

2008-2009

Grant Writing Help for Harrison County Schools



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Planning and First Steps

A grant proposal and its future implementation can only be as good as the preparation and planning that go into it. Before an agency starts to tackle the application, a few preliminary steps should be taken to avoid future frustration.

- An agency should work under an updated and well thought out mission and/or vision statement. This mission and/or vision will help guide your search for funding. You should not go after money just because it is there, rather it should help to fulfill what your agency has stated it wants to accomplish through its mission. Getting money that requires your organization to completely alter how it provides service or to whom it provides service to is not that helpful!!
- A strategic plan can also help your agency prepare for writing a grant. A strategic plan forecasts where your agency will be in one, or two, or more years down the road. How the services will be administered, the staffing patterns, and who will the customers be are the typical types of items covered in an agency's long-range plan. By thinking ahead your agency can have a better idea of the amount and types of funding that may be needed in the future. You do not want to get caught in the situation where you need grant funds yesterday.
- Develop a Work Group to assist in completing the proposal. This Group should consist of members from throughout the organization. Often proposals are developed with little or no input from the staff that will be implementing the program. This could cause serious delays in implementation or worse, a sabotage effect on the project itself. The development of a Work Group also creates a division of labor and responsibility that will decrease the chances that one person will shoulder the entire burden of developing the proposal. Additionally, the Work Group can use brainstorming sessions to further develop or address implementation plans, budgetary concerns, evaluation methods, etc.
- Each Group member should be made aware of his or her responsibilities and role in the project. Developing a detailed outline that identifies a task, a timeline, and the person(s) responsible for completing the task will help develop a plan of action. Table 1 gives an example of this work plan matrix. It is a good practice when developing this timeline to make it reasonable. The Work Group should not expect a member to complete a very large task in a matter of days when realistically it will take two weeks. The timeline should also allow time for unforeseen events that could add to the completion of the proposal.
- It is also important to include the necessary or relevant stakeholders for the problem you are addressing. Stakeholders are those individuals or organizations who have a role in the problem or issue that is to be addressed. Collaboration is a key element to any successful application.

Table 1: Work Plan Matrix

Task	Due Date	Assigned Responsibility
Get final data on number of youth.....	December 22	Group Member Assigned
Meet with community partners and determine what other agencies need to attend.	Dec. 22 – Jan. 4	Group Member assigned
Get information on.....	December 14	Group Member Assigned

• Read the directions very thoroughly and carefully. When grants are reviewed the first item a reviewer looks for is if the directions were followed. It may sound silly, but applications have been turned down because the margin size was wrong or a necessary attachment was forgotten.

• Be aware of how the proposal will be scored by reviewing the evaluation criteria. This often tells you how much section each section is “worth” as the reviewers read your proposal. This will also let you know which parts are the most important and where you should spend your time. In addition, the instructions tell you exactly what should be in the proposal. There should be no “guess work” when writing grants, it is all spelled out for you in the instructions.

Executive Summary/Abstract

The Executive Summary or Abstract is a short document, often one or two pages, outlining the essential content and components of the entire proposal. This document is most easily written once the entire proposal has been completed, because one can then cut and paste material from the narrative and budget sections of the proposal.

The Executive Summary/Abstract should:

- Be clear and concise;
- Address each major section of the proposal and keep them in the order they appear in the text;
- Address why the proposal is being written, what is the intent of the project;
- Provide a description of the agency;
- Introduce the problem or need;
- Provide a brief description of the project management;

- Briefly describe the goals and objectives;
- Include budget information; and
- Provide any additional required material.

Problem Statement

This section of the proposal provides general background information on the specific problem the proposal will address. The problem needs to be defined in quantifiable (measurable) terms using statistics and data to present the full extent of the problem. A proposal cannot simply state that there is a literacy problem in a community. A strong proposal may cite educational data at the local, state, and national level presenting trends showing the local community has a more severe problem.

