures that the program is being implemented as planned and that resources are being used effectively.
- Transparency: Provides stakeholders with detailed information about how the program is being executed, fostering trust and support.
- Insight: Offers valuable insights into the operational aspects of the program, which can inform future program planning and development.

Examples of Process Evaluation Methods

- Checklists and Logs: Keeping detailed records of program activities, including dates, times, locations, and participants.
- Observations: Observing program activities to assess how they are being delivered and how participants are engaging.
- Interviews and Focus Groups: Conducting interviews and focus groups with program staff, participants, and other stakeholders to gather qualitative data on their experiences and perceptions.
- Surveys: Administering surveys to participants and staff to collect feedback on various aspects of the program's implementation.
- Document Review: Reviewing program documents, such as training materials, manuals, and reports, to ensure they align with the program's design and goals.

Example Scenario

Imagine a health education program designed to promote healthy eating habits among school children. A process evaluation for this program might involve:

- Checking if the educational sessions are being conducted according to the schedule.
- Assessing the quality of the materials used in the sessions.
- Observing the sessions to see how engaged the children are and how effectively the educators are delivering the content.
- Collecting feedback from the children, their parents, and the educators through surveys and interviews.
- Reviewing records to ensure all planned activities are being completed and resources are being used as intended.

Outcome Evaluation

Outcome evaluation is a type of evaluation that focuses on the results or impacts of a program or project. It assesses the extent to which the program's objectives have been achieved and the overall effectiveness of the program in bringing about desired changes. This type of evaluation is usually conducted after the program has been implemented and seeks to determine whether the program has made a significant difference in the target population or community.

Key Characteristics of Outcome Evaluation

- Timing: Conducted at the end of the program or after sufficient time has passed to observe the effects of the program.
- Purpose: To determine the effectiveness of the program in achieving its goals and objectives.
- Focus: On the changes or benefits resulting from the program, such as changes in behavior, knowledge, attitudes, skills, or conditions.
- Measurement: Uses specific indicators and benchmarks to assess the extent of change.

Components of Outcome Evaluation

1. Objectives and Goals: Clearly defined goals and objectives of the program that specify the desired outcomes.
2. Indicators: Specific, measurable indicators that can be used to assess whether the desired outcomes have been achieved. These indicators should be directly linked to the program's objectives.
3. Data Collection: Gathering data through various methods such as surveys, interviews, tests, observations, and administrative records to measure the indicators.
4. Analysis: Analyzing the data to determine the extent to which the program's objectives have been met and to identify any unintended outcomes.
5. Reporting: Summarizing the findings in a report that highlights the effectiveness of the program, lessons learned, and recommendations for future programs.

Benefits of Outcome Evaluation

- Effectiveness Assessment: Provides evidence of the program's success or failure in achieving its goals.
- Accountability: Demonstrates to funders, stakeholders, and the community that the program has made a positive impact.

- Improvement: Identifies strengths and weaknesses in the program, offering insights for future improvements.
- Replication: Offers valuable information that can be used to replicate successful programs in other settings.

Examples of Outcome Evaluation Methods

- Surveys and Questionnaires: Collecting quantitative data on participants' knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and skills before and after the program.
- Pre- and Post-Tests: Measuring changes in specific knowledge or skills by comparing test results before and after the program.
- Interviews and Focus Groups: Gathering qualitative data from participants, staff, and stakeholders about their experiences and perceptions of the program's impact.
- Observations: Observing changes in behavior or conditions directly related to the program.
- Administrative Data: Analyzing existing records or databases to track changes over time, such as attendance rates, health outcomes, or academic performance.

Example Scenario

Program: Community Health Initiative to Reduce Obesity

Objective: Decrease the obesity rates among adults in the community by promoting healthier eating habits and increasing physical activity.

Data Collection

- Conduct pre- and post-program surveys to assess changes in dietary habits and physical activity levels.
- Measure participants' BMI at the start and end of the program.
- Hold focus groups with participants to gather qualitative data on their experiences and the perceived impact of the program.

Analysis

- Compare BMI Data: Analyze changes in participants' BMI from the beginning to the end of the program.
- Survey Results: Compare pre- and post-program survey results to measure changes in physical activity and dietary habits.

- Qualitative Analysis: Analyze focus group transcripts to identify common themes and insights about the program's impact.

Impact Evaluation

Impact evaluation is a type of evaluation that assesses the broader, long-term effects of a program or project. It goes beyond immediate outcomes to examine the overall changes and benefits that can be attributed to the program, determining whether it has made a significant difference in the target population or community. This type of evaluation helps understand the extent to which the program has achieved its ultimate goals and contributed to desired societal changes.

Key Characteristics of Impact Evaluation

- Timing: Conducted after the program has been implemented and sufficient time has passed to observe its long-term effects.
- Purpose: To assess the overall effectiveness and sustainability of the program's impact on the target population or community.
- Focus: On the long-term changes and benefits resulting from the program, such as improvements in health, education, economic conditions, or social well-being.
- Causality: Seeks to establish a cause-and-effect relationship between the program and the observed changes.

Components of Impact Evaluation

1. Long-Term Goals: Clearly defined long-term goals of the program that specify the desired impact.
2. Indicators: Specific, measurable indicators that can be used to assess the long-term impact of the program. These indicators should be directly linked to the program's goals.
3. Counterfactual Analysis: Comparing the outcomes of the program participants with a control or comparison group that did not participate in the program. This helps establish causality by showing what would have happened in the absence of the program.
4. Data Collection: Gathering data through various methods such as longitudinal studies, surveys, interviews, and observations to measure the indicators.
5. Analysis: Analyzing the data to determine the extent of the program's impact and to identify any unintended or negative effects.
6. Reporting: Summarizing the findings in a report that highlights the program's impact, lessons learned, and recommendations for future programs.

