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Editors' Note

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the 2016 edition of the *Journal of the Grant Professionals Association*. As the research publication of the GPA, the *Journal* provides a forum for scholarly examination of the profession, discussions of best practices, and presentation of case studies. The *Journal* is devoted to the improvement of the grants professional and our growing and changing profession. Like previous editions, this year's *Journal* mirrors the diversity of work in our profession, which provides a rich variety of experience from which to learn.

New to this year's *Journal* is the inclusion of GPA *Strategy Papers* published in 2016. Launched in 2014, strategy papers stimulate discussion and innovative thinking about a single topic that furthers the knowledge, skills, and understanding of grant professionals. Published several times a year, strategy papers are shorter than full-length *Journal* articles and offer practical solutions to current and emerging issues. Like *Journal* articles, strategy papers undergo a double-blind peer-review process. In this edition, we are pleased to reprint the four strategy papers published to date in 2016 to add to the body of research-based knowledge for the *Journal's* readership.

In 2017, we invite you to contribute your valuable experience to these publications. We seek articles that address new ideas in our field, contribute research-based information, provide a case study or best practices, or examine any of the competencies and skills in the Grant Professional Certification Institute's *Table of Validated Competencies and Skills*. We also invite you to consider serving as a peer reviewer to evaluate manuscripts submitted to these publications. Please contact us at journal@grantprofessionals.org if you are interested.

We thank the authors, editorial board, and peer review managers for contributing extensive time and effort to this year's *Journal*. We also deeply appreciate the time and effort of the peer reviewers for both publications; while anonymous, they are critical to ensuring the strong professional caliber of GPA's publications.

We welcome your comments on this issue of the *Journal*, and we look forward to your suggestions and article ideas for future issues.

David Lindeman and Andy Rawdon
Co-editors, *Journal of the GPA*

About The *Journal of the Grant Professionals Association*

The *Journal of the Grant Professionals Association* is devoted to the improvement of the grants professional and the profession. The *Journal* provides a forum for scholarly examination of the profession, discussions of best practices, and presentation of case studies. Papers submitted to the *Journal* are peer-reviewed by top professionals from around the country.

Proposals for articles may be submitted at any time to the *Journal's* Editorial Board via email to journal@grantprofessionals.org. Proposals must be no more than 300 words and follow the guidelines published on the GPA website (www.grantprofessionals.org/journal). Both proposals and full articles must be submitted as email attachments in Microsoft Word format. Each full article must contain a short biography of each author (100 words) and an abstract (150 words). References, punctuation, grammar usage, and paragraph formatting must follow the *APA Style Manual for Publication* (6th Edition). Submissions are peer-reviewed anonymously. Once selected for publication, editors will work with authors to address reviewer comments and other necessary revisions. The Editorial Board reserves the right to delay or withhold publication of any article submitted.

All submissions accepted for publication (except reprints of articles) will remain the copyrighted property of the GPA. Written permission must be obtained from GPA to reprint any published article. Please email journal@grantprofessionals.org with any questions. Submission requirements, annual cut-off dates, and other information are posted on the GPA website.

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GPA Mission

The Grant Professionals Association (GPA) is a nonprofit 501(c)(6) membership association. It builds and supports an international community of grant professionals committed to serving the greater public good by practicing the highest ethical and professional standards. To achieve this mission, GPA:

- Serves as a leading authority and resource for the practice of grantsmanship in all sectors of the field
- Advances the field by promoting professional growth and development
- Enhances the public image and recognition of the profession within the greater philanthropic, public, and private funding communities, and
- Promotes positive relationships between grant professionals and their stakeholders.

GPA does not discriminate in its provision of services due to race, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, ethnic group identification, sex, age, sexual orientation, and/or condition of physical or mental disability in accordance with all requirements of Federal and State Laws.

Validated Competencies and Skills

Grant Professionals Certification Institute (GPCI)

Below are the GPCI professional competencies and skills covered in the *Journal*. For more detail on each competency, please visit the GPCI website (www.grantcredential.org).

GPCI Competency 01: Knowledge of how to research, identify, and match funding resources to meet specific needs

GPCI Competency 02: Knowledge of organizational development as it pertains to grant seeking

GPCI Competency 03: Knowledge of strategies for effective program and project design and development

GPCI Competency 04: Knowledge of how to craft, construct, and submit an effective grant application

GPCI Competency 05: Knowledge of post-award grant management practices sufficient to inform effective grant design and development

GPCI Competency 06: Knowledge of nationally recognized standards of ethical practice by grants professionals

GPCI Competency 07: Knowledge of practices and services that raise the level of professionalism of grant professionals

GPCI Competency 08: Knowledge of methods and strategies that cultivate and maintain relationships between fund-seeking and recipient organizations and funders

GPCI Competency 09: Ability to write a convincing case for funding

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Using Altmetrics to Effectively Support and Evaluate Grant Proposals

Catherine Williams

Altmetric LLP, London, UK

Stacy Konkiel

Altmetric LLP, London, UK

GPCI Competency 04: Knowledge of how to craft, construct and submit an effective grant application

GPCI Competency 05: Knowledge of post-award grant management practices sufficient to inform effective grant design and development

Abstract

The emerging field of altmetrics presents a method of capturing and reporting on the online activity of individual scholarly works, such as “mentions,” “references,” or “shares” in the mainstream media, public policy documents, and social networks, to provide readers with a more complete understanding of how such works are received. Altmetrics track who engages with a piece of work and any online commentary that occurs, providing qualitative insights and evidence of non-traditional engagement useful for informing the evaluation process. Emerging methods of tracking and reporting on the online activity of individual research outputs bring new questions for those involved in the grant application and evaluation process. Immediate evidence of non-traditional engagement is easily accessible today in ways it was not previously. This paper examines what impacts and opportunities the field of altmetrics presents for grant professionals.

Introduction

There are subjective elements to the grant application and peer review processes commonly thought of as objective in nature. Grant applicants must satisfy defined criteria established by a wide-ranging panel of reviewers. In many cases, these evaluators use external indicators to determine the significance of proposed or previous work to supplement their own expert opinions of the significance of research.

Grant proposals often include bibliometric indicators, such as citation counts and the Journal Impact Factor (Garfield, 2005), to demonstrate the academic impact of previous work. However, the ongoing debate around the application of these metrics (Callaway, 2016) raises several limitations that evaluators should take into account when reviewing.

As with all bibliometric indicators, citation count numbers alone tell the reviewer very little about the context in which the work is referenced or about its impact beyond the academic sphere. Among the criteria funders use to evaluate grant applications are demonstrating the broader impacts and extended benefits of research. Funders require researchers to demonstrate how their work impacts their academic peers, as well as its economic, health, or other benefits to society as a whole.

In the U.S., the National Science Foundation (NSF) defines a “Broader Impacts” criterion as part of its funding application process. Applicants must demonstrate how their work “increased public scientific literacy, [and/or] public engagement with science and technology” (National Science Foundation, 2016).

In the UK, government-backed research councils outline “Pathways to Impact” (Research Councils UK, 2014), which require research projects to prove the real-world impacts of their work. The UK Arts and Humanities Research Council specifically asks applicants to consider, “Who will benefit from this research?” and “How will they benefit from this research?” (Arts & Humanities Research Council, 2016).

Other government bodies and research funders in Australia and throughout Europe extend funding requirements to ensure that researchers demonstrate their work’s expected broader societal engagement and impacts.

Evidence of Broader Societal Engagement and Impact

Encouraging the use of altmetrics in research grant applications can help applicants meet the “broader impact” and “pathways to impact” requirements. Altmetrics data provide a real-time and immediate record of the online activity surrounding scholarly outputs, such as practitioners who discuss the research and subsequently adapt their protocols based on the findings. Altmetrics tools are useful to demonstrate broader impacts including where government policy cites the work and where the mainstream media covers it.

Unlike citation counts, altmetrics track more than journal articles and books. Altmetrics are useful when applied to research data (useful given the recent US NSF data sharing requirements) (Hswe & Holt, 2010), software applications (Katz, 2015), and other scholarly “outputs.”

Altmetrics technologies track online activity of research outputs across all disciplines and formats, making altmetrics particularly powerful for researchers in the humanities and social sciences fields. In these fields, outputs tend to exhibit greater variability and therefore, citation databases like Web of Science do not adequately support citation research (Larivière et al., 2006). Altmetrics data provide scholars in these disciplines with evidence to demonstrate how their research is received and in what ways it is implemented.

The additional context provided by altmetrics data ensures a more thorough understanding of the proposed project and its potential impact on society.

Complement to Understanding Research Impact

It is difficult to understand and quantify the impact of research. Two methods are popular: manually gathering anecdotal evidence of the ways in which the research made a difference; and counting citations of the research to understand its disciplinary impact among scholars.

However, the use of altmetrics makes the process easier, more efficient, and timelier. Altmetrics are data collected from the social web (e.g., mentions of research on Twitter, commentary posted to Facebook, and discussions on research blogs) which give insight into how Internet users share, discuss, review, and reuse research (Priem et al., 2010). For example, through text mining and other data collection techniques, it is now possible to:

- Follow conversations among researchers on blogs and social media as they dissect the latest papers in their discipline;
- Track newspaper coverage of academic books;
- Discover when policymakers recommend research-backed health interventions; and
- Uncover uses of academic research by a variety of stakeholders.

This exchange of information formerly took place in a milieu exclusive to its participants. There was little chance of wider dissemination. For example, scientists discussing a recent journal article in the faculty lounge, a doctor recommending an article to a patient, or a policymaker weaving research-informed insights into public policy are all engaged in discussions which rarely extend beyond the immediate participants.

However, now these discussions occur online. Anyone can follow these “digital footprints” around the Web. Such transparency makes it easier to see and understand the many and varied directions of such discussions in the research community and among other scientists, patient groups, policymakers, and stakeholders (Piwowar, 2012).

Another advantage of altmetrics is the speed with which these data accumulate. Because altmetrics source directly from the Web, collection of such data is often instantaneous. Compared to citations in the peer reviewed literature, which take months or years to appear in databases like Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, altmetrics are a timelier gauge of the coverage given to research. Moreover, some altmetrics like Mendeley readership counts (Priem, Piwowar, & Hemminger, 2012) and discussions in research blogs (Thelwall et al., 2013) are “leading indicators” for later citations.

Altmetrics are an ideal way to understand the value of grant-funded dataset creation, software development, and outreach strategies such as conference presentations and white papers. In that way, they validate the often- unacknowledged academic work of data curators, programmers, lab technicians, and graduate students.

Altmetrics are useful complements to citations. When using both, one gains a fuller, quicker, more nuanced understanding of the value of research and also gives credit to its many contributors.

Altmetrics Can Confirm Funder-Mandated Broader Impact

Altmetrics helps researchers find evidence of “broader impact,” which can be useful as evidence in grant applications and reporting. Altmetrics are not just metrics but also are qualitative data that brings to the surface actual comments about the research and the source of the comments. In some cases, this qualitative evidence contains important examples of “real world” applications of research.

Because the “broader impacts” criterion is interpreted as the effect of research and its related activities on society (National Science Foundation, 2016), citations are not a useful metric to understand such impact, because they are limited to the scholarly impact of research. In instances where altmetrics uncover the “real world” application of research (e.g., showcasing attention paid to research by the public and other stakeholders, in addition to scholars), they more accurately illustrate broader impacts.

To use altmetrics in this way, one must examine the underlying qualitative data. Some examples of altmetrics that highlight the “broader impact” of a given research work include:

- Practitioner engagement measured by citations in policy documents: Which NGOs, governments, and nonprofits cite the research in policy documents?

- Public engagement by mainstream media attention: How is the research communicated to the general public through domestic and international news outlets?

Figure 1 represents an example of how altmetrics tools can provide evidence of a journal article referenced in public policy:

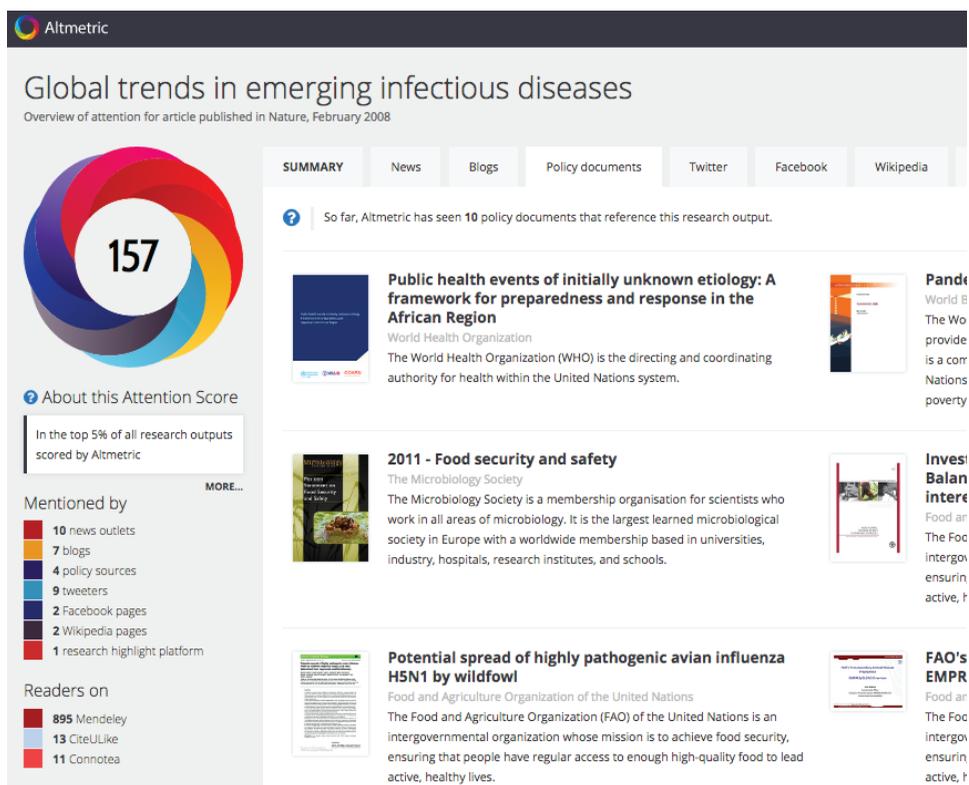


Figure 1. Altmetric.com's "bookmarklet" provides evidence of a journal article referenced in public policy documents and assigns an "attention score" to the article.

The Role of Altmetrics for Funders and Grant Professionals

Altmetrics data applies to many parts of the grant application, selection, and review processes. Grant applicants uncover evidence of the broader influence and attention that their scholarly or research work receives. In turn, these findings demonstrate the value of their work, providing a stronger argument in favor of funding.

Altmetrics data are considered alongside traditional metrics such as citations, and in combination with peer review, to assist funding panels to gather a complete picture of the impact of the research and the researcher (Dinsmore, Allen & Dolby, 2014). These insights are critical for addressing specific criteria outlined by funders (for example, where

public engagement and the communication of research is central to the aims of the funding organization).

Altmetrics data are particularly valuable in cases where funding is for a limited period of time, and therefore insights that take longer to accrue (such as citations or a measure of the full economic, social, or political impacts of the work) are unavailable to evaluators. Finally, altmetrics data enable funders the ability to conduct their own analyses of the reach of their funded projects, without relying solely on grantee reporting.

Two case studies, below, illustrate the use of altmetrics data in grant application and reporting processes.

Case Study 1: Moore Foundation's Data Driven Discovery Grant Application

Dr. C. Titus Brown, associate professor in the College of Biological Sciences at the University of California, Davis, is a recent recipient of the Moore Foundation's Data Driven Discovery grant program which aims to advance scientific progress by funding data science researchers who study important challenges:

Effectively harnessing these large and complex scientific datasets requires fundamentally different techniques, better tools, and a new data-driven practice. These techniques are being developed by an emerging, interdisciplinary type of research called data science.

While the research community recognizes the need for these skills, there is a critical shortage of practitioners. Science may be data-rich, but will remain discovery-poor without the institutional commitment, people-power and technology needed to mine data and reveal hidden breakthroughs.