The problem statement must also address the clients, customers, or target populations that are affected by this issue. Again, a strong proposal must present data that demonstrates how the target population has been negatively affected.

There are a number of questions that your Work Group can pose to help determine the root problem.

- Why are you writing the proposal?
- Who will be served by the project?
- What is the current situation?

It is often useful to develop a “solution summary” at the conclusion of the problem statement. A solution summary is a brief statement that introduces to the reviewer how you plan on addressing the problem you have just highlighted. It lets the reviewer know that your organization understands the issue and you are prepared to positively impact the community with your well-conceived plan.

Goals and Objectives

Often writing goals and objectives can be the most difficult piece of the proposal. Much of the difficulty is attributed to the confusion between a goal and an objective. A goal is long-term, broad, or global statement of what will be accomplished. For example, if you were writing a proposal to help youth transition back into the community from a secure juvenile facility your goal could be: “The goal of the Transition Program is to increase the percentage of students that successfully reenter the community after being released from a Youth Development Center, thus helping to reduce juvenile recidivism rate.”

The following matrix can be helpful when developing your goal. By answering each question, one will be able to develop a well-rounded goal statement.

Writing Goals	
Building Goals:	Example
1. What overarching statement will describe what you want to achieve in your project?	Whatever School will have its students reading at grade level.
2. Does this goal address the needs statement?	Yes, literacy has an impact on every part of the school experience. Youth who are below grade level in reading in third grade are more likely to be involved with the juvenile justice system.
3. Is this goal realistic and achievable?	We would like for 95% of our youth to be on grade level by School Year 2007-08.
4. If your goal is met will it have a positive effect on the targeted problem?	Yes
Restate your goal (steps 1-4): The Whatever School will improve the overall educational experience for its youth and reduce later involvement with the juvenile justice system by having 95% of its third grade students reading at or above grade level by School Year 2007-08.	

An objective is a specific, measurable target that aids in accomplishing the goal. Some objectives for the previously stated goal could be: “The project will increase the number of youth that enroll in an education program after release by 25 percent.” “The project will increase the number of youth that enter the workforce upon release by 35 percent.” The objectives should be clear, realistic, practical, beneficial, measurable, and consistent with the mission of the agency.

The following matrix can be helpful when developing your objectives. Just as with the previous example, answer the Building Objective questions individually and then restate those answers to form the completed objective.

Writing Objectives	
Building Objectives:	Example
1. What activity will you engage in? How many people will engage in this activity? With whom (organizations, community leaders, youth, parents)? What part of your agency's mission does this address?	One staff member will be hired to work with the Whatever School staff, parents and youth to expand an existing after-school tutoring program to 30more youth. Improvement of literacy skills in youth is a key component of our mission.
2. What outcome do you expect from this activity? Are you going to focus on capacity building or direct service of the activity? (Be sure there is a direct connection between the activity and the desired outcome)	More students will improve their literacy skills in a safe and structured after-school program. This outcome will focus on the direct service of tutoring.
3. What tools/methods will the program use to measure the outcome?	Daily attendance logs to track the number of students attending and frequency of individual students' attendance. Reading assessment tool to measure increased literacy.
4. What degree or level (percentage or numbers) of the desired outcome do you want to achieve to indicate success? Over what period of time?	80% of the students who attend at least two days per week will increase their literacy skills.
5. How many people will directly benefit from this activity? Or, what systems, partnerships, community networks, or groups will directly benefit from this activity?	30 students in grades 3 through 5 will benefit.
6. Restate your objective (steps 1-5): One additional staff member will be hired, to address agency mission of improving literacy skills, by working with the staff, parents and youth of Whatever School to expand the after-school tutoring program to include 30 more youth in grades 3through 5, resulting in 80% of those students who attend at least two days per week, will increase their literacy skills as measured by the attendance logs and the Reading assessment tool. (Name the assessment tool that you will use.)	
*Some of this information for this activity was taken from the AmeriCorps Promise Fellows Application.	

