

Grant Writing in Student Services

NOTE: THIS IS A TWO WEEK ASSIGNMENT

While many industries discuss budget and finances in the tight economy, it seems to be a given to student services professionals that funding is always tightly guarded. With recent budget cuts in the state of Georgia as well as other systems of higher education, budget issues are even more in the spotlight. One strategy to continue current programs and begin new innovations is that of grant writing. For many, developing a grant proposal is complicated, time consuming, and just plain scary (Zant, 2003). The purpose of this lesson is to humanize the grant writing process. You will learn, in general, of the components of a grant. Furthermore, tips to follow and what to avoid will be discussed. Finally, you will be asked to consider issues at your own institution that may lend themselves to the grant writing process.

Common Misconceptions about Grant Writing

Grant writing is an anomaly for many individuals, not withstanding student services professionals. There are many misconceptions about the entire process. Individuals that have not taken the time to investigate the grant writing process generally create these myths. We often believe there is no money available. On the contrary, there is most always money available if you look hard and long enough in the right places.

What's more, many believe that it is not the grant proposal but whom you know that gets you the funding. To some extent, all that we do is about whom you know. Certainly, connections help as with any request for assistance. Still, grant writing is more about the quality and need of your proposed project than it is whom you know.

Similarly, as we think about writing grants, many student services professionals mistakenly believe that “the money that is available goes to big, prestigious institutions and agencies, not to individuals, small institutions, and small agencies” (Henson, 2004, p. 4). Upon thorough investigation of this subject, you will find that funding sources range from large foundations that do indeed favor the large institutions to smaller, local agencies and organizations that want to help the underdog. Many grants are of medium size, and come from local and regional resources (Brown, 2001, Henson, 2004).

Time is of the essence for all of us. To write a grant, requires time and energy. As student services professionals already functioning within budget crunches that often include understaffed units, our tendency is to simply state that we do not have time to develop grant proposals. In reality, grant writing is well worth its time and effort. When a program or project is dependant on finding external funding sources, the time taken to write a winning grant proposal greatly outweighs the costs of not doing so (Henson, 2004). As we delve into the components of a typical grant, keeping these misconceptions in mind is crucial for success.

Components of a Typical Grant Proposal

While every funding organization will have specific requirements as to the format and sections to be submitted, the current body of literature on grant writing suggests that there are several components typically found across organizations (Henson, 2004, Geever, 2001, Gitlin & Lyons, 1996, Blum, 1996). These components include:

- Cover Letter
- Title Page
- Abstract
- Table of Contents

- Executive Summary
- Statement of Need
- Literature Review/Theoretical background
- Methodology
- Timetable
- Evaluation Plan
- Budget
- Qualifications of Team

So, what do each of these mean? Gitlin and Lyons (1996) suggest that the parts of a grant proposal can be thought of as the following series of questions:

- What is your project about?
- Why is it important?
- What will you do?
- How will you do it?
- What will it cost?
- Why will it cost what it does?
- Why are you the best one to do it?

With these questions (p. 64) in mind, let's break down the above components of a grant proposal. First, **the cover letter** serves the exact purpose of which it appears. In theory, this is the first piece of information read by the granting organization. Carefully address this letter to be sure that name, title, and address are correct. You do not want to be taken out of the competition due to simple research or proofreading errors. This letter should express your enthusiasm for your project while briefly describing your purpose. Henson (2004) suggests that this letter state the support that your institution gives toward the proposed grant. Above all, this letter should be a brief one to two pages in length.

Your **title page** obviously contains the title of your project. Be sure to abide by all regulations and guidelines set by the granting institution as you title your project. It is difficult to adequately describe your intent in a short phrase, often ten words or less. The title page contains minimal, yet, crucial information such as the title of the project, the name of the institution applying for the grant, and the submission date. Additionally, phone and fax numbers of the principal team members may be included depending on the specific requirements of the funding agency.

Every grant includes an **abstract**. The purpose of an abstract is to briefly describe the proposal's purpose and methodology in less than 250 - 500 words. It is components such as the abstract that often take applications out of the process. Following guidelines and regulations is a must in grant writing. Again, articulating your purpose and methodology in such a short statement can be complicated. Still, if directions say to include an abstract of less than 250 words, do just that. Furthermore, if your grant proposal is five pages or longer, a **table of contents** is suggested. Specifics of what should be included on this page will vary by funding institution.

The **executive summary** describes the entire grant proposal in one page. While this section precedes the substance of the grant when submitting the proposal, it is often written last. This section is of utmost importance as granting organizations tend to read this before taking the time to review the grant in its entirety. You need to convince the reader in this one page that your grant is worth reading. To do this, you must clearly and concisely offer the key points of each section to follow.