To help catalyse these breakthroughs, we are supporting the people who innovate around data-driven discovery... (Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, 2014)

Because he works across a variety of scientific disciplines and creates and uses software and "big data" to fuel his discoveries, Dr. Brown is a perfect candidate for using altmetrics in his grant application. Specifically, altmetrics data could bring to the surface:

- The value of interdisciplinary research (Mohammadi & Thelwall, 2014), which in some disciplines receive fewer citations than single-field research (Larivière & Gingras, 2010);

- How widely Dr. Brown's software, *khmer*, is used by other researchers (which can be discovered by looking at software download and installation statistics); and
- Dr. Brown's collaborator network, which regularly helps to improve his research software projects.

In the grant application to his Data Driven Discovery program, Dr. Brown wove altmetrics data into the narrative in the following ways (Brown, 2014):

Documenting the uptake of software

Dr. Brown used altmetrics to make a case for the importance of his software to the larger scientific community:

- "In 1993, I co-authored the first version of the Avida software platform; 20 years later, Avida is a major research platform in evolutionary modelling and education, used by ≈ 20 research groups and cited in ≈ 100 publications."
- "The recent release of *khmer v1.0* has also seen a substantial increase in community participation in our software development."
- "Already our data structures and algorithms have served as a foundation for new approaches; the *diginorm* algorithm has been incorporated into several widely used assemblers; and our *khmer* software is quite popular, with thousands of downloads a month."

Specifically, Dr. Brown used installation metrics, citation metrics, collaborator numbers and diversity, and download statistics to illustrate non-traditional impact. He also integrated altmetrics evidence other than metrics (e.g., "a substantial increase in community participation in our software development") in order to make an argument for the usefulness of his work.

Describing how success will be measured

Metrics are also important to the grant reporting process. Dr. Brown highlighted several ways he intends to measure whether or not his funded research project will align with the values of the Data Driven Discovery grant program:

- "The second measure of progress is less traditional but perhaps more important: if we are providing important and useful solutions that help address important scientific questions, our techniques should be adopted by others."
- "For this proposal, I would hope to see similar adoption of our core graph and server technology within 5 years, with dozens of labs running their own servers and making their data publicly available."

While no one has the ability to accurately predict the downstream impacts of research (Chubb & Watermeyer, 2016), metrics to describe potential progress can be used in later grant reporting, demonstrating to funders whether or not research has had the effect applicants aimed for when applying for funding.

Case Study 2: Reporting for a Wellcome Trust-funded Study

Upon completion of a grant, funders often require researchers to report to them on the status of the research project and whether or not they succeeded in achieving the original goals in their grant application. Altmetrics data can be valuable in the grant reporting process for documenting evidence of research diffusion, public engagement, and broader impacts, such as policy uptake for research. In particular, the Wellcome Trust is outspoken in its interest in altmetrics for understanding the “broader impacts” of the research it funds (Dinsmore, Allen & Dolby 2014).

To understand the use of altmetrics in grant reporting in practice, consider altmetrics data for a Wellcome Trust-funded research team that recently published two articles related to the Zika virus, “Anticipating the international spread of Zika virus from Brazil” (Bogoch et al., 2016) and “The global distribution of the arbovirus vectors *Aedes aegypti* and *Ae. Albopictus*” (Kraemer et al., 2015).

Showcasing public engagement

Worldwide discussion of research often begins as soon as it is published, and big data from sites like Twitter identifies the locations of those discussions and those participating in the discussions. Services like Altmetric.com data mine Twitter to create maps based upon discussion location and participation. Visualizations supplement grant reporting, particularly in showcasing the public impact of research. As seen in Figure 2, the Bogoch et al. (2016) study reached more than twice as many “members of the public” as compared to scientists, practitioners, and science communicators.

Showcasing policy impact

Research articles are cited in public policy documents for a variety of reasons (Haynes et al., 2011). In general, it is useful for funders to know that the research they support has an influence on policymakers.

The Wellcome Trust identified altmetrics as one way to identify any influence the particular research has among policymakers. In particular, altmetrics’ immediacy has been described as an important way to “explore how [funders] efficiently reach non-academic audiences and better understand routes from research to integration in policy and practice” (Dinsmore, Allen, & Dolby 2014).

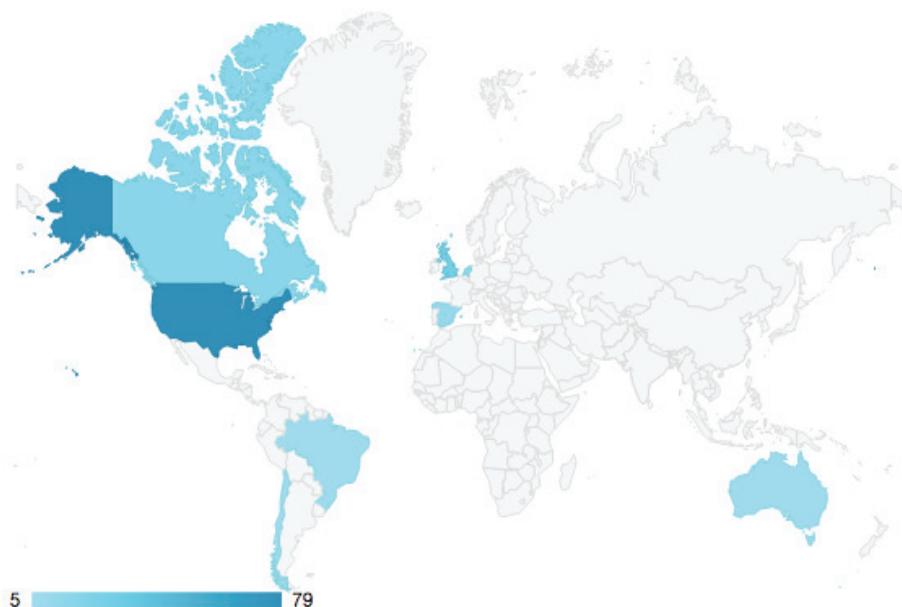


Figure 2. A map of tweets mentioning Bogoch et al. (2016) illustrates the geographical and demographic reach of the research article.

As an example, the World Health Organization cites “The global distribution of the arbovirus vectors *Aedes aegypti* and *Ae. Albopictus*,” in its technical report on the Zika virus, a resource created to help African governments develop risk assessments on the spread of the virus. Citations to research in policy confirm that policymakers are paying attention.

Conclusion

As funders and grant committees look to evolve and improve their evaluation and review processes to better support today’s research practices, altmetrics and the impact evidence they provide are well-positioned to provide substantial benefits, both for the applicant and the granting organization.

The true power of altmetrics comes from their value as a complement to citations, peer review, and other qualitative evaluation methods already in widespread use. As demonstrated in the examples above, altmetrics serve to add further context to claims of impact, as well as a timelier and automated approach to gathering indicators of influence among a broader audience.

Altmetrics are still in the early stages of development, and there are ongoing initiatives working to establish standards to ensure that their data are transparent and auditable (National Information Standards

Organization, 2013). That said, altmetrics' adoption among funders is increasing, adding efficiencies and new insights to existing workflows. Those who already utilize these data are doing so with a careful approach, applying them in a way that enables users to better determine whether or not the funded research, or research proposed for funding, is achieving the intended objectives.

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Biographical Information

Catherine Williams is Chief Marketing Officer at Altmetric LLP, a data science company that uncovers the attention that research receives online. Prior to joining Altmetric, Catherine held roles at Nature Publishing Group and SAGE publications, where she worked with both institutions and authors across a range of scientific, medical, engineering and social science publications. Catherine received her undergraduate degree from Aberystwyth University and her CIM Diploma from London School of Marketing. Reach the author at cat@altmetric.com

Stacy Konkiel is the Outreach & Engagement Manager at Altmetric LLP. Her research interests include incentives systems in academia and informetrics. Stacy has written and presented worldwide about altmetrics, Open Science, and library services. Previously, Stacy worked with teams at Impactstory, Indiana University & the Public Library of Science. Stacy received her undergraduate degree from the University of Delaware and her Masters of Information Science and Masters of Library Science degrees from Indiana University. Reach the author at stacy@altmetric.com

Breaking Up the Blog Jam: How to Help Newly Minted PhDs Develop Proposal Writing Skills in the Swift Currents of Academia

Timothy P. Hooper, MPA, GPC

Proposal Writing Consultant, Nashville, TN

GPCI Competency 02: Knowledge of organizational development as it pertains to grant seeking

GPCI Competency 03: Knowledge of strategies for effective program and project design and development

Abstract

A common challenge shared among early-career faculty after accepting new university assignments is frustration over the need to secure grants to establish themselves as independent researchers. Writing courses offered in terminal degree programs focus mostly on publication writing and lack supporting instruction on proposal writing for grants. Often, highly capable individuals find themselves unprepared for the abrupt change in skills needed to embark on sustained research, proposal writing, and submission campaigns. These new challenges arrive after early-career faculty successfully complete lengthy but otherwise productive periods of time mastering their respective fields of study. Coming to terms with these new challenges and finding ways to overcome them are not always shared in constructive settings. Many turn to Internet blogs to express their frustration and disillusionment over repeated rejections and harsh proposal reviews. Given the initial investment that universities make to recruit faculty for research and teaching assignments, it becomes important to understand how early-career faculty process this transition and respond to constructive criticism. Developing appropriate training programs and providing specialists to help early-career faculty become more proficient in proposal writing and the grants review process is critical to sustaining university research programs.

Introduction

University-based researchers face the reality that they must embark on sustained grant search and proposal writing activities to fund independent research. Many new investigators recruited into university settings receive a modest “start-up package” from their institutions to help them get established within their departments (Howard & Laird, 2013). This may include supporting equipment, resources, and possibly a reduced teaching load. The honeymoon is short-lived, and the question eventually emerges, “When are you going to start writing proposals to fund your research?” In most cases, early-career faculty may not be properly trained to handle these new responsibilities (Boyer & Cockriel, 2001). Seasoned researchers and grant professionals know that “grant writing can be a long and demanding process, generally punctuated by rejection” (Jamieson, 2011). Successfully navigating this experience and securing sufficient funding to cover full-time research, or a portion of salary if they also teach, is quite a formidable goal. After years of intensive academic study, laboratory training, and possibly a post-doc appointment or two, early-career faculty arrive at their new positions with optimism and many questions on how to get started. Understanding the learning curve that early-career faculty face and providing the right types of resources to help them succeed are critical to their professional development and sustained progress in their field.

Seeing Who Can Swim

In 1998, Drs. Patricia Boyer and Irv Cockriel developed a survey instrument to measure the motivators and barriers that prompted tenured and non-tenured faculty to engage in grant proposal writing. Their study is frequently referenced in literature and has been replicated several times in follow-up studies (Table 1). In 2010, Drs. Patrick Walden and Valerie Bryan used this survey tool as the basis for a similar study. They recorded similar results, but also noted a few new themes had emerged. Combined, these studies provide an interesting glimpse into how grant proposal writing is perceived by faculty at various career stages.

New themes that emerged from a replicated study show that heavy teaching loads limited the amount of time tenured faculty could engage in grant proposal writing. Faculty perception was also influenced by university culture. Respondents considered the lack of recognition and absence of incentives as barriers to pursuing grants. Several respondents characterized grant proposal writing as “extra work,” and many were highly critical that indirect budget expenses offered no tangible benefit to their research or department (Walden & Bryan, 2010).

Only one shared result was noted from both studies: tenured and non-tenured faculty members were significantly motivated to

*Table 1. A Comparison of Two Studies of Faculty
Motivators and Barriers to Grant Proposal Writing*

Boyer & Cockriel Study (1998)	Walden & Bryan Study (2010)
Significant Motivators <i>(ranked by highest cited motivator per study year)</i>	
1. Consideration in tenure or promotion decisions	1. Opportunity to research new information
2. Building my professional reputation as capable researcher	2. Personnel support such as graduate assistants and clerical help when proposals are funded
3. More control over resources and innovation	3. Having travel money available for conferences
4. Having a strong commitment from the college president	4. Building my professional reputation as a capable researcher
Significant Barriers <i>(ranked by highest cited barrier per study year)</i>	
1. Lack of training in grant seeking / grant writing	1. Inadequate support available to submit proposals in a timely manner
2. Lack of knowledge of budget development	2. Heavy teaching load (tenured faculty)
3. Lack of knowledge of funding sources	4. University culture is a barrier—real or perceived

pursue grant-funded opportunities as a way to build their professional reputation as capable researchers (Walden & Bryan, 2010).

Proposal writing duties often get parceled out to others. Terminal degree programs do provide some training on how to develop research proposals, and many advisors encourage or expect their PhD students to write and submit full proposals. However, instructive guidance from their advisors may be negligible, and receiving credit for the work and benefiting from the award if funded is another matter. Numerous web posts question the fairness of their advisors taking full credit for the grant award and maintaining control over the funds as Principal Investigators. “Some supervisors expropriate the work of their students and subordinates as a personal advancement strategy...” (Martin, 2013). While online discussion can get quite heated on this topic (Blueblue, 2011), one moderator notes, “Technically, grants from... NSF (and presumably other agencies) are not given to the PI, but to the organization for which they work” (Barth, 2014).

Untethered from their lengthy apprenticeships, early-career faculty members face a new dynamic. They have greater control and ownership over their proposals, but find they need to acclimate to their new roles and positions first. Finding time to refine proposal-writing skills and maintain a high level of grant submissions gets lumped into the bevy of other tasks they are asked to perform both inside and outside their respective departments. The former Director of Texas A&M's New Faculty Research Initiative shares that for many participants, the process must seem like "drinking from a fire hose." While new faculty are introduced to key support staff, they "may have no memory of the discussion [until several months later]...when they are ready to write a grant." One recommendation is to "engage with new faculty multiple times and in various ways over their first year..." (Decker, 2015).

Establishing an active grants submission routine is crucial for early-career faculty. Securing large, multi-year research grants is a matter of significant prestige for institutions, and the revenue generated from indirect expenses is used to support a variety of activities that help the institution function. Administrators rely on grant revenue to keep the lights on. But as one observer notes, grant revenue is "the dark side... of [a] complex and broken system...[used] during the hiring process of young faculty" (Szalinski, 2014). From the faculty's standpoint, "it's not so much a question of prestige as it is of survival as a faculty member. Since most tenure decisions also examine your ability to secure grants, there's a good chance you might not get tenured and will have to leave the university" (Ahmad, 2015). Despite announcements that proudly share the award of a new grant, the reality is the process typically started months earlier with a lone investigator, unheralded, working well past normal hours with huge uncertainties about the chance of success.

Web Posts from the Sinking

Two of the most prestigious federal agencies that fund scientific research are the National Institute of Health (NIH) and the National Science Foundation (NSF). Securing an award from one of these agencies brings instant recognition from peers and is a key evaluation component for promotion and tenure. Despite the level of difficulty, early-career investigators consider aiming for these funding sources as a way to strengthen their tenure review portfolio. But getting funded by these agencies can be so difficult that one commentator said "if you know someone who has gotten that type of funding, invite them to your cocktail party" (Morris, 2014).

Left unsupported, new faculty tend to seek answers to their many grant questions from online sources. To say that just a few online blogs exist that express the frustration of early-career PhDs becoming familiar with grant proposal writing is a thunderous understatement. Online posts

range from initial inquires on how to get started to full-blown anger and despair over their lack of success. Many choose to remain anonymous and use aliases when posting their comments. Others encourage blog discussions as a form of protest or redress to NSF and NIH. Numerous farewell messages are posted from utterly defeated PhDs reflecting on their unrealized career aspirations in academia. The following are just a few examples of postings and subsequent blog comments:

I am halfway through my 35th year and I have to admit I'm not where I thought I would be. When I graduated with my PhD at age 29 I was very naïve and a little bit smug. I had secured my first postdoc and imagined that within 5 years I would be starting out in a tenured faculty position. I knew that it would be difficult and competitive, but I thought all I would have to do is stick it out and work hard. (Bioluminessa, 2014)

I've committed 5+ years to science communication and nearly a decade to science with nothing to show for it but publications. Meanwhile, our family has not progressed. We have no money, no savings and mounting debt. (Zelinio, 2013)

As a graduate student, I was well aware of all of the negatives of an academic career. I accepted the miniscule pay, the inability to choose where to live, and the insane workloads of professors. I accepted the uncertainty of whether, after 10–12 years as a graduate student and postdoc, I would actually get a job as a professor. I accepted that even after attaining this lofty goal, five years later, I could be denied tenure and would have to move to another university or go into industry. I accepted that even with tenure, I would have to worry my entire life about securing research funding for the lab. I saw all of these as the price to pay for doing something that I love.