Benefits of Impact Evaluation

- Effectiveness Assessment: Provides robust evidence of the program's long-term success or failure in achieving its goals.
- Accountability: Demonstrates to funders, stakeholders, and the community the significant impact of the program.
- Improvement: Identifies areas for improvement and informs future program design and implementation.
- Replication: Offers valuable information that can be used to replicate successful programs in other settings.

Examples of Impact Evaluation Methods

- Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs): Randomly assigning participants to either the program group or a control group to compare outcomes.
- Quasi-Experimental Designs: Using non-randomized methods to create a comparison group, such as matching or propensity score analysis.
- Longitudinal Studies: Following participants over an extended period to observe long-term changes and impacts.
- Surveys and Questionnaires: Collecting data on participants' behaviors, attitudes, and conditions before and after the program.
- Interviews and Focus Groups: Gathering qualitative data from participants, staff, and stakeholders about their experiences and the perceived long-term impact of the program.
- Administrative Data: Analyzing existing records or databases to track changes over time, such as health outcomes, employment rates, or academic performance.

Example Scenario

Program: Rural Education Improvement Initiative

Objective: Improve educational outcomes and long-term socio-economic conditions in rural communities.

Long-Term Goals and Indicators

- Goal: Increase high school graduation rates and improve employment opportunities for graduates.
- Indicators: High school graduation rates, college enrollment rates, employment rates, and income levels of program participants.

Data Collection

- Track students from the start of the program through high school graduation and into their early careers.
- Conduct annual surveys to collect data on educational progress, college enrollment, and employment status.
- Conduct in-depth interviews with participants, educators, and community leaders to gather qualitative insights.

Analysis

- Comparison of Outcomes: Analyze differences in graduation rates, college enrollment, and employment between program participants and the control group.
- Long-Term Impact: Assess the program's long-term impact on participants' socio-economic conditions.

Developing an Evaluation Plan

Creating an effective evaluation plan is essential to ensure your project can be accurately assessed for success. Follow these steps to develop a comprehensive evaluation plan:

Clarifying Program Objectives and Goals

Begin by clearly defining the objectives and goals of the initiative. Identify what it aims to accomplish and the strategies planned to achieve these goals. This clarity helps pinpoint where to focus evaluation efforts. Consider creating a table (such as Table 8.1) that outlines each program component and its elements to organize your thoughts.

Table 8.1: Organizational Tool for Goals and Objectives

Increase voter registration in census block area by 15%	Numbers from state, survey
Have 6 cars available all day on election day to give rides to the polls	Yes or no, satisfaction survey? Numbers?
Increase turnout on election day among POC by 10%	Numbers from state, survey, exit polls
Media blast with voting rights info	Survey, tracking numbers

Developing Evaluation Questions

Evaluation questions typically fall into four categories:

1. Planning and Implementation.
    - Who participates in the program?
    - Is there diversity among participants?
    - Why do participants join or leave the program?
    - Are the services meeting local needs?
    - Are there capacity issues at the organization?
2. Attainment of Objectives.
    - How many people participate?
    - How much time are participants spending?
    - What is the net change since implementation?
    - What is the dollar equivalent of the program benefits?
3. Participant Impact.
    - How has behavior changed as a result of participation?
    - Were there any problems as a consequence of participation?
    - Are participants satisfied with their experience?
    - Have there been any particular success stories?
4. Community Impact:
    - What were the results of the program?
    - Do the benefits of the program outweigh the costs?
    - Were there any negative externalities associated with the program?
    - Have any community-level indicators changed?

Developing Evaluation Methods

Once you have your evaluation questions, decide on the best methods to answer them. Common evaluation methods include:

- Monitoring Systems: These systems include process measures (work done, or actions taken), outcome measures (the results), and observational systems (real-time tracking).
- Surveys: Collect feedback on goals, processes, and outcomes through surveys conducted before, during, and after the initiative.
- Interviews: Gather insights from leaders and participants about the program's quality and impact.

- Community-Level Indicators: Use data to assess program outcomes.

Setting Up a Timeline for Evaluation Activities

Start evaluating right away. Early and continuous evaluation allows for a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of the project's progress and impact.

Starting the evaluation at the beginning of the project ensures that baseline data is collected, which serves as a reference point for measuring changes and outcomes. This initial phase involves defining key evaluation questions and identifying the types of measures needed to answer them. Data collection methods and experimental designs should also be outlined to ensure the validity and reliability of the data gathered.

Throughout the project, it is essential to provide periodic feedback and reports. Regular updates help keep the project on track and allow for timely adjustments based on interim findings. These updates should be shared at meetings with the steering committee or coalition to keep all stakeholders informed and engaged. The frequency of these updates will depend on the needs of the project and the preferences of funding partners, but they should occur often enough to catch any emerging issues and to capitalize on opportunities for improvement.

The evaluation timeline should also include specific milestones for data collection and analysis. For example, if the project spans a year, quarterly data collection and analysis might be appropriate. This approach allows for the identification of trends and patterns over time, providing a clearer picture of the project's trajectory.

As the project nears its conclusion, it is important to plan for the final evaluation activities. This phase involves gathering and analyzing all remaining data, synthesizing findings, and preparing the final evaluation report. The timing of these activities should align with the project's end date, allowing for a timely and thorough assessment while details are still fresh in the minds of those involved.

Logic Models

Similar to their usefulness in LOIs, logic models can be good tools for the evaluation process. They provide a visual representation of the relationship between a program's resources, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impacts. By outlining these elements, logic models help clarify the program's underlying assumptions and theory of change. Here’s how and when logic models are typically used in evaluation:

Inputs: This will be information on what raw materials (including personnel efforts) will go into the program or initiative. This can also include constraints as well, as sort of anti-resources.