“Grant writing is about power. We write grants because they empower us to do things we otherwise could not do” (Henson, 2004, p. 2). For this reason, **the statement**

of need is seen as the substance of the grant proposal. According to Swan (2003), sufficient information to document need includes, listing the individuals involved in addressing the problem and need, outlining the goals, objectives, and activities to be met through the project, listing materials needed, and describing the impact the project will have on the institution and/or surrounding community. Geever (2001) further describes the statement of need as presenting facts and evidence that support the issues to be addressed in the project. She continues to advocate for a succinct and persuasive statement of need. Give specific details and statistics. Show that you have done your homework. Distinguish your proposal from projects previously completed around the same topic.

Goals, objectives, and activities are the key to your statement of need (Gitlin & Lyons, 1996, Blum, 1996). *Goals* explain what is to be accomplished as a result of your project. Goals are stated in broad, general terms. *Objectives* are measurable outcomes of the program. They break goals into concrete specifics. And finally, *activities* direct someone to the outcome. They define the how the objectives and goals will be met. Clearly defined goals, objectives, and activities set the tone for the remainder of the grant proposal.

Before a funding organization will award a grant, the grant seeking institution must prove its place in the field. To do this, a thorough **literature review** must occur. What theoretical background the team comes from should be disclosed. Previous attempts to solve this or related issues need to be addressed. You must prove that you are sufficiently knowledgeable in the area of your project and all related areas.

No agency will award you monies until they know exactly what you plan to do with it. Your **methodology** needs to explain *how, when, and why* you plan to complete this project (Geever, 2001). Blum (1996) states that this will be the longest section of your grant proposal. Your methodology is not the section to show your creativity. Use this section to outline the nuts and bolts of your proposal. Step-by-step, explain what will happen in your project and who will be involved. Following this description, a **timetable** detailing every step of the plan is given.

Funding organizations want to know how you will show the impact and effect of your project. According to Swan (2003), your **evaluation plan** will offer criteria for success of each objective. References to literature defending the manner of evaluation are also suggested. Zant (2003) distinguishes between the summative and the formative evaluation. A summative evaluation measures how the targeted population reached the set goals. A formative evaluation collects data throughout the process and consistently updates the design of the project. The evaluation plan should match the measurable objectives previously discussed.

Once you have laid out your need, methodology, timetable, and evaluation plan, it is necessary to provide the funding organization with your **budget**. A line-by-line analysis of where the monies will be spent is required by many granting organizations. It is important that the budget is realistic and reasonable, falling into the limitations set by the funding agency. To exceed amounts set per award is an easy way to guarantee that you receive no money!

Last, many grant proposals require that you submit a **statement of qualifications** for each of the individuals that will work with the grant. A written blurb

summarizing how each individual will impact the process should be included with current curriculum vitae or resumes.

Some Do's and Don'ts in Grant Writing

Gitlin and Lyons (1996) discuss major weaknesses commonly found in grant proposals. Background and rationale for the project tend to be poorly referenced. Stated objectives confuse the reader. Third, grant writers do not adequately define and describe their methodology. The reader does not know what will be done with their money. And, evaluation plans are vague. Ward (1998) and Gitlin & Lyons (1996) further discuss the do's and don'ts of grant writing.

DO:

- Develop a project that is do-able and fundable.
- Review previously funded proposals from the organization to which you are applying.
- Contact staff members at the funding organization to discuss your idea and the likeability of receiving an award.
- Follow specific, individual instructions and guidelines for each organization you apply to.
- Create a detailed outline of your proposal before beginning to write.
- Take notes of deadlines.
- Be clear, concise, and convincing (keep it simple).
- Be conscious of your timeline and budget as it relates to the stated award criteria.
- Stay within the allotted page limit per grant proposal.
- Review, edit, and proofread your proposal numerous times prior to submission.

DON'T:

- Contact an organization before reviewing their materials.
- Submit incomplete applications in order to meet deadlines.
- Propose a budget and timeline that exceed the limits of the granting institution.

- Be unrealistic in any section of your proposal.
- Send a proposal that has not been thoroughly reviewed and proofread.
- Use jargon, abbreviations, clichés, or too many big words.
- Be redundant.

Geever (2001) interviewed various funding organizations to learn what the other side thinks. When asked if most grant seekers have done their homework prior to submittal, one funding organization said, “The majority (80%) don’t fit. They are not looking at our prior grantees” (p. 155). Furthermore, when asked how they usually read a grant proposal, responses included “I read the project section and look for outcomes, approach, and capacity to implement. All elements of the proposal should interrelate. They should be consistent with the mission and strategies” and “I read the cover letter first, hoping it will contain a quick, concise, statement of what the proposal says. Ideally, it should make me *want* to read the full proposal” (p. 157).