However, one aspect of being a professor has been terrifying me for over five years now—the uncertainty of getting funding from NIH. No let me rephrase that. What is terrifying is the near-certainty that any grant I submit would be rejected.

I have been waiting for the funding situation to improve, but it seems to only be getting worse. I personally know about ten scientists who have become professors in the last 3–4 years. Not a single one of them has been able to get a grant proposal funded; just

rejection, after rejection, after rejection. One of these is a brilliant young professor who has applied for grants thirteen times and has been rejected consistently, despite glowing reviews and high marks for innovation. She is on the brink of losing her lab as her startup funds are running out and the prospect of this has literally led to sleepless nights and the need for sleeping pills. How can this not terrify me? (Teytelman, 2014)

[Response to the preceding web post]

This is a fantastic writing, despite the sadness. I sympathize (finishing [my] PhD in neuroscience, considering heading out). [...] I'm already looking through that Good Doc you posted right now, and my heart is breaking. (Wilson, 2014)

[Response to Teytelman from post-doc]

I have reread this post a dozen times over the past couple weeks, as I am a postdoc currently on the precipice of throwing in the towel on my academic career. I can't shake the feeling that giving up on this career that I have been laser-focused on for ten years feels an awful lot like a traumatic breakup. (CB, 2014)

Taken as a whole, these posts provide very personal insights into the challenges early-career faculty face and the thoughts that consume them. The salient take-away is that they enter the grant arena with overwhelming uncertainty about their futures. It should be noted that tenured faculty also express their opinions and sense of frustration. With the advantage of a more secure career position, however, their comments lack the biting tone of anger and dejection. There is no question the pressure is on those just entering the field to become established, and quickly.

This disparity has several negative ramifications for new faculty too. There are limited opportunities for early-career faculty to serve as co-investigators, and fewer experienced faculty available to serve as mentors (Howard & Laird, 2013). Even worse, early-career faculty who have succeeded in joining a research team and been provided with mentors often find they were hired solely for the benefit of the lead investigator's career. Many times subordinate faculty find they are entering environments where they are "treated as hired hands, and true mentoring [is] not taking place" (Trivedi, 2006).

Who Is Out There to Throw a Line?

With any project, finding the right mix of personalities, skill sets, and working rapport is critical. A big challenge is that “some trainees can’t get beyond their own egos and emotions” (Kohan, 2014). High-performing students largely enjoy success throughout their undergraduate and graduate educations and are very confident in their abilities. Consistent with the blog comments that “Bioluminessa” and others share, their confidence continues into early-career appointments. However, confidence and effective communication skills are not synonymous. Effective writing skills are the attributes that early-career faculty need most when starting out. As one successful research mentor says:

Knowing how to construct a paragraph and organize a paper around a particular theme has done more good for my grant-writing career than any science class. I can’t tell you the number of times I have seen very bright people fail because they couldn’t communicate effectively on a grant application. Mentors can guide, but they are not there to provide handouts.... Far too many trainees believe their path will be cleared, steered, and guaranteed by their mentor. (Kohan, 2014)

Academia is often criticized as being too siloed and unable to connect with broader audiences like opinion leaders in business, politics, and the general public (Manning, 2014). This is evidenced by the “laser-focused” attention that blogger “CB” and others have spent mastering their research skills at the expense of refining their writing skills. Once they join the faculty ranks, feedback from senior faculty familiar with the grant review process is often misinterpreted as being overly harsh or even punitive. One early-career faculty admits feedback by senior colleagues is such a nerve-racking experience they now question their research abilities and no longer share material with others (Anonymous, 2015). Turning to the blog community for support, this researcher confides they suffer from “Imposter Syndrome,” a term coined in 1978 by psychologists Drs. Clance and Imes to describe the lack of confidence by otherwise high-achieving people (Clance & Imes, 1978).

Conversely, researchers who serve as mentors to new faculty have developed their own terminology to counter the impact of negative reviews. Reference terminology such as *protective factor* and *vulnerability factor* are used to measure the level of support or encouragement a colleague needs to apply to help a mentee overcome harsh criticism on journal drafts and early-career grant proposals. It would appear (at least from one investigative team) that *resiliency* from repeated rejections is a learned coping mechanism (DeCastro et al., 2013).

These Swimming Lanes are Getting Crowded!

Another argument heard loudly throughout the research blogging community is that academia produces too many PhDs. This strains research funding to a point where many investigators are unable to sustain their current activities—much less expand upon any noteworthy discoveries. One observer shares that “fundamentally, the current system is in perpetual disequilibrium...[generating] an ever-increasing supply of scientists vying for a finite set of research resources and employment opportunities” (Smith, 2014). In a candidly titled article, the contributor notes the “resulting strains have diminished the attraction of [the] profession...novice and experienced alike” (Smith, 2014).

A historical review of doctorate degrees awarded in the United States over nearly a century shows that the early 1920s produced just an average of 545 doctorate graduate degrees per year. NASA’s Apollo program is largely attributed for the rapid increase in engineering and science degrees through subsequent decades, raising the count to 26,854 terminal degrees awarded in America at the end of the 20th century. Now in the second decade into the 21st century, America’s colleges and universities graduate an average of 27,137 terminal degree students in science and engineering per year (Howard & Laird, 2013).

There are even more students progressing through the graduate and postgraduate degree pipeline. The National Science Foundation reports 666,586 students are enrolled in masters, doctorate, and postdoctorate degree programs in science, engineering, and health (NSF, 2016). Contrast this against government funding levels for science-based research, one finds that funding for non-defense research has remained at 10% of annual domestic discretionary spending for the past 40 years. Demand for funding from the two principal government sources (NSF and NIH) has passed the tipping point for being able to support both scientific research and career retention in academia (Howard & Laird, 2013).

Aware of these inherent conflicts and subsequent criticism expressed through the scientific blogosphere, NIH hosts its own blog site as a way of responding to the many complaints targeted at them. The blog site *Rock Talk* is billed as the online resource for “Helping connect you with the NIH perspective.” There, Dr. Sally Rockey presents the actual level of funding NIH has awarded in recent years.

[In 2014] NIH received 51,073 research project grant (RPG) applications, out of which we funded 9,241, resulting in a **success rate of 18.1 percent**. When we look at award rate, which accounts for resubmissions that came in during the same fiscal year, the application count increases to 54,519 resulting in an **award rate of 17.0 percent** in 2014. And if we look specifically at numbers of PIs, we see that in FY 2014

we funded 9,986 PIs out of 39,809 total investigator applicants for a **funding rate of 25.1 percent**.

...The number of investigators rose to an all-time high in FY 2012, after which it fell, likely related to the sequestration that significantly reduced NIH's budget. While NIH funding levels were partially restored in FY 2014, the number of PIs remained at 2013 levels.

So what are the take-away messages? Success, award, and funding rates track closely to the NIH budget. And clearly, the NIH budget is not keeping pace with demand; as a result, the success, award, and funding rates are at historically low levels. However, more applications are being submitted and more PIs are being supported now compared to 15 years ago. (Rockey, 2015)

NIH's use of *Rock Talk* is laudable as a way to explain (and possibly defend against) the many complaints NIH institutes receive about their funding levels. But ultimately, this form of communication is doomed to attract fierce rebuttal posts from anonymous bloggers and those emboldened to share their name when venting their frustration.

[Response to the preceding post]

An obvious caveat of this analysis is that awards are typically cut and modules have not been increased in many years. \$250K today (typically cut to <\$200K by programmatic review) do not support the same today as 15 years ago. As a result, everybody needs to submit more grants to subsist.... Getting a grant funded has become an exercise of throwing darts until something hits the target. (CD0, 2015)

[Response to CD0's comments]

CD0 is correct on all points. I am at the point of my career when I should be at peak productivity, but here I am at 10 pm with less than 5% of my real effort hours (~160% FTE!) integrated over time actually devoted to research. I am filing non-competes, writing new grants, applying to dozens of private foundations to fill in the gap that NIH cuts create, [and] complying with onerous animal welfare regulations....

On top of that, the brightest students and fellows see how little time I get to do what I actually love, and conclude (very reasonably) that they don't want to follow my path. The not-so-bright end up in our grad program where I have to spend hours convincing each one that they should welcome constructive criticism, not cry about it. It is actually very depressing to think about what I could be doing just a few steps away in my lab, and what I am forced to do instead in this tiny office at this late hour. (Singlestone, 2015)

Replies to Dr. Rockey's *Rock Talk* go well into the late evening and early morning hours, with nearly all highly critical of the funding process NIH uses. A review of a few other blog sites shows there is an entire sub-group of highly educated, highly exasperated investigators using blogs as a coping mechanism. Their comments leave today's grant professional to ask what are the best ways to help early-career faculty develop grant skills so they can be successful?

Finding and sharing information on the historical funding percentages agencies award is a good place to start. In 2015, Drs. Ted and Courtney von Hippel completed a study that used statistical software to analyze grant success rates. Variables included individual success from prior grant submissions, the time invested to complete new proposals (116 hours on average), and the three-year funding percentage from four leading federal agencies. The study factored in "conditional probabilities," which is a nice way of saying heavier weight went to applicants with more grant experience. They concluded investigators "should avoid submitting proposals to programs with funding rates at or below 20%" (von Hippel & von Hippel, 2015). Considering the time commitment applicants face, the 20% threshold provides a good reference point for mentors, administrators, and grant professionals to start a much larger dialog.

Other factors helpful to discuss include the level of subjectivity involved in grant reviews. A 2010 article in *Nature* entitled "Research funding: Making the cut" provides an interesting account of how funding decisions are actually made; in it, a NIH R01 panel reviewer shares, "I don't want to say it's arbitrary.... It's the subtle things" (Powell, 2010). The key point to emphasize here is that applicants need to help readers get through their application in an effective and efficient manner.

A grant reviewer who voted not to fund a particular proposal stated, "what annoyed me to no end... [was the applicant] put the more important figures in the appendix, where there is not supposed to be any data" (Powell, 2010). The funding aspirations of still another researcher were lost on their biographical sketch: "This is well conceived, nicely written...and it's really great science. But this investigator had an extended postdoc...and very few first-author publications" (Powell,

2010). With the fate of proposals riding on such fine points of subjective discussion, it is easy to see why the blogosphere provides such a ready forum for many.

Posting Lifeguards Makes Swimming Safer

One of the leading trainers and writers on how to secure research grants is Dr. Robert Porter. He shares that “young investigators can find themselves in a lonely ‘sink or swim’ environment when it comes to sponsored research, and many are hesitant to approach experienced grant writers on their own” (Porter, 2011). Knowing these dynamics are present, some universities have created new professional positions to support or complete the variety of tasks involved in proposal development. These positions are often titled *Proposal Development Specialists*. Frequently serving as a shared resource within a department, people who hold these positions have sufficient work experience and knowledge on how to write, edit, budget, and assemble the variety of elements that go into a formal grant proposal. Their professional experience can often help identify and correct subtle nuances that frequently bump proposals out of consideration.

A person who spent time in the training trenches notes, “new faculty often arrive on campus with widely varying levels of experience and knowledge related to pursuing external funding” (Decker, 2015). Having a knowledgeable resource at hand to both familiarize and train early faculty on the functional aspects of putting a proposal together helps faculty get engaged in the process early on once they arrive on campus.

The following recommendations will help new investigators get acclimated to proposal writing and ensure they are well supported and can maintain a healthy and frequent pace of grant proposal submissions:

Pre-production

- *Provide a support person.* Preferably, this should be an individual without supervisory influence who can make an initial, informal assessment of the early-career faculty member’s proposal-writing skills. This assessment can serve as the starting point for more customized follow-up training. The “Proposal Development Specialist” (or comparably-named position) can be a very appropriate person to fill this role.
- *If adding new support personnel is not an option, promote available resources.* The body of knowledge offered through the *Journal of the Grant Professionals Association* has grown over the years. There are now a significant number of instructive articles specific to grant proposal writing in academic settings, and past articles are available online for free.

- *Work to place early-career faculty on grant review panels.* Federal agencies rely heavily on independent reviewers to read and score competitively awarded grant proposals. Typically, a phone call or email to federal program managers initiates the process. It may take a few attempts to land on a specific review panel, but the real objective is to gain familiarity with the review process from a reviewer's perspective. Additionally, department heads should view this as critical professional development training for early-career faculty and provide them with sufficient release time to participate.
- *Consolidate frequently-used grant proposal information onto a quick reference sheet.* Nothing exasperates an already frantic, deadline-pushing grant applicant more than not knowing what their ZIP+4 number is. Taking time to prepare and distribute a basic reference sheet on all commonly referenced items, and providing instruction on remembering to hit the "save" button frequently when entering information in an electronic grant packet helps reduce the level of stress as a deadline approaches.
- *Provide training on using grant listservs to search for funding opportunities.* Much of this article's discussion focuses on the two premier research funders (NSF and NIH). However, there are numerous other funding sources with which faculty should become familiar. Proactive participation is essential to be successful: the best way is to set up an email notification account on Grants.gov or to add an RSS (Rich Site Summary) feed to one's Internet browser. New faculty orientation should include specific training on these helpful resources. The email notifications from the agencies are brief and include direct links to the full announcements.

Production

- *Prepare and work from templates that list the specific questions and score.* Writing narrative takes time, and one can almost certainly anticipate interruptions throughout the day. Federal grant announcements tend to provide detail on the questions to answer and in which order. Investing time to show early-career faculty how to prepare a working draft so that it aligns with the pagination and specific questions right under each section is a great time saver. Make the font a different color and size to denote the questions from the announcement and the drafted responses. Once finished, delete the reference questions and save the document as a finished narrative.
- *Prepare and keep updated Curriculum Vitae per funder requirements.* Nothing is more frustrating to grant professionals than having to go

back and edit down an outlandishly long biographical sketch emailed at the last minute. Keep activities current on a main biographical sketch, and then pull updates off for a version specific to the funder's requirements.

Post-submission

- *Acknowledge successful grant submissions.* Just as important as celebrating successful grant awards, it is important to acknowledge the efforts early-career faculty make in actually getting a full proposal completed and submitted. University public relations offices enjoy these types of notifications and can provide additional support. Public recognition goes a long way and may serve as a catalyst to get others involved in the process.
- *Debrief to identify additional training needs.* Take time to schedule a brief meeting with all participants in the grant submission process. Ask for specific feedback on how the process went from their perspective, and if there are any modifications needed to make the process go smoother the next time. As seen in blog comments, feelings of isolation and lack of support are pervasive and do little to strengthen the overall goals within a research department.

Conclusion

This article presents a variety of comments expressed by early-career investigators profiling their frustration with, and disappointment in, the need to secure grant funding to establish and maintain careers in academia. Formal studies show early-career researchers feel they receive inadequate support in proposal writing, and the constant focus on this sole activity removes them from their investigative interests. The Proposal Development Specialist is an emerging position within the grants professional community that is being used more frequently within academic settings. This position helps bridge training gaps that exist within terminal degree programs, offers needed support for faculty, and serves to strengthen the overall grants submission rates at institutions. Providing this key human resource, and promoting the use of additional bodies of knowledge on grant proposal writing in academic settings, can help new investigators learn needed proposal writing skills and better prepare them for competitive grant submission environments. Because proposal development personnel are likely to be a shared resource, additional investigation is needed to identify the most efficient methods to fund and leverage these positions to improve grant production levels and grant funding success.

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Author's Note

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Biographical Information

Timothy P. Hooper, MPA, GPC, has 15 years of professional experience in proposal writing and grants management in public, nonprofit, and academic settings in Nashville, TN. This includes more than three years of direct grants training and proposal development support to early- and mid-career scientists at Tennessee State University's College of Agriculture, Human and Natural Science, and Tennessee State University's Cooperative Extension Program. Mr. Hooper was a member of the inaugural class of grant professionals to receive their GPC certification in 2007, and served as GPA's Tennessee Chapter President in 2011. He holds a bachelor's degree in Broadcast/Cable from Pennsylvania State University and a master's degree in Public Administration from Wilmington University (DE). Reach the author at tim.hooper@comcast.net.