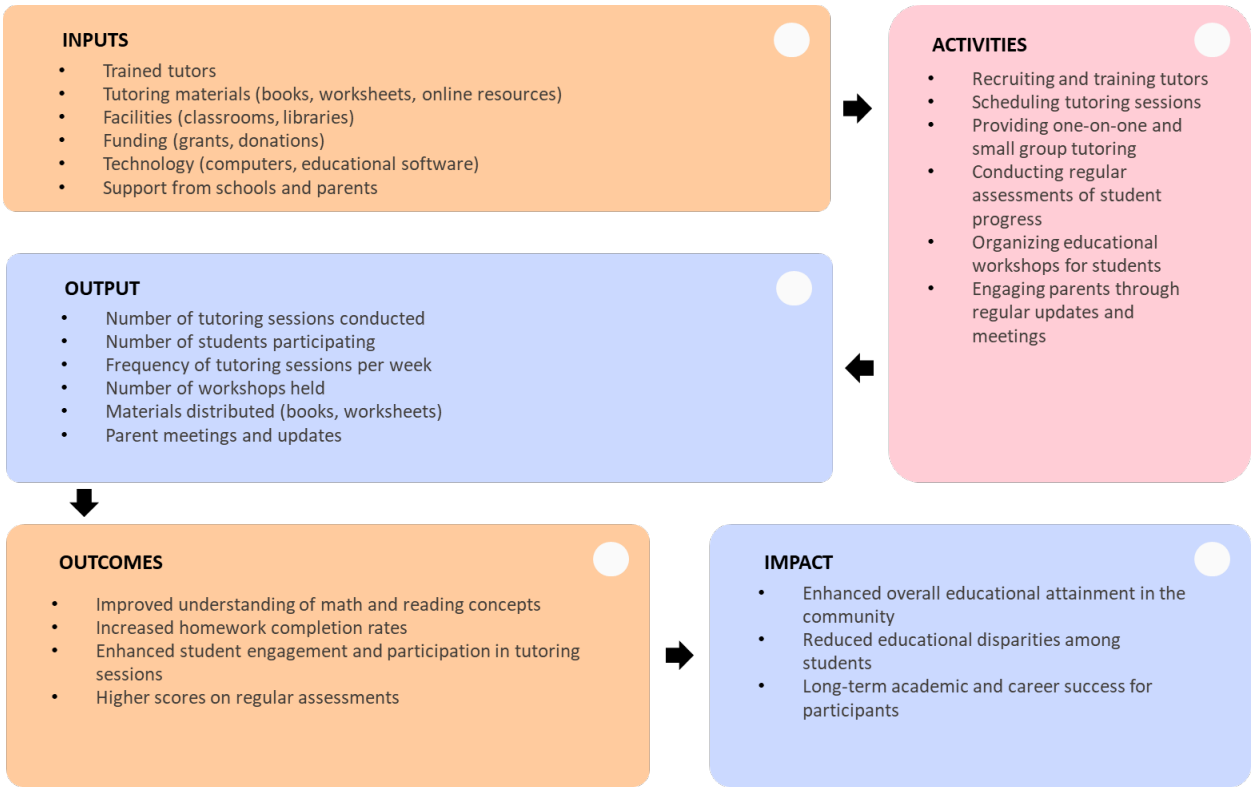
Activities: What interventions will you be doing with those resources in order to affect the change you want to see?

Outputs: This will include any hard evidence that the activities that you had planned, happened. What events occurred? How many people were there? How many volunteers were trained? Who presented?

Outcomes: These are your bigger results, in the short-term. What changes occurred as a result of the activities that you did?

Impact: This is your long-term result. How has the community changed because of your program?

Figure 8.1. Sample Logic Model



In the early stages of evaluation, logic models are instrumental in developing specific evaluation questions. These questions are designed to systematically assess various components of the program as outlined in the logic model. By breaking down the program into its fundamental parts—inputs, activities, outputs, short-term outcomes, long-term outcomes, and overall impact—evaluators can create targeted questions that address each aspect comprehensively.

Inputs

Evaluation questions regarding inputs might include:

- Are the resources (e.g., funding, personnel, materials) being utilized as planned?
- Are there sufficient resources to support the program activities?

Activities

Questions about activities might focus on:

- How effectively are the planned activities being implemented?
- Are the activities reaching the intended participants?

Outputs

For outputs, evaluators might ask:

- How many tutoring sessions were conducted?
- What was the level of participation in each session?

Short-Term Outcomes

Questions here could include:

- Are students showing improved understanding of math and reading concepts shortly after the tutoring sessions?
- What changes in homework completion rates are observed?

Long-Term Outcomes

Evaluators might explore:

- Have students' overall academic performances improved over the course of the program?
- Are there sustained improvements in students' self-confidence regarding their academic abilities?

Impact

Finally, for impact, questions could focus on:

- What is the overall effect of the program on the educational attainment in the community?
- How has the program contributed to reducing educational disparities?

By aligning these evaluation questions with the logic model, evaluators can ensure a comprehensive and systematic assessment of the program's implementation and outcomes.

During the implementation phase, logic models serve as a blueprint for guiding data collection and analysis. They help evaluators determine the specific types of data needed at each stage of the program and align data collection methods with the program's activities and intended outcomes.

Inputs and Activities Data Collection

- Administrative Records: Collect data on the allocation and utilization of resources, such as funding reports, staff time logs, and material inventories.
- Activity Logs: Track the implementation of program activities, including session schedules, attendance records, and participation rates.