Where to Begin

Now that you have an overview of what is involved in writing a grant proposal, let’s back up and discuss how you might begin this process. Grant proposals start as ideas. Not all ideas lend themselves to forming a proposal. Blum (1996) suggests that a **good idea** is original. This is not to say that you must come up with an idea that has never been previously discussed. Instead, you must have a unique and original approach to the existing problem. Your idea must explore a compelling need. Last, you must be investigating a timely topic. Outdated projects and ideas will not get funded.

Brown (2001) explains that in order to be a successful grant writer, you must self-reflect on your organization while developing your idea. How do the mission, history, and background of your unit, division, or institution fall in line with your idea? What

direction is your institution taking? Do you have the leadership abilities to turn this idea into a grant proposal? And finally, how does your unit, division, or institution relate to the community? Have you thought about how your idea will impact the community upon completion? All of these questions should be considered while beginning the grant writing process.

Before continuing, it is crucial to know the procedures in place at your institution. Every institution will be different; making it important to ask the following questions (Gitlin & Lyons, 1996, p. 50-51):

- Who has to review and approve your budget internally?
- If your grant involves hiring new staff, what are the institutional procedures?
- Who monitors monies received through grant proposals?
- How does the institution process payment of grant expenses?
- What, if any, procedures does your institution have in place? Do you have to obtain approval from your Vice President of Administration? What will be required of you in this process?

Swan (2003) recommends starting with three possible ideas. You should then begin to research funding opportunities for each idea. Once you begin to investigate funding sources, you may find that your ideas do not match the requirements of the different agencies. Therefore, by starting with three ideas, the probability of locating relevant sources of funding for at least one idea is increased. Geever (2001) proposes that you compile a list of possible sources, investigate each source and its potential for this particular idea, and then refine your list to include only realistic and feasible options.

Private foundations, corporations and businesses, national and local government and nonprofit agencies, as well as individual donors are all possible funding sources. Each type of funding opportunity has its own benefits. Private foundations such as the

Ford and Rockefeller Foundations are sophisticated and have lots of money to award. These foundations are generally easily accessible for information. Corporations and private businesses are often motivated by advertising and public relations incentives. Government agencies can sometimes offer larger awards than other options. And, depending on cause, individual donors are intrinsically rewarded (Blum, 1996). It is important to keep an open mind at the start of the grant writing process as you research your options for funding. Amount of funding available and stipulations attached to the awards will vary by granting organization. Local groups as well as professional organizations and private foundations offer possible funding.

Week 1 Assignments

1. Using the following questions as a guideline, investigate the grant writing procedures at your institution:
 - Who has to review and approve your budget internally?
 - If your grant involves hiring new staff, what are the institutional procedures?
 - Who monitors monies received through grant proposals?
 - How does the institution process payment of grant expenses?
 - What, if any, procedures does your institution have in place?
2. For one idea, describe the problem or need for a grant proposal including a statement of the problem; participants to be involved; goals, objectives, and activities; and the projected impact. Each statement should be one page, single-spaced.

Week 2 Assignments

1. Update and revise your statement of need based on the feedback you have received.
2. Using the attached list of potential funding sources, locate three potential awarding organizations that relate to your ideas described in #2. Use the prospect worksheet to summarize your findings.

References

- Blum, L. (1996). *The complete guide to getting a grant: How to turn your ideas into dollars, revised edition*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Brown, L. G., & Brown, M. J. (2001). *Demystifying grant seeking: What you really need to do to get grants*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Geever, J. C. (2001). *The Foundation Center's guide to proposal writing, third edition*. United States: The Foundation Center.
- Gitlin, L. N., & Lyons, K. J. (1996). *Successful grant writing: Strategies for health and human service professionals*. New York: Springer Publishing Company.
- Henson, K. T. (2004). *Grant writing in higher education: A step-by-step guide*. Boston: Pearson.
- Swan, W. (2003). EDUL 7650: Applied projects in education, grant writing. Retrieved July 3, 2003, from <http://www.webct.uga.edu/edul7650bs.html>.
- Van Zant, S. (2003). Successful grant writing strategies. *Leadership, March/April*, 16 - 19.
- Ward, D. (June 1998). Grant writing do's and don'ts. *Technology & Learning*.

Potential Funding Sources

The Foundation Center, <http://www.fdncenter.org/>

The American Association of Community Colleges,
http://www.aacc.nche.edu/Content/NavigationMenu/ResourceCenter/GrantOpportunities/Grant_Opportunities.htm

Office of Post Secondary Education,
<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/programs.html?exp=0>

US Department of Education Grant Information,
<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocfo/grants/grants.html>

The Federal Register, <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/index.html>

Council for Resource Development, Grant Related Resources,
<http://www.crdnet.org/resources/grantsresources.html>

Grants.gov, <http://www.grants.gov/>

Grantsandfunding.com, <http://www.thompson.com/grantsandfunding/index.html>

Grant makers in Georgia, <http://www.fundsnet services.com/georgia.htm>

Community of Science, <http://www.cos.org>