Project management

The project management describes the actual method and day-to-day activities by which the problem will be addressed. This is the section on which your Group should spend most of its time and effort. Every project is different in its actual operation, but there are several guidelines that should be followed when outlining your project.

- Describe the general approach to be used during the project to address the identified problem.
- Give a detailed description of how the project will operate. It is important to remember that the reviewers may know nothing about your type of program (Board members of a foundation or members of a local social

organization). You will need to paint a vivid picture of how the program will operate. This includes describing how the project will be managed and how clients will be referred to the program among other items.

- Present each of the various steps or phases of the project including a description of how the proposed work will be organized, managed, and staffed. Who will be the project director? Who will oversee the administration of funds? Who will be the direct care staff for the project?
- Do not use shoptalk or jargon when describing how the project will operate. Again, clarity is very important. You need to write the proposal in such a way that anyone could understand it, not just someone in your field of expertise.

Evaluation

The evaluation is a plan outlining the manner by which your agency will determine whether or not your project was a success. For every objective identified by the proposal at least one performance measure should be developed. By combining these performance measures an evaluation plan will be developed. These objectives are what drive your evaluation.

Staying with the transition example, one of the objectives was: “The project will increase the number of youth that enroll in an education program after release by 25 percent.” A performance measure that can be gleaned from it is: “Number of youth that entered an education program before the project began and after by conducting surveys.” So the evaluation plan (as it relates to this one objective) could read as follows: “The Transition Coordinator will survey local school counselors and community colleges to gather the number of youth that enrolled in an education program after release from a secure facility before and after the project started. This data will indicate the program’s success at helping the youth to successfully transition back into the community in this one aspect.”

One issue that must be addressed when developing the plan is whether or not to hire an outside evaluator to conduct the evaluation. Many funders do not require lengthy, sophisticated evaluations of the projects they fund. If the information and data the funding agency requires is modest and readily available, then the current staff should be able to conduct the evaluation on their own. If this is not the case, then the agency may need to contract with a professional evaluator or evaluation agency. If an evaluator is part of the proposal plan do not forget to include that expense into the final budget.

Sustainability

One of the most important pieces of your proposal should be how your agency plans on continuing the project once the grant funds are no longer available. An agency must be committed to a project enough to continue it even after a grant is over. Funders want to know how this program will continue after their funding is no longer available.

Budget




The budget for your project should not be an after thought or hurriedly completed in the final minutes before the proposal is put in the mail. The budget and the budget narrative¹ explain why and how funds will be used by the project.

- When developing the budget it is important to be realistic in the cost projections. Do not guesstimate the costs; rather do research to find the actual costs of products or services your project requires.
- Be exact when calculating expenses. For example, include benefits with personnel costs or sales tax and shipping with equipment. This attention to detail can alleviate the possibility of running out of funds prematurely because an expense was not taken into account.
- Do not unnecessarily inflate the budget. The funding agency will view that as a misuse of its funds and will not award the proposal.
- Explain how the budget numbers were developed by detailing and clarifying calculations.
- Check for consistency between the project description and the budget. It is very important to make sure that every expense that was described in the proposal makes its way into the budget.

¹ Budget Narrative: a narrative description of how and why grant funds will be spent.

General Grant Writing Pointers

The following are some tips that cover each of the areas previously discussed that should help you when you are developing your next proposal.

-  Problem Statement: One way to be prepared is to collect and maintain general data on your community. Statistics such as population, economic indicators, and demographics can demonstrate that your community is in line with the goals of the grant or granting body. Many grants have strict requirements about what types of communities are eligible for funds such as the number of children eligible for free/supplemental lunches or percentage of people under the poverty line.
-  Program: Gather and maintain information on your program or organization's effect. What are the effects of your service on your customers: how many people did you serve over a time period; how many people showed improvement in the area in which you offer service (if you work with a child illiteracy program, how many children showed improvements in reading level); how dramatic were the improvements? Is there an effect on the community at-large (was the crime rate reduced in your community because of your program)?
-  Program: Keep several "success stories" of your organization on file. These success stories are another way to show the impact your program has had. Rather than using cold numbers you can use the heart-

warming story of a seemingly unreachable child whose life your organization turned around as a real world example of the benefits of your program.

