

**STRATEGY PAPERS  
COMMITTEE**

David Lindeman, GPC  
Editor

Andy Rawdon, JD  
Editor

Dana Boe, AA  
Peer Review Manager

Robyn Gibboney, PhD,  
GPC  
Peer Review Manager

Barbara Roberts, MA  
GPA Publications  
Committee Chair

***GPA Strategy Papers*** offer practical solutions to current and emerging issues facing grant professionals. *The GPA Strategy Papers Committee* accepts concept proposals on a quarterly basis and uses a double-blind peer review process. Members and nonmembers may submit concept proposals and have electronic access to approved papers.

[www.grantprofessionals.org](http://www.grantprofessionals.org)

**Steps to Develop a Grantsmanship Degree Program**

*Phyl Renninger, Ph.D., GPC  
President, Grant Development & Management, LLC*

*Karen Stinson, Ed.D.  
Director of Education, University of Wisconsin*

**Abstract**

Development of a professional status involves a continuum of increasingly complex processes culminating in a degree and licensure which represent evidence of competence in the chosen field. The grant profession is no exception. Grant professionals confirm their credibility by achieving certification in the Grant Professional Certification Institute (GPCI). This certification provides a level of assurance that a person with the Grant Professional Certification (GPC) designation can effectively select, design, and write a grant proposal as well as manage the people, relationships, and funds once the grant is awarded.

This paper will provide an overview of the rationale and key steps in developing a new major or program in higher education which will focus exclusively on the development of skills in grant research, writing, and management. The paper will cover the steps for developing a grantsmanship degree program including establishing the need, collaborating with a university or college, and understanding the approval process.

**Introduction**

Most grant professionals began their grant writing careers as part of a “grassroots” effort or as beginners with little or no knowledge about grants (Renninger & Stinson, 2006; Torpey, 2014). As they develop their skills, they learn how to identify potential sources of grant funds and draft competitive grant proposals—duties attached to many job descriptions and titles. The grant profession advanced when the Grant Professionals Association (GPA) developed a psychometrically-sound credentialing process. This paper argues that the grants profession should now move to the next level: promotion of the development of a degree-conferring program in grantsmanship.

Reviews of scholarly literature yielded few articles related to grant professionals' need for a degree program. Some articles provide a practical approach on how to write a successful grant proposal such as one by Nilsen, Czajkowski, Davidson, Elwood, Hillhouse, Keefe, Patrick, Stirratt & Szalacha, 2013. Other articles provide research that surveys the current availability of grants and the feasibility of investing the time and effort into submitting a grant proposal, such as Von Hippel and Von Hippel, 2015. The review found fundraising courses such as those offered by the National Institutes of Health, several certification classes for training as a grant proposal writer, and college professional development courses. However, the authors were unable to find any articles or literature about the need for degree-conferring programs specifically for the grant profession.

## **Current Course Offerings**

Many non-degree courses are offered as continuing education, as a certificate, or as a component of a degree program. A few examples include:

- San Diego State University, Extended Studies, Certificate in Grant Writing
- Columbia University, Continuing Education, Fundraising Management
- Concordia University, Master of Arts, grant writing, management and evaluation
- Fort Hayes State University, Grant Writing Certification Program
- University of Georgia, Continuing Education, Grant writing/nonprofit courses
- University of Missouri, Mizzou Online, Graduate Certificate in Grantsmanship
- Notre Dame Online, Certificate in Grant Writing

The authors found grant development offered as a course or certificate in technical writing, fundraising, or nonprofit management degree programs but found no degree programs specifically designed to lead to a career in the grant profession. Groups such as Grant Writing USA, The Grantsmanship Center, Grant Training Center, American Grant Writers Association, and the National Grant Management Association offer non-degree programs in grant proposal writing and management.

## **Steps to develop a degree program**

After surveying literature and current course offerings, the authors then researched and laid out a potential step-by-step plan for developing a degree program. The authors suggest that three steps are required to develop a new degree program in a higher education:

- 1) Establishment of the need;
- 2) Endorsement by administration, faculty, and staff; and
- 3) Approval through review processes.

### **1) Establishment of the Need**

When developing a new program, a key consideration is the match between the mission of the Institution of Higher Education (IHE) and the focus of the department contemplating offering the new program. The IHE must "buy into" the need for a new program. The criteria for making that decision includes:

1. Does it support the IHE mission?
2. Is any similar program currently offered?
3. Could faculty resources be arranged to deliver the program?
4. Do current faculty support the program concept?
5. Is there sufficient student demand for the program?
6. Is there labor market demand for the graduates?
7. Would the program be distinctive among area IHEs?
8. Would the program improve the IHE's financial position vis-à-vis a return on investment analysis?
9. Would the program increase the IHE's visibility and recognition as a leader?

An IHE may consider the identification of workforce changes as a need that would drive a new degree program. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reports that employment of grant proposal writers (who typically fall under the category of public relations or fundraising managers) is expected to grow by 16% between 2010 and 2020. However, these numbers do not take into account that the nonprofit sector is one of the fastest growing industries in the U.S. or the fact that many grant professionals do not consider themselves as public relations or fundraising managers.

With an identified workforce need, IHE departments will require assistance to understand the full array of knowledge and skills needed in a grantsmanship degree program. The knowledge and skills needed include development and management knowledge, compliance, budget development, and many other complex and interrelated topics (GPCI Competencies and Skills).