Outputs Data Collection

- Quantitative Measures: Gather data on the number of tutoring sessions held, the number of students attending, and the frequency of sessions.
- Qualitative Measures: Collect feedback from participants about the quality and relevance of the sessions.

Short-Term and Long-Term Outcomes Data Collection

- Surveys and Tests: Use pre- and post-assessment surveys to measure changes in students' academic skills and knowledge.
- Interviews: Conduct interviews with students, parents, and tutors to gather qualitative insights into the program's effectiveness.
- Observations: Observe tutoring sessions to assess student engagement and tutor performance.

Impact Data Collection

- Longitudinal Studies: Track students' academic performance over time to measure sustained impacts.
- Community Surveys: Gather data from the broader community to assess changes in educational attainment and disparities.

By using a variety of data collection methods, evaluators can obtain a comprehensive view of the program's implementation and outcomes, ensuring that the data collected is both relevant and robust.

Logic models are crucial in formative evaluation, which involves ongoing monitoring of the program to make necessary adjustments. By regularly comparing actual activities and outputs against the logic model, evaluators can identify any deviations from the original plan. This comparison helps in understanding the implications of these deviations and in making informed, data-driven decisions to enhance the program's effectiveness.

For example, if fewer tutoring sessions are being held than planned, evaluators can investigate the reasons—such as tutor availability or student attendance issues—and recommend corrective actions. This might include recruiting additional tutors or adjusting the session times to better fit students' schedules.

Regular formative evaluation allows program managers to:

- Address issues in real-time, ensuring the program remains on track.
- Improve resource allocation based on observed needs.
- Enhance participant engagement by adjusting activities to better meet their needs.

In summative evaluation, logic models help assess the overall success of the program by linking inputs and activities to final outcomes and impacts. Evaluators use the logic model to frame their analysis, determining whether the program achieved its intended results and how these results were produced. This structured approach ensures that the evaluation report clearly communicates the program's effectiveness and provides insights into how it achieved its goals.

A summative evaluation might involve:

- Outcome Analysis: Comparing pre- and post-program data to measure changes in student academic performance and other targeted outcomes.
- Impact Assessment: Evaluating the broader effects of the program on the community, such as changes in educational attainment and reduction in disparities.
- Cost-Benefit Analysis: Assessing whether the benefits of the program justify the costs incurred.

The final evaluation report should:

- Summarize the findings of the evaluation, highlighting key successes and areas for improvement.
- Provide evidence of the program's impact, using data and testimonials.
- Offer recommendations for future programs, based on the insights gained from the evaluation.

By using logic models throughout the evaluation process, evaluators can ensure a thorough and systematic assessment that not only measures the program's effectiveness but also provides

valuable insights for future initiatives.

Sample Grant Evaluation Plan Template

Evaluation Plan Outline

<<Insert Program Name>>

Evaluation Plan

<<Insert Prepared by:>>

<<Insert Names>>
<<Insert Affiliations>>

<<Insert Date>>

Introduction
Provide an overview of the goals and objectives of the evaluation.

Evaluation Purpose

- What do you hope to achieve with this evaluation?
- How will the findings from this evaluation be used?

Stakeholders

- Who are the stakeholders for this evaluation?
- What is the nature of the roles of the stakeholders?
- How will the stakeholders be involved in the implementation of findings from evaluation?

Stakeholder	**Nature of Interest**	**Role in Evaluation and Implementation**

Description of What is Being Evaluated
Provide an overview of what you are evaluating. Make sure to be clear about how far along you are in your project.

Context

- What are the contextual factors for this evaluation?
    - What environmental elements could be influencing your inputs, outputs, and outcomes?

Need

- What is the need for what you are evaluating?

Clientele

- Who are you serving with this project?

Inputs and Resources

- What resources have been available to support the project?
- What resources have not been available?

Activities

- What specific activities have been undertaken to achieve the outcomes?
- What activities are still upcoming to achieve the outcomes?
- What activities were planned but did not take place, and why?

Outputs

- What outputs have been produced as a result of the activities performed?
- What outputs were planned but did not come to fruition, and why?

Outcomes

- What are the program's intended outcomes (intended outcomes are short-term, intermediate, or long-term)?
- What do you ultimately want to change as a result of your activities (long-term outcomes)?
- What occurs between your activities and the point at which you see these ultimate outcomes (short-term and intermediate outcomes)?

Inputs	**Activities**		**Outputs**	**Outcomes**	
	Complete or Ongoing	**Upcoming**		**Short-Term**	**Long-Term**

Logic Model

- Include a logic model.

Evaluation Design
Provide a brief summary on how you will design your evaluation here.

Evaluation Questions

- What specific questions do you hope to answer with this evaluation?

Evaluation Design

- What is the design for this evaluation?
- Why is this the best design for answering your questions?

Data Collection
Provide a brief summary of the methods you will use to gather data.

Data Collection Methods

- Will new data be collected or will secondary data be used?
- What methods will be used to acquire data?
- Will a sample be used? If so, how will the sample be selected?
- How will the quality of existing data be determined?
- How will the data be protected?

Data Relevance

How does the data relate to the evaluation questions proposed?

Evaluation Question	Collection Method(s)	Data Source(s)

Data Analysis and Interpretation
In this section, summarize the indicators that you will use to judge success. Explain how you will analyze your evaluation findings and interpret and justify your conclusions.

Performance Standards and Indicators

- To what standards will you compare your evaluation findings to determine success?
- What are some measurable or observable elements that can indicate the performance of what is being evaluated?

Evaluation Question	Indicator	Standard for Success

Analysis

- What method will you use to analyze your data
- Who will do the analysis and what are their qualifications for doing so?

Interpretation

- Who will be involved in drawing conclusions, and why?
- Who will be involved in interpreting conclusions, and why?
- Who will be involved in justifying conclusions, and why?