Best Practices in the Effective Use of Project Management Tools in the Grants Lifecycle

Rachel Werner, MPA, GPC, PMP

RBW Strategy, LLC, Rockville, MD

GPCI Competency 02: Knowledge of organizational development as it pertains to grant seeking

GPCI Competency 03: Knowledge of strategies for effective program and project design and development

GPCI Competency 07: Knowledge of practices and services that raise the level of professionalism of grant professionals

Abstract

The Project Management Professional (PMP) is an internationally recognized professional designation offered by the Project Management Institute (PMI). There are currently 694,536 active PMP-certified individuals and 274 chartered chapters in 204 countries and territories worldwide (PMI, 2016). While grant professionals may define themselves based purely on their grants-related titles, in reality they regularly conduct project management-related work, as revealed in a Grant Professionals Association (GPA) survey conducted in fall 2015. Rather than separating these two types of work into grants lifecycle tasks versus project management tasks, this article illustrates the overlap of these two areas and how the effective use of project management tools can positively impact grants lifecycle work. This article provides grant professionals with 1) an understanding of the applicability of project management to the grants lifecycle from a research-based standpoint; 2) increased insights into the project management field as a whole; and 3) recommendations for project management protocols that can help grant professionals become more efficient, insightful, and impactful in their daily work.

Introduction

Grant professionals are writers, managers, evaluators, fundraisers, financial analysts, and communication/social media specialists. They perform many functions outside of their designated job titles. As with professionals in many fields, their roles are often compartmentalized in such a way to suggest that they perform only certain clearly defined tasks, without considering all of the pieces that impact their deliverables, especially project management.

Project management is not a stand-alone set of tasks. Project management is a framework composed of clearly delineated processes and activities; a temporary endeavor with a beginning and an end that leads to the creation of a unique product, service, or result. The Project Management Institute (PMI), the leading global project management credentialing and training organization, identifies a system of tools and resources to be incorporated into almost any field and to be used on any project. The intersection of grants lifecycle work and project management activities presents immediate implications for grants professionals.

GPA Survey Results

In fall 2015, all active Grant Professionals Association (GPA) members had the opportunity to complete an eight-question survey about the project management work they do on a daily basis. Feedback from 295 individuals indicated that all of these GPA members perform project management tasks in their work. However, they do not typically view themselves as project managers, nor do others view them as project managers. For example, 75% of respondents consider themselves “grant professionals” first and another job title second. However, most of the other job titles were development-related (e.g., Grant Coordinator, Development Associate), not project management-related.

The graphs in Figure 1 on the next page illustrate respondents’ perceptions of their job duties (please note that not all of the 295 respondents answered each question).

The key findings from this survey are the following:

- 100% of the responding grant professionals perform project management related job functions in some capacity.
- Project oversight/planning work is generally done with more frequency than other tasks (although communications and financial management tasks also happen with regularity).
- More professionals generally prefer the beginning of projects (pre-award and planning phase) rather than closeout.

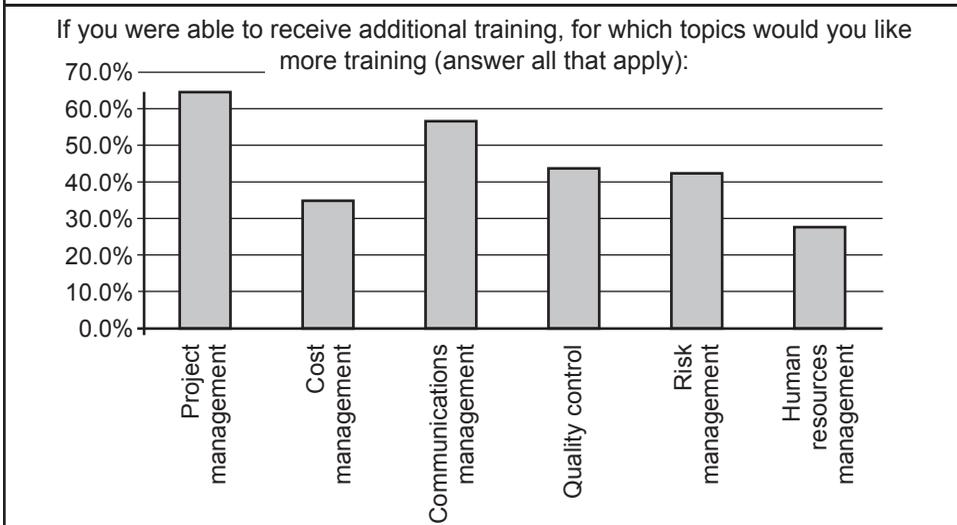
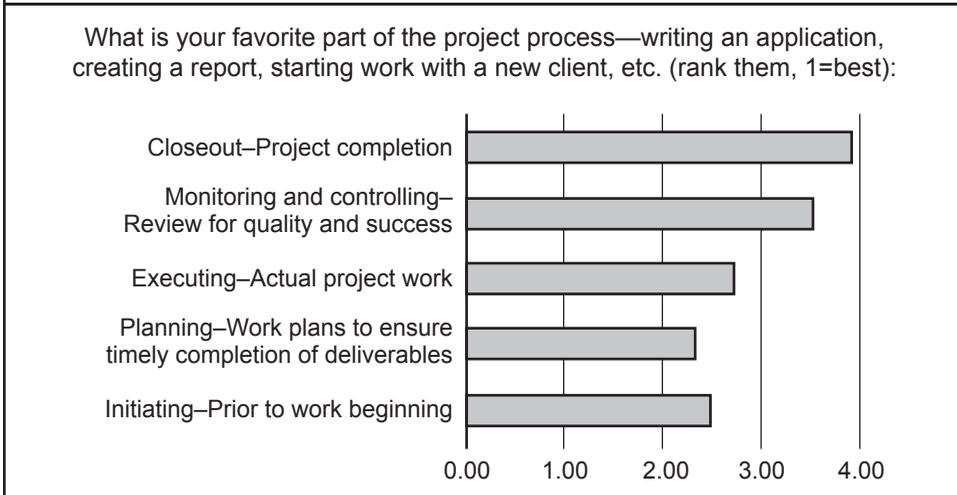
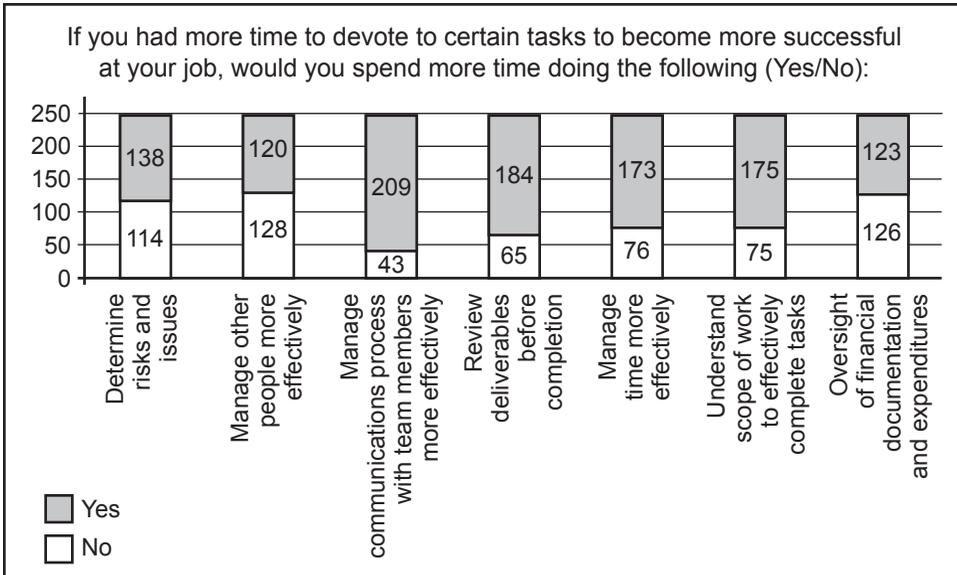


Figure 1. (previous page) Feedback pertaining to three different questions asked of GPA members and associated responses regarding project management activities that take place in grant professionals' day-to-day work.

- Additional professional development will reinforce and enhance existing job functions pertaining to non-grants related skills.

Project Management Body of Knowledge

To understand how project management relates to the grants lifecycle, one must review the project management field's approach and framework. PMI is the professional association responsible for the establishment of the *Project Management Body of Knowledge* (similar to the Grant Professionals Certification Institute's (GPCI) Competencies). This resource is the industry standard for project management by which practitioners' performance is measured.

Project management professionals have the option to earn certification (similar to the GPCI certification). Requirements for the PMI certification include a bachelor's degree, a minimum of 4,500 hours of experience leading and directing projects, 35 hours of formal project management education, and passing an exam.

Project Management Framework

The Project Management Framework (PMF) consists of five phases, known as "process groups," that proceed in a particular sequence in any project. Each process group relates to a knowledge area and to specific project management tasks that guide the completion of a defined project component. While not all projects require inclusion of every knowledge area, all project managers must review each activity to ensure that all appropriate activities occur throughout the project management lifecycle.

Application of the PMF has an immediate and direct impact on the success of any project. Focus on continuous quality improvement; use of tools to increase the likelihood of meeting project deliverables; enhanced organizational capacity through the use of a guided approach to managing projects; and an increased awareness of different knowledge areas results in enhanced mindfulness of the organization's capacity and creates intentionality vis-à-vis strategic planning.

Table 1 (*page 34*) shows the intersection between the process groups and knowledge areas of the PMF protocol (Leading Answers, 2007).

Table 2 (*page 35*) illustrates the intersection of each PMF process group with the grants lifecycle phase from development of a grant application through a resulting award. The table also shows the association between project management activities and each phase or process group.

Table 1. Project Management Framework (PMF)

	Initiating	Planning	Executing	Monitoring	Closing
Integration	Develop project charter	Develop project management plan	Direct and manage project work	Monitor & control project work Perform integrated change control	Close project or phase
Scope		Plan scope management Collect requirements Define scope Create WBS		Validate scope Control scope	
Time		Plan schedule Define activities Sequence activities Estimate activity resources Estimate activity duration Develop schedule		Control schedule	
Cost		Plan cost management Estimate costs Determine budget		Control costs	
Quality		Plan quality management	Perform quality assurance	Control quality	
Human Resources		Plan human resource management	Acquire project team Develop project team Manage project team		
Communications		Plan communications management	Manage communications	Control communications	
Risk		Plan risk management Identify risks Perform qualitative risk analysis Perform quantitative risk analysis Plan risk responses		Control risks	
Procurement		Plan procurement management	Conduct procurements	Control procurements	Close procurements
Stakeholder	Identify stakeholders	Plan stakeholder management	Manage stakeholder engagement	Control stakeholder engagement	

Table 2. Alignment of Grants Lifecycle Phases and PMF Process Groups

Grants Lifecycle Phase	PMF Process Group	Project Management Activities
Planning and Research	Initiating	<p>Establish signed Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs)</p> <p>Identify stakeholders</p> <p>Identify risks</p> <p>Define scope and collect project requirements</p>
Application Development	Planning	<p>Create task matrix to identify stakeholders' roles in application development and project execution</p> <p>Create a log to itemize each risk pertaining to the application or project</p> <p>Create a quality management plan</p> <p>Obtain quotes for vendor and subcontractor procurements</p> <p>Create Work Breakdown Structures (WBS) to identify how personnel will be used on the grant</p>
Notice of Award	Executing	<p>Create a project management plan for post-award activities</p> <p>Manage project team and develop structure for key personnel adherence to application requirements</p> <p>Set up stakeholder meetings (internal and external) to manage expectations</p>
Award Monitoring and Management	Monitoring and Controlling	<p>Ensure quality control through evaluation measurement</p> <p>Maintain scope through adherence to Notice of Grant Award reporting and compliance requirements</p> <p>Prepare RFPs and select vendors for vendor or subcontractor procurement</p> <p>Maintain milestone deadlines and address schedule or cost variations</p>
Closeout	Closing	<p>Prepare all required documents for final project reporting</p> <p>Close procurements</p> <p>Ensure all grant funds are spent and project is officially closed from an accounting perspective (or transferred to organization if the project will be sustained)</p>

Implementation of Project Management Framework

While project management may appear to be a very specific concept, the approach applies to many settings and industries. Thomas and Mullaly (2007) found that the effective use of project management processes led to an increase in successful results, and the approach optimally aligned “theory” and “practice” to create a more strategic method of applying project management protocols in workplace settings. However, they caution that the application and use of project management protocols varies depending on the complexity of the project and the size and scope of the organization, a finding corroborated by Turner, Ledwith, and Kelly (2012).

In the case of an organization handling multiple projects at a time (referred to as a “portfolio” by PMI’s definition), the PMI approach yielded positive results. Many organizations do not conduct stand-alone projects and regularly lead projects that complement one another. Researchers found that there is a “significant positive effect of...coordinating and controlling roles on performance in terms of project portfolio management quality, which is a predictor of portfolio success” (Unger et al., 2012).

Use of Project Management Framework on Distinct Projects

Many grant lifecycle activities can be viewed as stand-alone projects, such as prospect research, strategic plan development, application development, creation of grants policies and procedures, budget development, post-award monitoring, and evaluation measurement. The PMF offers a framework for such distinct, large-scale projects within the grants lifecycle that incorporates multiple stakeholders, involves phases, requires a multitude of resources, and entails the use of quality control and risk mitigation and management. While not all grants lifecycle activities may require a full-scale PMF approach, organizations may consider using the PMF approach for specific phases that require strategic intervention to enhance their chances of success.

These project management activities are a sampling of what grant professionals can apply in their daily work and of how this approach creates more structure and formality to the lifecycle process. PMI has hundreds of resources and tools aimed at project managers, many of which can be modified and leveraged for purposes of assisting grant professionals with their work. Below is a representative sample of project management tools, with proposed uses for grant professionals:

- *Project Charter*. Describes the project and its approach and lists the names of all stakeholders. *Proposed Use*: Establishes the scope of work, purpose, and proposed end result. Larger organizations find this useful when many individuals or groups participate in a project.

- *Stakeholder Analysis*. Identifies the individuals or groups that are likely to affect or be affected by a proposed action, and sorts these according to both their impact on the action and the impact the action will have on them. *Proposed Use*: Prior to working with collaborative partners, board members, or staff from various departments, this tool identifies how the project affects each entity and mitigates conflict.
- *Work Breakdown Structure*. Showcases the hierarchical decomposition of the work to be executed by the project team. *Proposed Use*: Ensures appropriate resource capacity to execute the project, and identifies the roles and responsibilities of each individual on the project.
- *Communications Plan*. Provides the overall plan for stakeholder communications on the project. *Proposed Use*: This plan is part of the larger stakeholder relations effort and ensures the appropriate people are informed, via approved communication mechanisms, throughout the project.
- *Risk Register*. Indicates in a detailed chart all risks identified and anticipated throughout the project lifecycle. *Proposed Use*: Ensures that project leadership is aware of potential issues or risks that could hinder the success of the project and proposes mitigation strategies.

Conclusion

The use of project management protocols stands to greatly improve the effectiveness of grant professionals' work. The incorporation of a research-informed knowledge base into a grant management process helps grant professionals become more efficient, insightful, and impactful in their daily work.

Concomitantly, organizations benefit from the blending of grant lifecycle strategies with project management protocols in many ways: creating more structure and efficiency on a project; leveraging resources effectively and with intent; ensuring alignment of activities to outputs and outcomes; following a sequence of activities to ensure nothing is missed; identifying risks and implementing relevant avoidance measures; and encouraging critical thinking vis-à-vis stakeholders' needs. The continuing study of the varied uses of project management processes and approaches is beneficial to measure their positive impacts on grant professionals and the organizations they represent.

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Biographical Information

Rachel Werner, MPA, GPC, PMP, owner and CEO of RBW Strategy, has more than 13 years of grants, consulting, communications, writing, strategic planning, training, and project management experience with nonprofit, government, and for-profit organizations of varying size and complexity. Throughout her career she has raised over \$16 million in grants and contracts and weaves project management principles into grants-related work. In addition to her GPC, she has obtained a Certificate in Grants Management and is a certified Project Management Professional. Reach the author at rachel@rbwstrategy.com.