Degree programs will provide an increased level of professional legitimacy because candidates who complete the programs will provide evidence of the knowledge and skills required for the profession. A degree program will provide a level of security or assurance for those hiring a grants professional. An IHE understands that a professional with a degree earns more than one without it. The U.S. Department of Labor and the U.S. Census Bureau confirm the positive correlation between degrees and earnings.

Finally, it is critical that enough students are interested in a degree program. There may be a role for the GPA to sponsor marketing surveys and/or to research studies to establish the need for a degree program.

## **2) Endorsement by administration, faculty, and staff**

Administrators have a perspective which contributes a broader analysis of proposed programs and their integration into the entire IHE community. For example, an idea may be to offer a new grantsmanship degree program in the sociology department, but the IHE administrators see the benefit of having a grantsmanship certificate as a minor in the Science department (for future scientists seeking National Science Foundation grants), or in the engineering department (for engineers seeking new specialized equipment). Administrators may be aware of other programs being developed or eliminated and may have recommendations for the most appropriate approach.

IHE administrators are responsible for the financial health of their institutions, and the grant professionals approaching IHE administrators should be well prepared with information such as projected enrollments and expected revenue and expenses. To save cost, consider suggesting current college core courses that could be bundled or revised slightly, such as writing, grammar, mathematics, and ethics, with newly developed technical courses specific to grant development and management, such as research, types of grants (foundation/corporation vs. federal/state), Institutional Review Board approval for permission to use human subjects, and compliance laws and regulations. The college or university faculty members could teach the core courses while a GPC professional could serve as an adjunct faculty member for the technical courses.

Every IHE will have its own preferred approach and its own idea of which administrators, faculty, and staff are the most effective in assisting the grant professional in developing a new grantsmanship degree or certificate program. It might take numerous conversations to determine how to navigate the IHE system and how to contact the key members.

## **3) Approval through review processes**

Since each IHE department has mandatory policies and procedures, it is important to have conversations with key IHE administrators, faculty and staff. Every IHE has internal faculty governance committees that recommend and approve new programs. The faculty and staff have a vested interest in any proposed program, because it will impact current students and will affect allocation of time resources.

Finally, IHEs maintain state and/or national accreditation status, which mandates specific processes and procedures for developing new degree or certificate programs. IHE administrators know how to navigate the accreditation approval process. If an IHE is part of a state IHE system, approval may also be needed from other universities or colleges in the system to ensure that the new degree program is not competing with existing programs in a limited service area.

## **Conclusion**

A new degree program must clearly demonstrate to IHE administrators, faculty, and staff how it will benefit students and how it will further the mission of the IHE. The administrative team will require market research to confirm that there are grant development and management jobs available, that candidates want to take the program, and that the program can be developed and implemented efficiently. Just like a good grant proposal, the “need” for a degree program should be based on statistics and data. There is a role for GPA, chapters or members to serve as major drivers in establishing the need by gathering data, statistics, and trends through grant professional surveys as well as community marketing surveys.

Contacting the right IHE administrators and faculty and staff is critical to navigating IHE systems and processes. As with grant projects “collaboration” is key to a successful plan. A partnership between grant professionals and IHE personnel will result in a well-developed program. It is time for the grant profession to take the next step in the grantsmanship career pathway by collaborating in the development of a degree program in grantsmanship.

## **References:**

Grant Professionals Association. (2016). Overland Park, KS. Retrieved at <http://www.grantprofessionals.org/>

Grant Professionals Certification Institute. (2016). Overland Park, KS. Retrieved at <http://www.grantcredential.org/>

Grant Professionals Certification Institute. (2016). Competencies and Skills. Overland Park, KS. Retrieved at <http://www.grantcredential.org/the-exam/competencies-tested/>

Higher Learning Commission. (2016). Retrieved at <https://hlcommission.org/>.

Jakob, E., Porter, A., Podos, J., Braun, B., Johnson, N. & Vessey, S. (2010). How to Fail in Grant Writing, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 57, 16.

National Science Foundation. (2016). Arlington, VA. Retrieved at <http://www.nsf.gov/>.

Nilsen, W.J., Czajkowski, S.M., Davidson, K.W., Elwood, W., Hillhouse, J., Keefe, F.J., Patrick, H., Stirrat, M.J. & Szalacha, L., (2013). NIH Grant Writing Seminar for Early Career Researchers, *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, 47, 1, S3-S3.

Renninger, P. & Stinson, K. (2006). *An Emerging Vocation: The Grant Profession*, AAGP Monograph: A Series of Papers on the Topic of Professionalism in the Grants Field. November 2006

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. (2016). Retrieved at <http://sacs.org/>

Torpey, E. (2014). Grant Writer. Career Outlook: Bureau of Labor Statistics: U. S. Department of Labor retrieved at <http://www.bls.gov/careeroutlook/2014/youre-a-what/grant-writer.htm>

U.S. Census Bureau. (2011). Education and Synthetic Work-Life Earnings Estimates. American Community Survey Briefs, September 2011.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2012). Work-Life Earnings by Field of Degree and Occupation for People with a Bachelor's Degree. American Community Survey Briefs, October 2012.

U.S. Department of Labor. (2014). Bureau of Labor Statistics: The Economics Daily, Median weekly earnings by educational attainment in 2014. Retrieved at <http://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2015/median-weekly-earnings-by-education-gender-race-and-ethnicity-in-2014.htm>.

Von Hippel, T., & Von Hippel, C. (2015). To Apply or Not to Apply: A Survey Analysis of Grant Writing Costs and Benefits PloS ONE, 10, 3.