Evaluation Management

Give a brief overview of how the evaluation will be managed and implemented.

Evaluation Team

- Who will be involved? Please include the resume/CV of the lead evaluator.

Individual	Role	Responsibilities

Data Management

- Who will be responsible for managing data?

Timeline

- When will planning and administrative tasks occur?
- Will there be pilot testing? If so, when?
- When will formal data collection and analysis tasks occur?
- When will information dissemination tasks occur?

Budget

- What is the budget for the evaluation?
- Where is the money coming from?

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Chapter 9: Ethical Considerations in Grant Writing

As you have likely figured out by now, grant writing is a significant activity for many public and nonprofit organizations seeking funding for their projects or initiatives. While the primary goal is to secure financial support, it is essential that the process is approached with a high level of integrity and ethical consideration. Ethical grant writing not only reinforces the trustworthiness of an organization but also ensures the sustainability of funding relationships over time. There are several ethical considerations in grant writing, such as honesty in presenting data, respecting funder guidelines, managing conflicts of interest, and maintaining transparency and accountability.

These are such consequential elements of the grant seeking and funding system that the associations of grant writers, such as the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP) have codes of ethics to lay out each item (see AFP Code of Ethical Standards, 2023; All Rights Reserved. Used with permission).

Michael Rosen, who at the time was the Executive Vice President of Client Development at Legacy Leaders, Inc., now known as Donor Compass, wrote that one of the biggest misconceptions when it comes to the study of ethics is that “good” people don’t need to worry about it. “Good” people can simply follow Jiminy Cricket’s advice, “Let your conscience be your guide”, right? Not right. Establishing and maintaining trust with funders and with the public is 100% necessary for organizations who need to raise money. There are lots of elements that can influence trust, however ethics are a major piece of the puzzle. Let’s go over a few of the major issues.

Relationships with Funders

In the spring of 2024,Will Zweigart, the Executive Director of Flatbush Cats, a Brooklyn-based cat rescue organization, received an email from a donor that caught his immediate attention. The email, addressed to two development staff and copied to Zweigart, was described by him as "inappropriate, unprofessional" and "severely out of line with our values." This incident was strike three for Zweigart, who noted that the donor had been problematic in the past. Within an hour, Zweigart had contacted the donor and terminated the organization's relationship with them, returning the donor’s gift of $28,860. Despite the immediate financial loss, he emphasized that the comment made by the donor was so misaligned with the organization’s values that there was no possibility of future collaboration.

While donors behaving inappropriately is, unfortunately, relatively common, it is their responsibility and yours to maintain professional relationships and behavior at all times. This can be difficult, as the donor has quite a bit of leverage over the grantee, and, unlike Flatbush Cats, most organizations are not in a position to return money, even if they find the donor to have been behaving unprofessionally

On the other hand, while it is important for you to learn as much as you can about your reading audience and try to develop a connection through a shared vision, you must keep some distance from funders. At no time should you contact the trustee of a foundation or speak with a trustee about a foundation grantmaking decision, even if you encounter the person outside the foundation environment and even if the trustee is your own father or mother. While it is generally okay to ask for feedback from the grant's manager after a rejection, approach this carefully and, when you are told the reason for a "no," accept it with grace. If the door is still open to future proposals, ask questions about how you can best approach the foundation with a different proposal next time.

Managing Conflicts of Interest

A conflict of interest, as defined by the Minnesota Department of Administration's Office of Grants Management's Policy 08-01, occurs when a person has actual or apparent duty or loyalty to more than one organization, and the competing duties may result in actions adverse to one or both parties. Conflicts of interest can be actual, potential, or perceived, and exist even if no unethical, improper, or illegal act results.

- **Actual conflicts of interest** arise when a decision or action compromises a duty to a party without immediate action to eliminate the conflict. Examples include using one's position for personal advantage or having a financial interest in the other party's organization.
- **Potential conflicts of interest** may exist if one party has a relationship that could influence their decision or recommendation affecting that relationship. For example, serving in a volunteer capacity for another party may create a conflict depending on the nature of their relationship.
- **Individual conflicts of interest** benefit an individual directly or through indirect gain to an immediate family member, business, or organization with which they are involved.
- **Organizational conflicts of interest** occur when a grantee's objectivity in carrying out the grant is impaired due to competing duties or loyalties, or when they have an unfair competitive advantage through unauthorized proprietary information.

Conflicts of interest in grant writing can occur when personal interests interfere with the organization's interests or the interests of the funders. These conflicts might include personal relationships with funders or financial incentives that could influence the grant writer's decisions. Ethical grant writing involves identifying, disclosing, and managing these conflicts of interest to avoid any bias or misrepresentation in the grant application.

Organizations should have clear policies in place to handle conflicts of interest. This could involve having multiple people review and approve the proposal, ensuring that no single individual has undue influence over the grant writing and submission process. Personal and professional relationships, such as family members or close friends, current collaborators, or recent supervisors, can all pose potential conflicts of interest.

Interests can include various types of commitments, duties, obligations, and values, such as contractual or legal obligations, loyalty to family and friends, financial interests, and professional duties. For example, loyalty to one's employer and a family business could conflict if the goals of these two entities clash. These potential interests can be categorized into four types:

1. **Direct interests:** These include an individual's personal self-interest, family obligations, and personal business interests.
2. **Indirect interests:** These involve the personal, family, and business interests of people or groups with whom the individual associates.
3. **Financial interests:** These encompass anything of monetary value, including services rendered, commercial dealings, or share ownership.
4. **Non Financial interests:** These involve personal or familial relationships and other potential sources of bias.