The Who, What, and Why of Creating a Robust Community Needs Assessment Survey Template

Kristi Miller, MA

Commission on Economic Opportunity, Troy, NY

GPCI Competency 02: Knowledge of organizational development as it pertains to grant seeking

GPCI Competency 03: Knowledge of strategies for effective program and project design and development

GPCI Competency 04: Knowledge of how to craft, construct, and submit an effective grant application

Abstract

This article studies the creation of a standardized survey template for collecting accurate and uniform data across all Community Action Agencies (CAAs) in New York State. As recipients of Community Services Block Grant funds for programs and services to reduce poverty in their target areas, CAAs are required to produce a community needs assessment every three years to analyze local needs and the causes and conditions of poverty in their communities. The New York State Community Action Association (NYSCAA) proposed a standardized survey for CAAs in order to streamline the collection of comprehensive, qualitative data. NYSCAA assembled a workgroup, including representatives of several state CAAs and a survey-design expert, to create a survey template and question bank to collect accurate data from low-income populations as well as the population at large. The workgroup adopted three filters to process each potential survey question to determine its usefulness. The workgroup applied the survey-design field's best practices for question development to ensure that each question was appropriately crafted to collect reliable data across all populations. The survey

underwent a test run and is currently in a full year of pilot implementation in several state CAAs. With an improved survey instrument, grant professionals and staff in state CAAs hope to gather robust community data that will enhance the accuracy of their community needs assessments and, correspondingly, grant proposals and grant reports. Furthermore, the picture of community need will be clearer than in previous years and ultimately lead to the improvement of services to target populations.

Introduction

The nation's network of Community Action Agencies (CAAs) was established under the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 to fight America's War on Poverty. According to the Community Action Partnership's website, "CAAs help people to help themselves in achieving self-sufficiency" (*About CAAs*, n.d.).

CAAs are guided and partially funded by Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) monies, which originate with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. As such, CAAs are obligated to abide by a recently updated set of CSBG Organizational Standards that articulate the regulations required for compliance and continued funding support. The Organizational Standards are composed of nine categories that each CAA must address, covering areas such as community involvement, organizational leadership, and strategic planning. Organizational Standard 1.2, for example, requires that "the organization analyzes information collected directly from low-income individuals as part of a community needs assessment."

Organizational Standard 3 focuses on the completion of this community needs assessment and more thoroughly describes the guidelines by which each CAA is evaluated. Specifically, Organizational Standard 3.1 recommends that "the organization [had] conducted a community needs assessment and issued a report within the past 3 years." Organizational Standard 3.4 further dictates that "the community needs assessment includes key findings on the causes and conditions of poverty and the needs of the communities assessed." Across the country, CAAs utilize surveys to collect this information from their community members, particularly low-income populations, and present these survey results in their triennial community needs assessments.

Although all CAAs use surveys as convenient data-collection tools, each agency invests its own time, money, and effort to create versions for internal use. In addition to these unnecessarily duplicated resources, this process is also challenged by the fact that many CAA developers are

not experts in the field, nor have they conducted the necessary research to develop a valid and reliable test instrument. Sometimes the result is a survey instrument not capable of serving its well-intentioned purpose.

The idea of developing a standardized survey template for several CAAs across a single region arose unexpectedly as staff members of the New York State Community Action Association (NYSCAA) assisted a local agency with the preparation of its community needs assessment. Those staff members recognized the time and effort required to create the survey and the difficulty they experienced, despite their extensive knowledge of the community action field. It was then, in 2014, that the survey template idea was born.

The Need for a Robust Survey Template

As all CAAs in the U.S. are mandated to prepare community needs assessments every three years, there is strong interest in tools designed to streamline the collection of comprehensive, qualitative survey data from their target populations and geographic service areas. Similar to other nonprofit organizations, CAA grant professionals and other staff members appreciate the use of tools that provide the best, most effective results for the time and effort invested in this process. Such professionals recognize the significant value in a survey tool that collects, extracts, and presents accurate and useful data from a target audience. As the “garbage in=garbage out” adage suggests, analysis of data collected through inadequate tools and processes will lead to reporting equally inadequate and potentially inaccurate results.

The NYSCAA team decided to “start small” by creating a standardized survey template to be used only by New York State’s CAAs and by strongly encouraging, but not requiring, use of the template. By mid-2016, 16 of the state’s 49 CAAs are using the standardized survey tool as part of the pilot year of the template’s use.

From the outset, the team recognized that not every valid question would be useful to the majority of agencies, but may still be valuable to some, due to the diversity of needs and interests of CAAs across the state. Therefore, the team planned early on to have a “question bank,” to store questions deemed to be valid but not necessarily useful to all agencies, so that individual CAAs would have the option of including such questions in their own surveys in addition to those questions to be asked in all surveys.

NYSCAA leaders also recognized the value of collecting statewide data that can be directly combined or compared in order to obtain a clearer view of poverty throughout New York State as a whole. Therefore, a key goal of designing such a survey template was to collect valid, reliable, and uniform data that had the potential to improve the level of knowledge and understanding of poverty in the state.

Bringing a Team to the Table

First, the NYSCAA team members recognized the need to engage a survey-design expert to guide them, in order for the finished product to be a valuable tool worthy of sharing on a statewide or national level. This expert would ensure that each question would be scientifically crafted to gather reliable data across all populations. The NYSCAA team quickly recruited such an expert and set the survey project into motion.

The team then invited representatives from each of the state's CAAs. The various urban, suburban, and rural regions across New York State reflect extremely diverse populations in which race, economic status, and other demographics result in similarly diverse perspectives of their day-to-day situations. Therefore, these populations had to be accurately represented in the survey creation process to ensure that questions were worded for optimal understanding, that multiple-choice response options were appropriate for their regions, and, ultimately, that the survey would serve its intended purposes. Sixteen of the state's 49 CAAs accepted the invitation to participate and chose at least one representative to join the survey workgroup.

Designing the Survey

NYSCAA spearheaded the survey-design efforts by requesting that all state CAAs submit any surveys used in past completed community needs assessments. One NYSCAA staff member compiled all of the surveys, grouped together similar questions, and identified categories for which information was solicited. This compilation resulted in a long and thorough document with which the group could work.

Filter Questions

In subsequent conference calls, the workgroup discussed the collective survey questions. Some individuals felt strongly about the questions they had contributed to the process and the group found it difficult to agree on which questions to keep and which to discard. According to Tait, Voepel-Lewis, and Thomas (2015), "Like all good research, surveys should begin with an important question and set of objectives. Consideration should be given to the uniqueness of the question and the degree to which answering that question might contribute to generalizable knowledge." The workgroup's survey-design expert offered guidance to make the process more objective, including the following filters—standards against which to evaluate each question—in order to determine its suitability for inclusion in the survey:

- Do we need to know this information?
- What will we do with this information?
- Does the question align with the CSBG Organizational Standards?

The first filter question (“Do we need to know this information?”) helped the group to reduce the number of survey items. The filter caused workgroup members to focus on the questions less subjectively and more objectively, and to think about other sources from which they might be able to obtain this information. For example, one potential survey question asked about the availability of daycare centers in the area. Through the application of this filter question, the team determined that information on the existence of daycare centers could best be obtained from sources such as U.S. census data, Community Commons, or the Kids’ Wellbeing Indicator Clearinghouse (KWIC), rather than from individual community members who may or may not have the most accurate information.

The second filter question (“What will we do with this information?”) became important as workgroup members debated whether the usefulness of the data to be extracted was worth the potential inconvenience experienced by survey respondents. For example, one survey item listed a series of 13 community services and asked the respondent, “Do you live less than 5 miles from...?” for each. When examined through the lens of the second filter question, this survey item appeared less critical to the data collection process. Workgroup members wondered how they would incorporate the responses to this question into their community needs assessments, and ultimately, what kind of effect such data would have on the planning processes and eventual direction of their own agencies. Would the agency open a new medical office in a disadvantaged neighborhood? Would the agency install new mailboxes where the community currently lacks such receptacles? If the answer is “no,” then the question is more likely a hindrance than a help to survey respondents. Understanding that community members may be busy, preoccupied, or experiencing a host of other emotions or situations, the team became mindful of the length and complexity of the survey tool. They sought to ensure that it only take as much space and time as is acceptable to this population.

The third filter question (“Does this question align with the CSBG Organizational Standards?”) served as the ultimate deciding factor during survey item deliberations. In some instances, certain group members felt strongly that a particular question should remain in the final product, while others felt equally strongly that it should be removed. In these cases, if the question pertained to an issue that must be documented according to the Organizational Standards, then the question remained. If, however, the question related to an interesting, but not required, topic, it was removed from the survey and added to the question bank. Richardson (2005) suggested that survey designers “resist the temptation to include extra questions about topics that are not directly relevant; keep the questionnaire simple, clear and to the point.”

In summary, the filter questions ensured that the following points are true:

- Group members believe there is value in knowing the answers to every question that remains in the final version of the survey;
- Group members believe their agencies will meaningfully utilize the information obtained from each question that remains in the final version of the survey; and
- All questions pertaining to the CSBG Organizational Standards remain in the final version of the survey.

Survey Design Best Practices

In the next step of the survey-design process, the workgroup focused on adhering to additional guidelines based on the survey-design field's best practices. The workgroup's survey-design expert contributed to the list of general guidelines to be observed. Research in the survey-design field further supported the group's adherence to various rules and principles during the process. The following are some of the best practices that the workgroup adopted and examples of how these practices were incorporated into the survey template.

- *Use standard questions.* The survey-design expert advised the workgroup to use standard questions whenever possible, such as those provided in online tools like SurveyMonkey®. Another source of strong standard questions is the U.S. Census; designers of census questions have deep experience in the field and solid research to support the ways in which they solicit information from respondents.
- *Use complete sentences when crafting questions.* Often, surveys ask only for name, age, sex, or other data. The workgroup's expert reiterated that to reduce confusion for survey respondents, full sentences must be used, such as "What is your age?" or "Are you male or female?" Also, the workgroup should take into account other considerations to make each question as specific as possible, such as, should "male" and "female" be the only options offered, or should respondents be asked "How old are you?" or "What was your age on your last birthday?" In all cases, survey creators must focus on asking questions in complete sentences.
- *Focus on the intended audience.* Along with asking questions in complete, standard ways, survey items should be designed with short sentences and simple words, without any jargon. For example, while it may be common in the community-action field to talk about "barriers" to services, a member of the low-income population served by CAAs may be confused by the term. Questions must be

understandable by the person with the lowest reading level who will complete the survey, in order to ensure that all respondents are able to provide meaningful contributions to the results.

- *Ask one question at a time and refrain from asking “double-barreled” questions.* For example, if the topic at hand is the availability of transportation and the effect it has on one’s ability to work, ask each portion separately. Ask, for example, if a person has access to a vehicle, and then if respondents answer in the negative, ask if that lack of access to a vehicle prevents them from getting to work. A very confusing, double-barreled question is one such as “Are you unable to get to work because you do not have reliable transportation?” Researchers are unable to use the data from this question because a “yes” response could apply to the first part of the question (regarding inability to get to work) or the second part (regarding inability to access reliable transportation) or even both parts. Unless the parts of the question are separated and answered individually, respondents may be confused as to how to answer, and researchers will be unable to utilize the resulting data.
- *Avoid double negatives.* The double-barreled question above also includes double negatives: “Are you *unable* to get to work because you do *not* have reliable transportation?” Not only is this question confusing, but the cognitive energy required to determine the best answer may cause them to disregard it.
- *When designing multiple-choice responses, ensure that all response options are exhaustive and mutually exclusive.* Respondents should be able to choose a single response to accurately reflect their optimal answer. For example, in a question about an individual’s age group, be sure that all ages are represented in the options and also ensure that each age is *only* represented by a single option. Mutually exclusive response options might include ages 21-30, 31-40, and 41-50, whereas poorly constructed options may include ages 20-30, 30-40, and 40-50. In the latter case, people who are 30 or 40 years old would be confused as to which option best represents their age. Researchers might also be confused, since a 30-year-old respondent could fall into a category with 20-year-olds or with 40-year-olds, and those distinctions might have significant implications for the survey results.
- *Ensure that a single construct is used when delineating the choices among response options.* Be sure that a respondent can understand the way in which each choice relates to the other choices, so that he or she can choose the best option to represent the most appropriate response. Collins (2003) states that “the researcher’s choice of response alternatives may affect the way the respondent decides to answer the question, and thus may affect the survey results.

Moreover, the choice of response alternatives may also affect the way in which respondents interpret the question and the recall and judgment strategies they use.”

For example, in a question about customer satisfaction with services, ask survey respondents to choose from descriptions such as “Extremely satisfied,” “Satisfied,” “Neutral,” “Dissatisfied,” and “Extremely dissatisfied.” An example of response options that do not follow the single-construct rule is: “Loved it,” “Satisfied,” “No opinion,” “Didn’t like it very much,” “Extremely unhappy.” The options in the first example measure a person’s opinions on a continuum of satisfaction. Respondents do not have to put much effort into understanding how each option compares to the others and then choosing the one that best describes their opinion. The second example, however, also measures satisfaction but in an abstract and disjointed way. Respondents may find it difficult to determine exactly how positive or negative of an opinion each option actually portrays, as compared to the other choices.

- *Give specific timeframes.* Tait, Vopel-Lewis and Thomas (2015) explained that questions should include concrete timeframes in order to elicit more accurate and current responses and to assist respondents with their recall abilities. For example, to find out if a person has accessed a CAA’s services, it would be best to ask, “In the past 12 months, have you received services from this organization?” instead of asking simply, “Have you ever received services from this organization?”
- *Finally, be cognizant about making assumptions about knowledge and about what types of information are or are not obvious to the general public.* For example, CAAs can be composed of several different programs, such as Head Start, YouthBuild, or food pantries. If a Head Start parent is asked by his or her child’s teacher to complete the survey, the parent may be confused by a question that asks, “How did you learn about this Community Action Agency?” Not all respondents understand that Head Start may be part of a CAA or that a food pantry might be one of many services offered by a CAA. It is not necessarily common knowledge that a particular agency is a CAA, and so questions should be written with sensitivity toward that fact. Explain all potentially challenging words and concepts if there is any doubt that a survey respondent may not know or understand its context.

Adding to, but Not Subtracting from, the Survey

The workgroup aimed to construct a survey instrument with what Tait et al. (2015) call “BRUSO” questions: questions that are **B**rief, **R**elevant,

Unambiguous, Specific, and Objective. The process to whittle down the original list of questions was arduous and time-consuming, but the final product is a survey that the workgroup believes includes items and responses that apply to as many New York State populations as possible. The questions were thoughtfully crafted and included only after serious discussion of the pros and cons of collecting the associated information.

In some cases, however, a workgroup member felt strongly about retaining a question that the rest of the group voted to eliminate. If the question was an otherwise valid question but simply was not deemed to be useful to the majority of CAAs, it was removed from the survey template but added to the question bank. For example, the original survey contained a question that aimed to determine whether or not community members were aware of services offered at the local Career Center. After discussion, the majority of the group decided that the information received from this question would not be useful for the CAAs in general, but rather would serve the marketing team at the Career Center. All except one group member voted to eliminate the question. The person who voted to keep it was a staff member at a CAA that offers the Career Center as one of its services. In this case, the question was relevant and useful to one CAA, but not to the others. As such, the group decided to “bank” the question for use by any CAAs which might find it meaningful but not to add it to the survey template.

From the beginning, the workgroup decided to provide each interested CAA with the finalized survey template as a PDF and instruct them not to remove or change any of the questions. Each CAA would, however, be able to add as many questions as necessary to achieve their individual goals with the survey. This way, the basic set of questions would be asked of all survey respondents across New York State, and the results could be compared on a statewide basis.

Putting the Survey to the Test

After several months of conference calls, question-crafting, editing, and proofreading, the survey was ready for an initial test run. The CSBG requires that each CAA complete an updated community needs assessment every three years, but only one CAA was ready to begin its assessment process at that time. It volunteered to test the survey. This particular CAA shared its progress and its lessons learned so that the workgroup could make modifications to the survey.