- ✦ **Budget:** The budget should include all costs for the project. The budget should be realistic, itemized and justifiable. Always follow the funder's guidelines for presenting the budget.

Grant Writing Checklist

This Checklist can be used after the proposal has been completed as a quick reference to grade your finished product.

- ✓ Have each member of the Work Group proofread the proposal very carefully
- ✓ Check for spelling and grammatical mistakes
- ✓ Make sure formatting and style is consistent throughout the proposal
- ✓ Have people not involved in the writing edit the proposal to ensure that it is clear and understandable
- ✓ Jargon, acronyms, and “shop talk” should not be used
- ✓ Gather letters of support, letters of agreement, or memorandum of understanding from stakeholders or partners showing support for the project
- ✓ Is the population to be served clearly defined?
- ✓ Who?
- ✓ How many?
- ✓ Where?
- ✓ Were the directions followed?
- ✓ Page limit
- ✓ Number of copies submitted
- ✓ Authorized signatures
- ✓ Required documentation and attachments
- ✓ Are the project activities specific?
- ✓ Was every item in the application covered?
- ✓ Were all the key points of the application’s evaluation criteria met or addressed?
- ✓ Are the projects goals and objectives:
- ✓ Clear?
- ✓ Realistic?
- ✓ Practical?
- ✓ Effective?
- ✓ Consistent with the goals of the funding organization?

- ✓ Measurable?
- ✓ Are there adequate resources available to support the program after grant is complete?
- ✓ Programmatically?
- ✓ Fiscally?
- ✓ Make sure the finished document is neat and eye pleasing.

Helpful Terms

Community Foundation—a foundation formed by broad-based community support from multiple sources; a community foundation usually makes grants only within a specified geographic area

Corporate Foundation—type of foundation that receives its income from the profit-making entity whose name it bears, but it's legally an independent/separate entity

Discretionary Grant—provided by Federal government for local groups, agencies, etc.; awarded at the discretion of the Federal government

Executive Summary—a summary document, in this case a summary of the proposal; usually included in the executive summary is the problem or need statement, a brief description of the project, funding requirements, etc.

Family Foundation—a private foundation whose funds are derived from members of a family
 Foundation—provide funds for specific projects; usually have strict eligibility, application, and reporting requirements; see Family Foundation, Corporate Foundation, and Private Foundation

Goals—the long-term accomplishments, i.e. help children do better in math

Grant—funds awarded to an organization to carry out specified tasks/projects

Grantee—organization or individual that receives a grant

Grantor—organization that makes a grant

In-kind Contribution—a donation of goods/services rather than money

Match—a grant is made with specification that the amount donated must be matched, usually as a prescribed percentage formula; if the budget for a project was for \$10,000 and the granting agency called for a 10 percent match, then the grantee would have to put forward \$1,000 and the granting agency would give \$9,000.

Monitoring—ongoing assessment of the progress of the grantee's activities by the grantor

Nonprofit Organization—a corporation whose charter prohibits the distribution of profits to officers or members; they are distinguished by IRS designations, i.e. 501 (c) 3

Objectives—time-specific products that enable the program to reach its goals, i.e. the remedial education program will assist 10 youth in improving their math scores by one grade level on a standardized math test after six months in the program

Private Foundation—a nongovernmental, nonprofit organization that is managed by its own directors/trustees and has a principle fund or endowment; makes grants, primarily to other nonprofit organizations

RFP—Request for Proposals, signifies that funds are available from granting agency and invites the submissions of proposals

Seed Money—funds used to start a new project