Conflicts of interest can take various forms and involve multiple interests, both personal and professional. Common types of conflicts of interest include (but are not limited to):

1. **Self-dealing:** This occurs when a person acts in their own best interest in a transaction at the expense of the organization or their clients. An example of self-dealing in grant writing could involve someone who has insider knowledge about an upcoming grant opportunity from their organization. Suppose a grant writer is a close friend of this person. The grant writer may obtain detailed, privileged information about the grant application process, requirements, and selection criteria from their friend, giving them unfair advantage over other applicants.
2. **Nepotism:** Favoritism towards family members or friends, such as hiring a relative despite their lack of qualifications over more suitable candidates, is a form of nepotism. An example of nepotism in grant writing could occur if a program manager is responsible for evaluating and recommending proposals for funding within their organization. If their family member or close friend submits a proposal, the grant writer might favor this proposal over others, regardless of its merits.
3. **Multiple employers:** Working for multiple organizations in the same sector can lead to conflicts of interest, especially if proprietary information from one job is used to benefit the other. An example of how working for multiple organizations as a grant writer may create a conflict of interest could involve a grant writer employed by two nonprofit organizations that both apply for the same grant. In this scenario, the grant writer has access to proprietary information and strategic plans from both organizations, which could lead to several potential conflicts:
    - **Sharing Confidential Information:** The grant writer might inadvertently or deliberately share one organization's confidential strategies, data, or approaches with the other organization, giving one an unfair advantage.
    - **Prioritizing One Organization Over Another:** The grant writer may prioritize the interests of one organization over the other, perhaps because of a personal

preference or stronger loyalty, leading to a biased effort in preparing the grant applications.

- **Divided Attention and Resources:** The grant writer may struggle to equally allocate time and resources between both organizations, potentially leading to a lower quality of work for one or both applications.

For example, if Organization A and Organization B are both applying for a highly competitive grant, the grant writer might use insights gained from working on Organization A's proposal to strengthen Organization B's application. Alternatively, the grant writer might spend more time and effort on Organization B's application because they feel a stronger personal connection or receive higher compensation from Organization B.

This situation creates an inherent conflict of interest, as the grant writer's divided loyalties and potential for biased actions compromise the fairness and integrity of the grant application process for both organizations.

4. **Gifts:** Accepting gifts from external parties to gain an advantage can improperly influence judgment and is a conflict of interest. An example of how accepting gifts can create a conflict of interest for a grant writer involves a situation where a grant writer receives a significant gift from a potential grant applicant. Here's how this can lead to a conflict of interest:

   Imagine a grant writer working for a foundation that awards grants to various nonprofit organizations. A nonprofit organization, eager to secure funding, gives the grant writer an expensive gift, such as a luxury item or a free vacation package, as a token of appreciation. This gift could influence the grant writer's impartiality and decision-making process.

   The potential conflicts include:

- **Bias in Evaluation:** The grant writer might feel obligated to favor the nonprofit that gave the gift, consciously or unconsciously giving their proposal a higher score or more positive review than it might objectively deserve.

- **Undermining Fairness:** Other applicants, who have not provided such gifts, may be at a disadvantage, as the grant writer's impartiality is compromised. This undermines the fairness and integrity of the grant awarding process.

- **Pressure to Reciprocate:** The grant writer may feel pressured to reciprocate the kindness shown by the gift-giving nonprofit, leading to preferential treatment.

  For example, if the grant writer receives a gift from Nonprofit Organization X and then later evaluates grant proposals, they might rate Organization X's proposal more favorably, despite other organizations having stronger proposals. This unfair advantage could result in Organization X receiving funding over more deserving applicants, solely because of the gift's influence.

Ethical grant writing requires transparency and adherence to guidelines to manage these conflicts. By maintaining clear ethical standards and managing conflicts of interest diligently, grant writers can ensure their work supports the best interests of both the organizations they serve and the integrity of the funding process.

Respecting Funder Guidelines

Each funding source typically has specific guidelines that dictate the kinds of projects they support, the format and scope of proposals, and the reporting requirements. Adhering to these guidelines is a fundamental aspect of grant writing ethics. It demonstrates respect for the funder's objectives and compliance with their procedures. Moreover, it ensures transparency and builds trust between the grant writer, the applying organization, and the funder.

When funders outline their requirements, they do so to streamline the evaluation process and ensure that their resources are allocated to projects that align with their mission and goals. By following these guidelines meticulously, grant writers show that they are attentive to the funder's priorities and are committed to using the funds responsibly. This adherence not only increases the chances of the proposal being considered but also fosters a positive relationship with the funder, which can be beneficial for future funding opportunities.

Ethical dilemmas may arise when there is pressure to tweak a project's goals to fit a grant's focus areas artificially. This situation can occur when an organization is in desperate need of funding and may be tempted to make their project appear more aligned with the funder's priorities than it truly is. Such practices can compromise the integrity of the project and the organization.

Grant writers should ensure that the project genuinely aligns with the funder's interests and that any adjustments to the project do not compromise its core objectives or the mission of the organization. Ethical grant writing involves a thorough assessment of both the project and the funding opportunity to ensure a genuine match. This practice not only respects the funder's guidelines but also upholds the integrity of the organization's mission and goals.

Artificially aligning a project with a funder's focus areas can have several negative consequences. If the project does not genuinely fit the funder's priorities, it may fail to meet their expectations, leading to dissatisfaction and potentially damaging the organization's reputation. Furthermore, if the project is awarded funding based on misrepresented alignment, it may struggle to deliver the promised outcomes, resulting in a waste of resources and a loss of trust from both the funder and the community the organization serves.

In cases where a project does not align well with a particular grant, it is more advisable to seek alternative funding sources. There are numerous funding opportunities available, each with its own set of priorities and focus areas. By carefully researching and identifying funders whose goals align with the organization's project, grant writers can find more suitable and ethical funding sources. This approach ensures that the project remains true to its objectives and that the organization can deliver impactful results without compromising its values.