Shortly after this initial test run, additional CAAs began to show interest in the survey and started to request copies for their own community needs assessment processes. As a result, calendar year 2016 is the first full pilot year of comprehensive testing and adjusting of the survey as necessary. Representatives of participating CAAs take notes as surveys are completed and analyzed in order to keep track of best practices for soliciting responses and collecting accurate data. Workgroup

members record issues that arise due to the ways in which questions are asked, the options that are available for responses, and the comments survey respondents include in open-ended questions or elsewhere. This information will provide workgroup members with additional ideas for ways to ensure the reliability and validity of the survey instrument template.

Conclusion

There is significant value in the creation of a standardized survey template to be used by all CAAs. The ability to collect statewide data will be useful for various purposes and the existence of a template will save time, money, and effort across agencies when the need for a survey instrument arises. At the end of the project's pilot test year, further research will take place to assess the survey tool's effectiveness in the achievement of such goals. Since the workgroup represents multiple CAAs throughout New York State, it helps to ensure that the final product is suitable for use across all populations served by the agencies. The individual workgroup members also contribute their own personal experiences and expertise toward the development of a reliable and valid survey template that can be used to obtain valuable data across all state CAAs. With the survey template, the workgroup expects that the collection, analysis, and reporting of more accurate and comprehensive data by CAAs in New York State will lead to improvements in the programs and services offered to their target populations.

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Biographical Information

Kristi Miller holds BA and MA degrees in Social/ Experimental Psychology from Stonehill College and the University at Albany, SUNY, respectively. She has worked as a grant professional for six years and in the nonprofit field for five years. She currently serves as the Grants Manager at CEO (Commission on Economic Opportunity for the Greater Capital Region, Inc.) in Troy, NY, which is the Community Action Agency for Rensselaer County. As a member of the NYSCAA Community Needs Assessment workgroup, Kristi has represented the group's work through presentations at various conferences, including the 2016 Community Action Partnership Management & Leadership Conference in New Orleans, LA. Reach the author at krmiller@ceoempowers.org.

Practical Considerations of Direct Versus Indirect Costs for Nonprofit Organizations

Richard Redfearn, PhD

Sam M. Walton College of Business,
University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR

GPCI Competency 04: Knowledge of how to craft, construct, and submit an effective grant application

GPCI Competency 05: Knowledge of post-award grant management practices sufficient to inform effective grant design and development

Editor's Note: *This article is the second in a two-part series. The first part, published in the 2014 edition of the Journal of the Grant Professionals Association, focused on practical considerations of direct versus indirect costs for higher education. This second part focuses on the same topic for nonprofit organizations.*

Abstract

This article provides practical definitions and calculation methods for determining direct costs versus indirect costs, primarily for grant professionals serving nonprofit organizations. It helps grant professionals who work with NPOs to design budgets that recover a portion of indirect costs. Furthermore, it details the recent changes introduced in the Uniform Guidance cost principles for federal awards (2 CFR Part 200) and presents examples of indirect cost calculations. By illustrating methods to understand and use indirect cost principles in a practical way, the article shows grant professionals how to create accurate budgets that support project narratives while ensuring compliance with both federal agency and private foundation guidelines. Grant professionals will learn to be mindful of the process for identifying direct versus indirect costs and to apply the correct calculations to recover the maximum indirect costs for their projects.

Introduction

Grant professionals who work with nonprofit organizations (NPOs) sometimes overlook recovery of overhead or indirect costs, such as rent, utilities, and insurance, associated with the administration of grant-funded projects. However, the integrity of an organization is in jeopardy if funding sources for these costs are unidentified. Grant professionals must investigate the possibility of recovery of these costs and take action as outlined in 2013 Uniform Guidance: Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards, specifically 2 CFR Part 200.414 Indirect (F&A, or Facilities and Administration) costs. Many private foundations accept inclusion of these expenses as part of a grant budget (generally at 5–15% of the total budget). However, NPOs frequently omit these costs in budgets.

Definitions and literature review

First, most grant professionals working for NPOs tend to identify shared costs—those not directly attributable to a particular grant project—as their organizations' *overhead costs*. The more precise designation is *indirect costs*, which will be used in this article. These costs are sometimes referred to as F&A (for “Facilities and Administrative” costs) in academic circles. Most grant professionals working for NPOs use the term *funders* to describe grantmaking agencies and foundations, not the term *sponsors* used by grant professionals working for academic institutions. Since this article is primarily directed to nonprofit grant professionals, the term *funders* will be used.

Indirect costs for federal grants are often calculated by applying a rate negotiated with the federal government to a subset of all direct project costs, also called Modified Total Direct Costs, or MTDC. Most academic institutions negotiate an indirect cost rate agreement with the federal government, in which the calculation of the indirect contribution to the budget results from multiplying the negotiated indirect cost rate by the MTDC. Most NPOs do not negotiate an indirect cost rate agreement with the federal government, but MTDC is still a basis for calculating indirect costs as part of a grant budget, defined in 2 CFR Part 200.414.

In 2 CFR Part 200.56, indirect costs are “those costs incurred for a common or joint purpose benefitting more than one cost objective, and not readily assignable to the cost objectives specifically benefitted, without effort disproportionate to the results achieved.” Furthermore, 2 CFR Part 200.414 expands the definition to state that “[Such costs that cannot be readily assigned to the cost objectives of one particular grant project] must be classified into two broad categories—Facilities or Administration.”

Past articles published in the *Journal of the Grant Professionals Association* (JGPA) discuss indirect costs. These references are in the

JGPA article written by Redfearn (2014). The body of work on this topic in the *JGPA* includes: Campbell and Carter (2004); Renninger, Bastuscheck, and Brandolini (2007); Blanchard and Bullock (2010); and Dresen (2013). Indirect costs are mentioned briefly in a *JGPA* article published in 2015 but only as a description of, “colleagues who recognize terms such as ‘design teams,’ ‘RFP,’ ‘indirect cost,’ ‘non-negotiable deadlines,’ and ‘application packages,’ without needing to define each phrase” (Renninger, Peterson, Reardon, & Winkler, 2015).

Several recent publications on the subject of indirect costs are relevant to grant professionals working for NPOs:

- The Association of Fundraising Professionals’ publication, *Advancing Philanthropy*, featured an article in its Spring 2014 edition entitled “The Impact of Overhead: The Great Debate” by Mary Ellen Collins (Collins, 2014).
- In 2013, the CEOs of GuideStar, BBB Wise Giving Alliance, and Charity Navigator wrote an “Open Letter to the Donors of America” arguing for an end to what they termed the “Overhead Myth,” the view that lower overhead equals a more efficient (and therefore more deserving of a grant award) NPO (Taylor, Howard and Berger, 2013).
- In a recent *Blue Avocado* blog post (Song, 2014), the author addressed the argument that private foundation funders must be willing to pay indirect costs as part of a grant award.
- The National Council of Nonprofits recently published a practical guide for NPOs outlining methods to recover their share of indirect costs. “The federal Office of Management and Budget (OMB)...issued new rules that require governments at all levels, local, state, and federal, that hire nonprofits to deliver services, to reimburse those nonprofits for their reasonable indirect costs (sometimes called “overhead” or “administrative” costs) when federal dollars are part of the funding stream” (National Council of Nonprofits, 2015). Gil Tran, Senior Technical Manager with the Office of Management and Budget, also made this point in his presentation to attendees at the 2014 GPA Annual Conference (Tran, 2014).

What are indirect costs?

The definition of indirect costs is straightforward for federal agency funders: if a cost cannot be assigned to a single cost objective in a grant-funded project, it is an indirect cost. However, private foundations use different definitions and methods of indirect cost calculation. To illustrate the difference between federal agency funders and private funders, examine the following examples.

From the National Institutes of Health (NIH) (2016)

“F&A Costs: Necessary costs incurred by a recipient for a common or joint purpose benefitting more than one cost objective, and not readily assignable to the cost objectives specifically benefitted, without effort disproportionate to the results achieved.”

This is straightforward. Expenditures connected with facilities, or costs for general administration, are included in indirect costs, because these do not directly relate to a particular project’s activities, goals, objectives, or deliverables.

Therefore, it is prohibited to budget rent, depreciation, use allowances on buildings, equipment, and capital improvements as direct costs to a project. In addition, it is inappropriate to include general administrative costs such as those associated with a department chair’s office, unless the administrator is also listed as a key contributor to a project in the proposal.

From the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (2012)

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation defines indirect costs as:

- Overhead expenses or ongoing operational costs incurred by the applicant organization on behalf of the organization’s activities and projects, but that are not easily identified with any specific project.
- Administrative or other expenses which are not directly allocable to a particular activity or project.
- Expenses related to general operations of an organization that are shared among projects and/or functions.
- Basic examples include executive oversight, existing facilities costs, accounting, grants management, legal expenses, utilities, and technology support.

Note the emphasis on shared expenses that relate to general operations of an organization. If these costs are shared, they are not easily attributable to a particular grant project except as a percentage of the total budget.

How to calculate indirect costs—federal agency funders

When an NPO has no negotiated indirect cost rate with any federal agency, the method used to calculate indirect costs allowed by federal agency funders involves the application of the 10% *de minimis* indirect cost rate authorized by 2 CFR Part 200.414 to MTDC. The exclusions to the total direct costs for a grant budget are given in 2 CFR Part 200.68: “MTDC excludes [from total direct costs] equipment, capital expenditures, charges for patient care, rental costs, tuition remission, scholarships

and fellowships, participant support costs and the portion of each sub-award and subcontract in excess of \$25,000.” Grant professionals need to take caution, since other budget line items may be excluded if there is “a serious inequity in the distribution of indirect costs, and with the approval of the cognizant agency for indirect costs” (2 CFR Part 200.68) (Office of Management and Budget, 2013). If there is any doubt, the grant professional should contact the program officer assigned to the applicable federal agency’s grant program.

These new regulations represent a significant step forward for NPOs that have not had any practical way to recover indirect costs. This change is “thereby further reducing potential barriers to receiving...federal financial assistance” (2 CFR Part 200, Supplementary Information, II. Major Policy Reforms) (Office of Management and Budget, 2013).

Example 1 for federal agency funders:

NPOs lacking a negotiated indirect cost rate with federal agencies

An NPO proposes a one-year project to the Department of Defense to train service dogs for use by U.S. veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. The total budget (direct costs) is \$150,000, and a portion of the expenses is stipends for the veteran participants in the amount of \$1,000 each for 12 participants. The NPO also plans a sub-award of \$40,000 to an animal-care facility that provides housing for the dogs until they graduate from the training program.

- *Step 1:* Determine what must be excluded from total direct costs to yield MTDC. The prohibited items are: participant stipends and the portion of the sub-award in excess of \$25,000. The sum of exclusions = \$12,000 (participant stipends) + \$15,000 (portion of the sub awards over \$25,000) = \$27,000.
- *Step 2:* Calculate MTDC by subtracting the sum of excluded costs from the total direct costs. $MTDC = (\text{total direct costs}) - (\text{exclusions}) = \$150,000 - \$27,000 = \$123,000$.
- *Step 3:* Calculate indirect costs by applying the 10% indirect cost rate to MTDC. $\text{Indirect costs} = MTDC \times \text{indirect cost rate} = \$123,000 \times 0.10 = \$12,300$.

Thus, the total requested amount from the federal agency in this example is the sum of direct and indirect costs, or $\$150,000 + \$12,300 = \$162,300$.

It is possible that the total direct costs will equal MTDC. This occurs when the budget does not include any of the exclusions listed above from 2 CFR Part 200.68 because there are no costs for equipment, tuition, patient care, etc. For these cases, steps 1 and 2 are not needed, and the

indirect cost rate applies to the total direct costs (because total direct costs = MTDC) to yield the recoverable indirect costs.

Example 2 for federal agency funders:

NPOs having a negotiated indirect cost rate with federal agencies

Follow the steps from Example 1, but in step 3, use the indirect cost rate negotiated with the federal government instead of the 10% *de minimis* rate allowed by 2 CFR 200.414. The policy and procedures for negotiating an indirect cost rate for application to federal agency funders are in Appendix IV to 2 CFR Part 200—Indirect (F&A) Costs Identification and Assignment, and Rate Determination for Nonprofit Organizations.

For most small NPOs, the distinction between a negotiated rate and the *de minimis* rate is not relevant, because the federal government assumes that only larger NPOs should attempt to negotiate a more favorable indirect cost rate. In 2 CFR Part 200.414, “major nonprofit organizations” are defined as those receiving more than \$10 million dollars in direct federal funding. Therefore, most small NPOs use the 10% *de minimis* indirect cost rate.

How to calculate indirect costs—private foundation funders

Unlike federal agency funders, private foundations are not required to adhere to standard rules to define or calculate indirect costs, nor are they subject to the 10% *de minimis* rate for federal agency grants. Therefore, prudence dictates that grant professionals adhere to the foundation’s published guidelines—in the RFP and/or on their website. Of course, the grant professional should always use the best practice of contacting the funder’s grant program officer to inquire how that particular foundation allows indirect costs in a grant budget.

For example, the Gates Foundation uses the definition of indirect costs cited above, and their maximum indirect cost rates depend upon the type of applicant: 0% rate for government agencies, other private foundations, and for-profit organizations; up to a 10% rate for U.S. universities and U.S. community colleges; and up to a 15% rate for non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international organizations, and non-U.S. universities. Most NPOs in the U.S. fall into the 15% indirect rate category.

In contrast, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation has a variable manner in which it treats the indirect costs part of grant awards. As stated on their website,

[The] Mott Foundation does support indirect costs. However, indirect cost percentages are up to the discretion of the program officer. Indirect costs may not exceed the appropriate level based on project-

specific direct costs. Indirect costs typically include rent/occupancy, administration costs, equipment and overhead. Other costs such as supplies, printing and communications may be either direct or indirect, depending on the project. (Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, 2016)

Yet a third example involves foundations that have two or more different indirect cost rates, depending upon the type of project. The John Templeton Foundation covers indirect costs of up to 15% of all direct project costs less any amount given by the awardee as pass-through grants to participants. These pass-through grants can have indirect costs applied to them but only at a rate of 5% of this line item total. Therefore, calculating indirect costs is particularly complex, as multiple indirect cost rates must be applied, as illustrated in the following example.

*Example 1 for private foundation funders:
the John Templeton Foundation*

An NPO proposes a project to create and execute annual conferences for three years with a total budget (direct costs) of \$475,800 and with annual mini-research grants of \$20,000 awarded to one conference participant each year who presents the outstanding poster at the conference.

**Calculation of indirect costs using Foundation guidelines:
prizes/grants are excluded from the calculation**

- *Step 1:* Determine the amount that must be excluded from total direct costs for the 15% indirect cost rate. The excluded item is a mini-research grant award to selected conference participants, $\$20,000 \times 3 \text{ years} = \$60,000$.
- *Step 2:* Calculate the base used in the calculation of indirect costs at the 15% indirect cost rate by subtracting the excluded cost from step 1 from the total direct costs. $\text{Base} = (\text{total direct costs}) - (\text{exclusion}) = \$475,800 - \$60,000 = \$415,800$.
- *Step 3:* Calculate overhead by applying the 15% indirect cost rate to the base from step 2, then add in the 5% indirect costs from applying this lower rate to the total amount of mini-research grants.
- Indirect costs @ 15% = $\text{Base} \times \text{rate} = \$415,800 \times 0.15 = \$62,370$.
- Indirect costs @ 5% = $(\text{total of mini-research grants}) \times \text{rate} = \$60,000 \times 0.05 = \$3,000$

Thus, the total requested budget amount in this example is the sum of direct and indirect costs, or $\$475,800 + \$62,370 + \$3,000 = \$541,170$.

The grant professional must pay close attention to the guidance given by the private foundation and follow the rules and procedures closely in order to create a responsive budget that captures all of the indirect costs allowable for the proposed project.

Spreadsheet and budget justification example including indirect costs

A suggested format for indirect cost calculation in a spreadsheet is below for a four-year project. The indirect cost rate in this case is assumed to be the 10% *de minimis* rate allowed by 2 CFR Part 200.414. Note that although the total sub-award is \$140,000, the only part that is included in the indirect cost calculation is the first \$25,000 of the sub-award (Year 1); all costs above \$25,000 of the sub-award are excluded from MTDC.