Honesty in Presenting Data

Honesty, transparency, accountability, and sustainability are the cornerstones of ethical grant writing, directly impacting an organization's credibility and its relationships with funders. Misrepresenting data (in a grant proposal or when reporting at the end of a grant cycle) is not only unethical but also fraught with risks and repercussions.

Brenda K. Banks, the Executive Director of Angels on Wheels in Omaha, Nebraska, serves as a stark example of the consequences of unethical grant writing. In 2018 and 2019, Banks submitted falsified documents to the Nebraska Environmental Trust (NET) and the Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy (NDEE) to secure additional funds. Her deceitful actions, which included altering checks and invoices and fraudulently obtaining a Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan, ultimately led to her conviction for wire fraud. The federal court sentenced her to four months in prison and imposed a substantial fine.

The story of Brenda K. Banks serves as a powerful reminder of the severe consequences of unethical behavior in grant writing. Beyond legal repercussions, dishonesty in grant applications can lead to a loss of trust and credibility that is difficult to rebuild. Once an organization is found to have submitted falsified information, it may face increased scrutiny and skepticism from funders, making it more challenging to secure future grants. This kind of grant fraud not only affects the organization but also the communities and causes it aims to support.

Grant fraud occurs when award recipients deceive the government about their use of award money, engaging in actions that the Department of Justice characterizes as "lying, cheating, and stealing." Such fraudulent behavior leads to inefficiencies and waste in the government, but the repercussions for the offending entities can be severe. The Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General outlines potential consequences, including debarment from future funding, administrative recoveries of funds, civil lawsuits, and criminal prosecution. As grant agreements are legally binding contracts, grantees are obligated to use their funds as outlined and act with integrity when applying for and reporting their actual use of funds. Properly tracking fund usage and maintaining adequate supporting documentation are also critical responsibilities.

Typical issues in grant fraud include unilaterally redirecting funds from their intended purpose, failing to adequately account for transactions, and providing false or misleading information in applications or reports. Fraud can take many forms, including deception, bribery, forgery, extortion, theft, conspiracy, embezzlement, misappropriation of funds, false representations, concealing material facts, and collusion. Examples of fraudulent activities include commingling grant funds with other funds and submitting false or altered documents for reimbursement. Instances of such fraud have occurred in academia, as seen in the cases of a Morgan State University professor who used $200,000 in grant funds for personal expenses, resulting in a three-year prison sentence, and a former University of Florida nuclear engineering professor who defrauded NASA funds, leading to a six-month prison sentence. These cases highlight the serious consequences of grant fraud and underscore the importance of adhering to ethical practices in grant management.

At the heart of ethical grant writing is the accuracy and honesty of the information presented in the grant application and then in the reporting. Misrepresenting data to make a proposal appear more appealing or to make a report line up with guidelines is fundamentally wrong and can have long-term negative consequences for the organization. Funders rely on accurate data to make

informed decisions about where to allocate resources. When data is falsified, it can lead to the failure of a project to deliver on its promises, resulting in a loss of credibility and future funding opportunities.

Building and maintaining trust with funders is essential for the long-term success of any organization seeking grant funding. This trust is built on a foundation of honesty, transparency, and accountability. Grant writers must ensure that all data presented in their applications is accurate and that any potential challenges are clearly communicated. By doing so, they not only increase their chances of securing funding but also strengthen their organization's reputation and relationships with funders.

Transparency and Accountability

The term “transparency” means something allowing light to pass through so that objects behind it are visible. Transparency in our context refers to operating openly so that one’s process and products can be evaluated fairly. Thus, transparency is the bedrock of ethics, embodying values like honesty, respect, and responsibility. It's essential for creating an ethical climate within organizations and should be evident in all communications, practices, policies, meetings, and other interactions.

Transparency fosters trust and strengthens relationships. Being honest and truthful helps to build solid foundations for relationships, as respect builds trust, and trust builds relationships. This is vital for your purposes because people are more likely to give money to those they trust.

Transparency in grant seeking and administration means being open to scrutiny about your processes. This involves providing reasons for decisions and the exchange of information. Transparency also provides assurance that your processes are being carried out appropriately and in accordance with any applicable requirements. According to an international survey conducted by Harris Poll, transparency and accountability are the strongest indicators of ethical behavior. Accountability involves grantees, officials, and decision-makers being able to demonstrate and justify the use of public resources, necessitating that all parties keep appropriate and accessible records.

As actress Anna Farris said in her book, Unqualified, "Don’t do anything that you wouldn’t want to see on the front page of the newspaper.” Perhaps today, this should be expanded to include not doing anything you wouldn’t want your grandma to come across be ashamed to see on TikTok.

Grant Transparency Strengthens Accountability

Grant programs need effective communication to strengthen accountability. Improving transparency is not just about making numbers, data, and reports available to the public. It's also about communicating in ways that advance the improvement of outcomes and operational quality, strengthen accountability, and demonstrate results.

Achieving transparency in grants administration involves ensuring that:

- Decisions relating to grants are impartial, appropriately documented and published, publicly defensible, and lawful.

- Grants administration incorporates appropriate safeguards against fraud, unlawful activities, and other inappropriate conduct.

This includes establishing appropriate internal controls for grants administration, such as making different officers responsible for assessing grant applications, giving financial approval for expenditures, and ensuring checks and balances at various stages of the grants administration process.

Transparent and systematic grant administrative processes should be established and adhered to, with grant funds allocated based on clearly defined criteria.