Table 1. Suggested Spreadsheet Format for Calculating Indirect Costs

Direct Costs and Calculation of Indirect and Total Project Costs	Year 1 \$	Year 2 \$	Year 3 \$	Year 4 \$	Total Project
Equipment @ >\$5K each	7,000	0	0	0	7,000
Participant support	0	0	1,500	1,500	3,000
Sub-award	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000	140,000
Total Direct Costs (including costs from elsewhere in the spreadsheet)	133,000	105,000	101,500	126,000	465,500
MTDC (direct costs – exclusions)	116,000	70,000	65,000	89,500	340,500
Indirect Costs (rate = 10%)	11,600	7,000	6,500	8,950	34,050
Total Project Cost (total direct costs + indirect costs)	144,600	112,000	108,000	134,950	499,550

The indirect costs must be in the budget justification document. The following statement should be included: “INDIRECT COSTS: The indirect cost rate will be 10% of MTDC in accordance with 2 CFR Part 200.414.”

Accounting for direct versus indirect costs

For cost accounting during the period of the project and for grant closeout, the payments or drawdowns for direct costs reimbursement must be excluded from payments for indirect costs reimbursement. The

NPO can spend the indirect costs reimbursement for any indirect cost but must maintain accurate records. Traditional grant award accounting governs how to spend the direct costs of the award.

Conclusion

Incorporating indirect costs into a grant budget can be confusing but grant professionals working with nonprofit organizations must seek to recover these costs as much as possible. This article defined indirect expenses in a practical way, using examples from federal agencies and private foundations, and it illustrated several actual calculations for including direct versus indirect costs in a grant budget. All NPOs need to know their rights pertaining to indirect cost recovery, both from grants directly awarded to the NPO and from grants that come from a pass-through entity that receives indirect cost payments as part of a grant award.

Moving into the mid-21st century, grant professionals in particular need to stay current with changing regulations in order to formulate best practices for achieving the highest possible return on investment from a grant-funded project—including the highest possible indirect cost recovery rate.

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Biographical Information

Richard Redfearn, PhD holds a Bachelor's Degree in chemistry from Lander University, and a Doctorate in chemistry from Duke University. Richard's experience includes 17 years as a researcher in the private sector, six years of college teaching and research experience, and seven years of service to nonprofits, county government, and higher education as a grants professional. He has served the GPA Arkansas Chapter as President, Program Chair and Membership Chair. His grant and resource development accomplishments include winning grants for academic research in the natural sciences, grants for health education, and facilitating grant applications for faculty and staff at his current position with the Fayetteville campus of the University of Arkansas. Reach the author at redfearn@walton.uark.edu.

Connecting the Silos: Building a Rural Grants Program

S. Kimberly Jones, GPC

Adena Health System, Chillicothe, OH

GPCI Competency 02: Knowledge of organizational development as it pertains to grant seeking

GPCI Competency 07: Knowledge of practices and services that raise the level of professionalism of grant professionals

GPCI Competency 08: Knowledge of methods and strategies that cultivate and maintain relationships between fund-seeking and recipient organizations and funders

Abstract

Rural communities often struggle to compete with urban communities in development efforts. Building a grants program for a rural agency or organization can be a challenging task for grant professionals due to many barriers common in rural environments. These obstacles can include limited rural funding opportunities, limited capacity for coordinating or managing grants, and limited connections to help create visibility around projects. Encouraging rural agencies to collaborate or to look for outside support can often be difficult. When grant professionals understand the environment and culture of these rural communities, they can strategize and use their networking, organizational, and resource development skills to improve fundraising success in these communities. This article proposes four specific strategies to overcome common challenges and provide resources and tools to support this success. It concludes with a case study to demonstrate the use of these concepts in a rural grants program.

Introduction

Rural America has long struggled economically (Flora & Flora, 2013): it is often portrayed as deteriorating downtowns, closed factories, and declining populations. These circumstances provide tremendous opportunity for development work. However, not surprisingly, rural communities have long lagged behind their urban counterparts in development efforts. In a recent report, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Economic Research Service estimated that the value of U.S. foundation grants to benefit rural areas was 6% to 7% of total domestic grants in 2010. This correlates with research findings that large foundations awarded \$88 per capita (2010 dollars) in rural areas, as opposed to \$167 per capita in metropolitan counties. While there are little data on exactly how much federal and state money goes toward rural projects, the continued decline of rural areas across the U.S. would also indicate that rural agencies do not receive as much federal or state funding as is needed (Shah, 2014). Yet, more than 20% of the U.S. population lives in a rural-designated area (Cromartie & Bucholtz, 2008).

Often, the word “rural” is perceived in a singular fashion: a pastoral image of an open field, swaying grass, cows in a pasture, and a quaint small town in the background. However, from a government agency standpoint, more than a dozen definitions of the word currently exist (Cromartie & Bucholtz, 2008). The Rural Policy Research Institute (RUPRI) reports that most definitions of “rural” utilized by government agencies are based on geographic units (Coburn et al., 2007) and fail to capture many of the cultural and environmental elements of rural communities.

Cromartie and Bucholtz (2008) note that when additional elements are used to describe rural communities, the common tendency is to describe the fundamental and inherent features of these communities rather than the characteristics they share. Some of the most common mutual characteristics include small size, sparse settlement, limited choices (employment, shopping, services, education, and healthcare), distance from population concentrations, limited educational attainment, and an economic base that often relies on traditional occupations such as agriculture or manufacturing (Monk, 2007).

Other commonalities reflect the environmental and cultural aspects of rural communities. For example, their geographic isolation can result in a common unwillingness to work with outsiders (Flora & Flora, 2013). Communities looking for funding often do not have a comfort level in asking about grant opportunities from outside agencies, such as their state governments. The members of these communities may also be unwilling to work together if they cannot agree on how to move forward. Small groups formed around political, religious, or social beliefs—all with their own agendas—are common in rural communities (Brown, 2011).

In addition, fear of change and innovation resulting from the presence of long-established employers who have provided jobs across

multiple generations may slow progress in rural areas (Ohio University, 1993). A rural community whose livelihood has been built on one or two industries may fear outside organizations offering unfamiliar opportunities or opportunities that could potentially threaten existing means of employment. Rural nonprofit agencies can be similarly hesitant about change: many exhibit fear and reluctance to phase out or change long-standing programs (Zimmerman & Bell, 2015).

Many rural communities are also experiencing a loss of young talent or “brain drain”; many youth leave their hometowns looking for opportunities more readily available in urban areas (Shah, 2014). Population loss, particularly among those from 25 to 35 years in age, continues to be a trend in most of rural America (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). According to Henderson (2015), “although 759 rural counties in 42 states lost population between 1994 and 2010, more than 1,300 rural counties in 46 states have lost population since 2010.” Many who stay often view advanced education as a low priority, leaving the skill base stagnant and the community without the capacity to support innovation and economic development.

Rural Challenges and Development Barriers

These characteristics of rural environments make advancement of any kind difficult. They translate to overarching barriers that impede a rural community’s ability to seek funding to facilitate development (Flora & Flora, 2013), including the following:

1. *Limited human resources to get projects started.* Small communities often have fewer human resources to develop and coordinate development projects (Global Change, 2014) due to low levels of skill sets and “brain drain.” An individual must coordinate the project team and look for a qualified person to coordinate the project and support project activities. Development, fundraising, or grant-seeking activities may not be at their best—or even be possible—simply because few have the time, knowledge, or funds to hire others to focus on these activities. These limited human resources result in rural agencies receiving less grant funding than their urban counterparts (Pender, 2015).
2. *Limited funds to get projects started.* Most rural communities have significantly less financial capital to leverage for outside or contractor support for grant research and proposal writing (Cohen, 2014). Furthermore, if no matching funds or donors are willing to support projects, then success with larger grants, when matching funds are required, becomes even more difficult. Today, funders often expect some level of matching funds and broad collaboration with community partners (Cohen, 2014).

3. *Limited knowledge about grants and competition.* Because of their isolation and limited human resources, rural community organizations and agencies often have limited knowledge of a broad base of funders. They are, therefore, competing with urban counterparts with more talent, resources, and funding. This places them at a disadvantage in understanding the level of innovation that today's funders look for in grant projects, particularly evidence-based delivery models or in activities used to engage a population (Reschovsky & Staiti, 2006).
4. *Limited capacity.* Management standards by federal, state, and private agencies require increased time and reporting for managing grants (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2016). Rural agencies often do not have the federal or state experience to fully understand the expectations of managing grants. They may also have limited knowledge of how to use technological tools for measuring and tracking outcomes, and lack financial resources to purchase project and grants management software, online reporting forms, and other technological tools.
5. *Lack of comfort in looking beyond the community.* Parochial attitudes can cause rural communities to isolate themselves from new or developing ideas (Holton, 2007). A community may be complacent with the way "things have always been" and bringing in new ideas, resources, or partners to collaborate on development projects may make many community members uncomfortable. This discomfort is also true for rural nonprofit agencies. If a national or state branch agency based in an urban area comes to a rural location to implement a program that has worked well in an urban setting, rural nonprofit agencies may not "get it" or understand how it is relevant or deliverable in their area.
6. *"Silo-ed" community agencies.* Parochial attitudes can also threaten local agencies, group collaboration, or simply the "current standing" (Holton, 2007). A limited economic base in a rural community means limited economic opportunities or jobs. A limited amount of jobs, therefore, may result in community members doing whatever is necessary to retain their current employment. Nonprofit organizations also act in this way; collaboration can often be viewed as consolidation which then threatens jobs. Therefore, many agencies will not collaborate with other organizations in fear there may not be "enough to go around." Over the long term, many rural agencies become comfortable "doing their own thing" rather than collaborating to develop new or expanded projects. This low interest in collaboration also results in limited communication and low visibility for projects.

Rural communities face a number of socioeconomic challenges that limit their capacities to navigate the development spectrum. When grants professionals understand the environment and culture of these communities, they can strategize and use their networking, organizational, and resource development skills to improve fundraising success in these communities.

Rural Development Strategies

Understanding rural environments and cultures is a prerequisite to establishing a development plan. Anticipating common rural community challenges and barriers is critical to making a productive start. Consequently, strategies to overcome these challenges must be developed to support success in developing funding. The following section examines four strategies, each supported with resources and tools, to support rural grant program success.

Strategy 1: Start where you are

“Let’s just get a grant!” is a commonly heard phrase in small, rural organizations. They know grants exist but are not sure how to get started or all they entail. Rural agencies with limited human resources and grant development skills have limited organizational capacity. An agency with a staff stretched thin and with limited financial resources and volunteers may become “stuck” trying to determine how or where to begin in developing a project or finding the right funding mechanism. In addition, rural agencies often do not participate in broader networks where innovation and collaboration opportunities are visible (Flora & Flora, 2013). Grant professionals should start, from the beginning with a rural organization, using basic elements of strategic planning to determine the current state of the organization, its needs, and its long-term goals. This process should include investigating opportunities for collaboration and small-step pilots.

Grant professionals can apply one or more basic planning tools during this process:

- *Needs assessments* that clearly outline a project’s purpose and expected outcomes can help an inexperienced group become organized and get them on the right track (Strengthening Nonprofits, 2010). The National Association of City and County Health Officials (NACCHO, 2016), Rotary International (Rotary International, 2012), and Community Action Partnership (Community Action Partnership, 2016) all have assessment tools with proven track records.
- *Concept papers* can facilitate the research, outreach, and cultivation of potential funding sources (Geever, 2012). While developing concept papers may seem a basic step for an experienced grant professional,

a rural organization may have little experience in grants or may only be in the “concept phase” of a project. This simple tool provides an opportunity for grant professionals to build relationships with rural agencies as they organize their plans.

- *Broader organizational, community, or government plans* can be useful tools. Feasibility studies for capital campaigns and local and state development plans are examples that can help when developing projects (Cohen, 2015). Even aligning a small, rural project with a broader state-level plan can increase chances of funding, as a case can be built on how the project will support statewide goals. Opportunities can be explored with other agencies outside the local community. Either way, this approach provides rural project coordinators with experience in collaborating outside of their immediate communities, introduces outside collaboration to rural communities, and accelerates capacity building with new partnerships and resources.
- *Pilot projects* are a mechanism that can help rural agencies get started with grants, since they require smaller amounts of funding and fewer resources to deliver and manage the projects. Pilot projects may even result from the use of some of the aforementioned tools, such as concept papers. Many grantmakers are more willing to fund smaller, pilot projects proposed by agencies that have limited experience in grants development. These projects have a higher likelihood of success than a large stand-alone project that has not been tested. Pilot projects, like the example provided in the case study below, can help an inexperienced rural agency take small steps to build a project over time, become comfortable working with other organizations, learn about grant monitoring and reporting, and build organizational competence and confidence.
- *Technical assistance* from rural support agencies, such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Rural Assistance Center (RAC), provides tools to help rural organizations get started on building their grant funding. These agencies are familiar with rural culture and the challenges rural organizations face in developing projects and therefore can provide technical assistance and build capacity in rural communities.
- *Collaborations with other organizations* can increase capacity and increase competitiveness in grant applications. Where hesitancy to partner exists, grant professionals must encourage agencies to develop a comfort level with outside agencies by familiarizing them with the work of these organizations, removing barriers, coordinating opportunities for representatives to get to know one another, and providing examples of how other organizations benefit from collaborating.

- *Identifying sub-grantee opportunities* for rural agencies is a good option. Organizations with secured awards, such as state and federal grants, can link smaller agencies to established and evidence-based models which, in turn, provides effective guidance and support in achieving their project goals. Connecting a rural agency to a sub-grantee opportunity allows the agency to gain experience with grants while supported by experienced grantees and to build connections to new funding streams outside of the community.
- *Collaboration with funding agencies that understand rural program development* and capacity building may be willing to work with an inexperienced group to get a project going. Some of the “usual suspects” who may be helpful include small, local foundations, state rural development programs, USDA, RAC, the Appalachia Regional Commission (ARC), and the Office of Rural Health Policy.

Grant professionals should educate rural stakeholders about the various types of program models and grants that can help get their projects started. Providing education on the differences between foundation and government grants, particularly on management requirements that can be problematic with limited human resources or grants management experience, is essential to this process. It also provides an opportunity for grant professionals to build relationships and trust with rural agencies.

Strategy 2: Manage well, play well

In order to build and maintain a grants portfolio, it is vital to demonstrate an organization’s capacity to successfully coordinate grant projects (Grants Managers Network, 2013). However, small organizations in rural communities can be overwhelmed by a lack of knowledge of how to properly manage funds while trying to implement programs.

Grant professionals must provide guidance to these organizations on grant management protocols from the outset to demonstrate worthiness for future grants. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has well-established and comprehensive guidelines that, when followed, ensure compliance with record keeping and budget management; USDA, RAC, ARC, and other agencies also provide guidance specific to rural communities.

Rural communities frequently struggle with working well together as they compete for limited resources for development projects. If one organization feels like another has too much control or is getting more than its fair share, disputes can quickly arise (Flora & Flora, 2013). Roles and responsibilities of collaborating rural agencies must be as clear and equitable as possible in order to survive in a competitive environment with limited resources.

Grant professionals should use project management tools such as committee charters, Gantt charts, and rolling action item lists (RAILs) to define responsibilities, deliverables, and timelines across all collaborating organizations and to keep projects on track (George, Maxey, Rowlands, & Price, 2004). A standing committee or team meeting to review these materials regularly will reinforce adherence to sound project management. Developing project workbooks to track grant activities, progress, and expenditures can help project teams to prepare and deliver concise reports and demonstrate management capacity. Tools such as “plan, do, check, and adjust” (PDCA) worksheets also help solve problems if program activities are not yielding anticipated results. PDCAs are designed to help projects identify weaknesses in a program, decide on needed adjustments, and assign tasks. These tools are designed to limit conflict.