Pre-Award Accountability Measures

Before applying for funding, implementing accountability measures can increase your likelihood of winning awards and save your team time in the long run. Key measures include:

1. **Maintaining thorough and accessible application records:** Having a standard process in place for tracking the grants you apply to holds both your team members and your organization accountable for the success of your grant portfolio.
2. **Implementing a grant management system that is accountability-focused:** Using outdated processes can lead to inconsistency and miscommunication. A modern Grant Management Software (GMS) system ensures adequate internal control systems are in place.
3. **Investing in training at all levels:** Training staff and those involved with grant management in regulations, proper GMS usage, and internal grant guidelines is crucial.

Award Management Accountability Measures

Once a grant is awarded, it's essential to ensure the accountability measures planned during the pre-award phase are integrated into daily tasks to maximize outcomes. These measures include:

1. **Comparing expenditures to projections:** This helps ensure grantees do not overspend and funds are expended within the predetermined grant period.
2. **Using a system to audit performance consistently:** Regular evaluations keep your team accountable and allow for adjustments to improve accountability.
3. **Keeping grant information safely accessible to all integral parties:** Transparency in managing grants ensures everyone understands how their tasks contribute to organizational accountability.

Closeout Accountability Measures

At the end of a grant cycle, increased future accountability can be achieved through:

1. **Shifting reporting from compliance-centric to performance-centric outcomes:** Demonstrating success and securing future funding requires relating costs to performance.
2. **Personalizing reports for stakeholders:** Tailoring reports to reflect the specific metrics of each grant showcases performance effectively.
3. **Evaluating outcomes and adapting processes:** Continuously striving for accountability by adjusting processes based on evaluation outcomes ensures ongoing improvement.

The Ethics of Compensation in Grant Writing

Grant writing is a specialized skill that requires time, talent, and resources. The ethical considerations surrounding compensation in grant writing are critical, particularly when discussing practices such as commission-based pay. Writing grants on commission, where a grant writer only gets paid if the grant is awarded and the payment is a percentage of the total grant, is widely considered unethical and is prohibited by leading professional associations such as the Grant Professionals Association (GPA) and the Association for Fundraising Professionals (AFP). This essay explores the ethical implications of such compensation practices and emphasizes the necessity of fair and transparent compensation for grant writers.

The primary ethical issue with commission-based compensation is that it does not fairly compensate the grant writer for their work. Writing a grant proposal involves significant effort and expertise, and the grant writer deserves to be paid for this work regardless of the outcome. Many factors beyond the grant writer's control can influence whether a grant is awarded. For instance, the organization applying for the grant may have a poor reputation, inadequate infrastructure, or may have failed to comply with previous grant requirements. These factors can result in a denied grant application, even if the proposal itself is well-written and compelling.

The GPA and AFP explicitly prohibit commission-based compensation. The GPA's Code of Ethics states, "Members shall not accept or pay a finder's fee, commission, or percentage compensation based on grants and shall take care to discourage their organizations from making such payments." This stance is grounded in the principle that grant writing is a professional service that should be compensated based on the time, effort, and expertise involved, not on the success of the grant application.

Grantmakers themselves typically do not allow grant funds to be used for pre-award activities, including grant writing. Using grant funds to pay for past activities is a violation of grant agreements and can result in the withdrawal of funding. Grantmakers want their funds to directly support the programs and services outlined in the grant proposal, not to cover administrative costs incurred prior to the award. This reinforces the ethical argument that grant writers should be compensated at the time services are provided, rather than based on the outcome of the grant application.

Commission-based compensation can lead to inflated grant requests, as grant writers might be incentivized to increase the grant amount to maximize their commission. This practice undermines the integrity of the grant application process. Grantmakers are vigilant about budget inflation and are likely to reject proposals that appear padded or unrealistic. Moreover, the philanthropic community relies on trust and transparency. If grant requests are consistently

inflated to cover commissions, it could erode trust in the grantmaking process and damage the overall reputation of philanthropy.

Fair compensation for grant writers should be based on the time and expertise required to develop a high-quality proposal. For example, if a grant writer spends 75 hours on a federal grant proposal and charges $95 per hour, their compensation would be approximately $7,125. In contrast, a 5% commission on a $5 million grant would amount to $250,000, which is disproportionately high and unjustifiable. The ethical approach is to pay grant writers a reasonable fee for their work, ensuring they are fairly compensated regardless of the grant's outcome.

The ethical issues surrounding commission-based compensation extend beyond just the payment structure. They also touch on broader ethical considerations in grant writing and fundraising. Grant writers should prioritize the mission and needs of the organizations they serve over potential financial gain. Accepting commission-based compensation can create a conflict of interest, where the grant writer's financial incentives may not align with the best interests of the organization or its beneficiaries.

Furthermore, ethical grant writing involves transparency and accountability. Organizations should clearly communicate their compensation practices to grant writers and ensure that all parties understand the terms of their engagement. This fosters a culture of trust and mutual respect, which is essential for effective collaboration and successful grant outcomes.

Summarily, commission-based compensation for grant writing is unethical and problematic for several reasons. It fails to fairly compensate grant writers for their work, can lead to inflated grant requests, and undermines trust in the philanthropic community. Ethical compensation practices should ensure that grant writers are paid for their time, expertise, and effort, regardless of the outcome of the grant application. By adhering to the ethical standards set by professional associations like the GPA and AFP, organizations can foster a culture of transparency, accountability, and fairness in grant writing and fundraising.

Conclusion

Ethical considerations in grant writing are crucial for maintaining the integrity of the funding process. By ensuring honesty in data presentation, respecting funder guidelines, managing conflicts of interest, and committing to transparency and accountability, organizations can build strong, trust-based relationships with funders. The ethical approach to grant writing not only secures necessary funding but also contributes to the long-term success and reputation of the organization.

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