Strategy 3: Be visible

Everyone desires to be a part of a successful venture, including grant funders. Publicizing project successes creates interest and can serve to increase future grant funding (Benson, 2011). However, many rural organizations do not make their project successes visible to potential partners, beneficiaries, and funders as the result of geographic isolation and limited connections outside the community. Media outlets may also be more limited; a small-town newspaper usually has limited distribution. Even social media outlets are only as effective as their followers and network. Grant professionals must assist rural agencies to become comfortable with visibility, as well as helping to find avenues beyond the community to promote the success of their grant projects and create “buzz” and interest from potential new partners.

Increasing rural agencies’ comfort with visibility is a challenge. Grant professionals should implement a multiphase communications plan to guide them and ease reluctance, beginning with local outlets and moving progressively outward to regional and state levels. As interest, partnerships, and additional funding develop, rural agencies will become more comfortable—and even excited—about this part of the process. To promote the good work of a grant project, a solid communications plan should be built around venues and means, then aligned with project timelines (University of Kansas, 2016). Venues should include print, online, social media, and new media outlets, as well as face-to-face meetings and presentations with local, state, and federal legislators and civic organizations. Means of communication should include print stories, video clips, in-person presentations, and project summaries available through these venues.

For example, organizations should share human interest stories with local media outlets such as regional newspapers or morning radio programs. Organizations can also post on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram

and other relevant outlets. Producing short videos featuring the work of the grant is another excellent method; smartphones are prevalent in all communities and expanded cellular coverage in rural areas makes this technology more accessible. Face-to-face engagement also increases the visibility of a grant project; organizations should present at civic group meetings and conferences to promote a project's impact and create interest.

Government relations work is not commonly done in rural communities, particularly at the state or federal level. This is a missed opportunity for rural communities to not only create visibility around a project, but to gain visibility in general for the social service and other support their community may need. Rural organizations should be encouraged to undertake regular engagement with legislators and to participate on state and federal committees and foundation boards and initiatives. By engaging these entities with regular visits or participating on their committees, boards, or teams, organizations can cast a broader net for funding and partnership support.

Strategy 4: Welcome friends

Throughout the processes of planning, developing management capacity, and expanding visibility, grant professionals must guide organizations in building and expanding rural partnerships. Collaboration is increasingly required for grant funding eligibility (Gose & Donovan, 2014) but many rural organizations often exhibit skepticism in partnering with other organizations.

Grant professionals should start by outlining the benefits of partnering and how potential partnerships can benefit the project. Next, the grant professional should assist with identifying potential partners for a developing project. This analysis will ease anxiety and create interest. A "project champion," or an individual who is known to the project team and is trusted, can encourage partnerships and collaboration especially if he or she can bring beneficial connections to the project. Furthermore, as discussed above, the project team can seek new partnerships by identifying a larger-scale project with a sub-grantee opportunity, which can lead to not only a new collaboration but also provide the team with an easier start for a new project.

Clearly identifying partner roles and confirming terms of agreement early in the process will help ease concerns of rural organizations new to partnerships. Tools such as project charters and memoranda of understanding (MOUs) establish guidelines that direct the project throughout its duration and ensures an environment of trust and cooperation. Such partnerships can not only help a rural organization identify additional funding sources for the project but can also lead to future funding opportunities for other projects and programs.

Case Study: Adena Health System's Baby-Centered Recovery Program

Adena Health System's Baby-Centered Recovery program in rural Ohio serves as a valuable case study of how a rural team successfully utilized strategies of planning, cooperation, management, and communications to bring a new project to reality. The project's team members, seeking to address growing addiction issues in their rural community, started by examining their options, as they had little experience with fundraising and grant projects. With the guidance and support of a grants professional, they secured a small pilot grant that was managed well with Lean Sigma tools—a methodology that relies on a collaborative team effort to improve performance—and delivered strong outcomes. By making these successes visible through media articles and government relations, the team was connected to additional, larger funding and sub-grantee opportunities that have helped the project serve more than ten times as many women, as well as influenced new legislation providing funding specifically for rural communities dealing with similar issues.

Background

The Ross County area in rural, Appalachian, southern Ohio began seeing a spike in drug-related crime and overdoses in 2007, due to growing heroin use. By 2012, the number of babies born with Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS) was more than three times higher than in previous years. The regional medical center of Adena Health System (AHS) convened a work team made up of an OB/GYN, a social worker, and a grant specialist to develop a project to address the issue. Not having experience in developing this type of project, the team was unsure where to start.

Planning

After initial discussions, the team agreed to start small by researching models of care that had demonstrated success in reducing the withdrawal symptoms of the infant while encouraging the mother toward a path of sobriety, which was the primary goal of the care teams. The team soon identified a relevant model developed by Kaiser Permanente. The grant specialist's assignment was to outline a similar model for the project team and to find funding to start a program at AHS. Having limited experience with such a project, the grant specialist recommended that the team start with a small, pilot grant to develop and optimize the program for the rural patients served by the medical center. After some research and inquiry, a small, pilot grant program from the CareSource Foundation was identified as a potential source of funding. The team applied for and received a grant in mid-2012 for the pilot Baby-Centered Recovery project. By using Strategy 1 planning tools and selecting a pilot phase approach, the team successfully secured this first grant for the project.

Implementation

The project's model integrated elements of CenteringPregnancy® (Centering Healthcare Institute, 2015) with traditional group-based addiction counseling. The pilot grant supported the coordination of a group of 12 women experiencing opiate addiction issues and in similar stages of pregnancy. The women met weekly to receive education on healthy pregnancy, childbirth, and new baby care. In addition, they engaged in group addiction counseling. A weekly health check and drug screening occurred, including a prescription for Subutex, a mixed narcotic agonist-antagonists (WebMD, 2015) which helps prevent withdrawal symptoms caused by stopping other opiate-type narcotics. As a result of the pilot project, all of the babies born to the mothers in the program were born at term and without NAS or other drug-related issues. By managing the pilot project well with Lean Sigma tools and delivering these strong outcomes, the team successfully utilized Strategy 2 tools to demonstrate their capacity and competence for administering and implementing grants.

The project team leveraged this success by working with the health system's communication team to compile and promote stories about two of the program participants and their experience in the program. The team also kept local social services providers informed about the program and invited them to participate in educational sessions with the women to promote their agencies' services. In addition, AHS's government relations liaison informed local, state, and federal legislators about the project, its outcomes, the developing partnerships, and the growing waiting list of women seeking support from the program. These legislators, already at work developing potential intervention programs, used this information in their efforts to create policy and funding avenues.

Funding and Future

These Strategy 3 approaches to build visibility helped the project team to secure \$125,000 in funding in late 2013 from the Ohio Department of Medicaid's Strong Start Ohio project as a sub-grantee under the Ohio State University. With this additional funding, the Baby-Centered Recovery program has since served 225 high-risk and addicted pregnant women. Success rates continue to be high, and the team is developing two partnerships with addiction treatment centers for fathers and women who are not pregnant. Pledges for grant funding from local, state, and federal resources continue to support an expanded addiction treatment network. Recent federal legislation, including the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (Senate Bill 524) and Protecting Our Infants Act (Senate Bill 799) has been influenced by the Baby-Centered Recovery program. Congressman Steve Stivers also referenced the program on the House floor during testimony for Senate Bill 799 (Stivers, 2015). By using

Strategy 4 tools of developing partnerships, serving as a sub-grantee, and building wider networks, the team successfully secured additional funding and strengthened future sustainability for the project.

Conclusion

The economic decline in rural communities and the related increase in social service needs are well-established and, unfortunately, continue to challenge these communities. Funding support through grants for development projects is a valuable opportunity for community improvement. However, rural communities continue to lag behind their urban counterparts in securing grant funding and developing healthy grant portfolios due to a variety of challenges related to a lack of experience, capacity, and collaboration. This does not have to be the case. Grant professionals must utilize their many skills, strategies, resources, and tools to support rural agencies to improve funding capacity and program success. Grant professionals must consider the cultural and environmental elements of rural communities in order to align the most appropriate resources to fit the communities' needs and capacity levels. By understanding these needs and challenges, particularly those involving relationship building and visibility, grant professionals can build knowledge and reduce fear in rural communities which will lead to funding success and growth. This success, in turn, can ultimately increase community capacity and turn the tide on declining rural communities.

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Biographical Information

S. Kimberly Jones, GPC, has 17 years of grants, government relations, program development, and management experience. She has worked in social service, higher education, and healthcare for rural Ohio and West Virginia agencies. She has established a large network of funders and partners, and is a strong rural advocate.

Ms. Jones holds a BS in Communications from Ohio University. She earned a Lean Sigma Green Belt in 2012 and a GPC in 2013, and is currently working on a Master of Applied Science (MAS) degree in Community Development through the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. A native of the Appalachian region of southern Ohio, she currently serves as the Director of Community Health Advancement for the Adena Health System and co-chairs the Partners for a Healthier Ross County steering committee in Chillicothe, OH. Reach the author at sjones2@adena.org.

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Grant Professionals and Web Development: An Opportunity to Transform Organizations at the Intersection of Strategy and Technology

Maggie Cunha, MPH

Grant Consultant, FreshGrants LLC
Paraná, Argentina

Abstract

This strategy paper advocates for grant professionals' involvement in website development to improve organizational capacity and grant outcomes. The paper first qualifies the importance of the organization's website for grantseeking. The paper then urges mission-driven grant professionals to proactively guide technology strategy at all levels of the organization as it is needed. Finally, to further encourage technology skill building and application among grant professionals, the paper details activities and expected outcomes of various web development projects.

Introduction

When thoughtfully planned and well-resourced, a nonprofit website works hard.

- It drives traffic and converts visitors to donors: From 2013 to 2014, nonprofit website traffic grew by an average of 11% and groups raised \$612 for every 1,000 visitors to their site (M+R, 2015).
- It engages people: Websites consistently rank as the nonprofit sector's most important communication channel (Nonprofit Marketing Guide, 2016).
- It improves productivity: By helping to align operations, appropriate website infrastructure and integrated services create organizational efficiencies (Schwartz, 2015).

A nonprofit's website also can influence a grantmaker's decision, because with increased dollars raised, people engaged, and efficiencies created by the website, a grant seeking organization may be stronger and better positioned to achieve its goals. But do we know if grantmakers actually visit websites during proposal reviews to help guide grant decisions? The topic has yet to be studied, though author and nonprofit icon Beth Kanter has said, "I know many program officers look at websites as part of proposal review due diligence" (Kanter, personal communication, December 10, 2015).

Grant professionals often do not give websites the attention they deserve, which may explain why the topic of websites and grant decisions has gone uninvestigated. Of the 82 workshops listed on the 2015 Grant Professionals Association (GPA) Conference schedule, no session title or linked description included the words "web," "website," or "online presence" (GPA, 2015). Likewise, GrantChat, a weekly grants Twitter conversation, has yet to explore the importance of grantseeker websites. When grant readiness was a GrantChat topic, participants did not mention website audits or updates as a component of grant proposal preparation (GrantChat, June 2015; GrantChat, July 2015). And among GPA peer-reviewed publications, only one article encouraged grant professionals' formal involvement in website development and maintenance (Lucas-Matos, 2010).

Tech Strategy and the Role of the Grant Professional

A survey conducted in 2015 shows that 25% of U.S. nonprofits lack a responsive web design to make their site mobile friendly (Arneal, n.d.), even as one in seven online donations comes from a mobile device (Granger, 2016). Only 45% of North American nonprofits regularly publish a search-engine-friendly blog (Nonprofit Tech for Good, 2016), even as 40% of nonprofit site traffic comes from search (Abramovich, 2015). Moreover, ineffective websites reveal deeper problems: a) a failure to include technology in organizational strategic plans, and b) inadequate staff to execute a long-term technology plan. Grant professionals who are familiar with technology, or have a functional understanding of composite parts, can help strengthen such organizations.

Advocates for Technology in Strategic Plans

At least 23% of nonprofits have yet to include technology in organizational strategic plans (NTEN, 2015). Long-term plans that fail to embed technology indicate organizational leadership has not embraced change, even as they operate in a dynamic field. Meanwhile, their competition can respond to new ideas and innovations by making use of proper equipment, technology training, and suitable compensation for

technology employees. What the leaders of the lagging groups need is a guide to connect strategic technology to organizational outcomes.

Grant professionals are well-positioned to help drive tech strategy for their organizations, because they are at the right place at the right time. They know what the most discriminating of donors are beginning to demand. They can see funders' imperatives stacked up against their organization's current operations or potential capacity, and understand that the markers of an effective *modern* nonprofit have just shifted. Nimble and effective for-profits are now competing for the same dollars. Large funders are beginning to make a smaller number of grants of larger award sizes, with capacity building support included. Tech grants are becoming more common. And non-tech grants often allow a technology component. These developments are clear signs that the most effective nonprofits look different today than five years ago.

Filling Gaps in Tech Staff

Nearly 57% of nonprofits do not have staff solely dedicated to technology (Care2 et al., 2015), and 42% of nonprofits lack any budget for staff training in technology (NTEN, 2015). Also, 74% of nonprofits say that "staff shortage" is the biggest challenge they face in planning digital strategy (Care2 et al.). Many nonprofits have ended up with an "accidental techie" who is typically under-resourced and underappreciated.

However, even on a restricted budget, technology for business has become incredibly accessible to non-tech professionals, such as those in the grants field. Advances in technology mean that network servers and security can be inexpensively outsourced, leaving time for strategic work such as identifying long-term needs and selecting and vetting various tiers of software products (BetterCloud, 2016). Also, today's technologists have many supportive resources that aim to help nonprofits understand software and service provider opportunities. Resources include *pro bono* organizations, community organizations, crowdsourcing companies, and outsourcing agencies or consultants (Peskey and Beldjilali, 2016).

Web Development Achieves Strategic Objectives

To encourage grant professionals to learn and apply tech skills, Table 1 (on the next page) details how web development can make dramatic improvements in organizational capacity and outcomes. For example, professionals who create effective website content help establish their organization's authority and connect them with supporters. Applying web design skills within a cross-departmental web planning committee can help build a site that is fundamentally welcoming to all users and provides a great experience.

Table 1. Expected Results When a Grant Professional (GP) Applies Web Development Skills

Tech skill	Recommended activities	→ Outputs	→ Organizational outcomes	→ Grant outcomes and opportunities
<i>Website audit</i>	Assess existing content Prioritize challenges	Website needs are understood	Leadership makes informed decisions about web development	Web challenges that undermine proposal success are exposed
<i>Content creation</i>	Revise or create text and images, including static content Guide blog creation or recovery	Content and SEO are improved Program impact is continuously documented	Donors and funders are driven to site through search Authority built New people are connected	Proposal efforts are supported Potential funders find the organization Success is demonstrated
<i>Web design</i>	Active in web planning committee Revisit brand, navigation, and page layout Promote transparency and responsive design	Website is welcoming to all users User experience is enhanced Visitor action is prompted Organization's story is brought to the forefront	Trust and confidence is inspired Visitors are converted to supporters and donors Brand is reinforced	GP's committee involvement promotes grant strategy Website impresses and inspires funders Increased donation revenue supports grantseeking efforts
<i>Web technology planning</i>	Active in web planning committee Help select vendors, CMS, CRM, and other web-connected service options Promote cloud-based service integration, quality of code, and a sound maintenance plan	Efficiencies are created Communication flows more easily Time spent gathering, moving, and analyzing data reduced Administrative user experience is enhanced	Operations are aligned Data-based culture of continuous improvement created Capacity to manage website and other software is improved Productivity increases	GP's committee involvement promotes grant strategy Appropriate systems and services (databases, donations, marketing, and analytics) build organizational capacity

Notes. CMS = content management system; CRM = constituent relationship management

Conclusion

Grantseeking organizations must keep up with technology and web development if they are to create real change for those they represent. It is time for grant professionals to see themselves, first, as agents of change and, second, as writers and researchers.

Grant professionals can guide organizations' use of technology to help organizations achieve their goals, including those that are grant-related. Mission-driven grant professionals who inform technology decisions, or contribute to web design or content, provide their organizations a seamless capacity building experience that will make their organization stronger and better positioned to seek and receive grants.

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Biographical information

Maggie Cunha is Founder and CEO of FreshGrants LLC and brings experience in multimillion dollar fundraising and grants management. She has the unique perspective of understanding both grant seeking and grant making. In addition to proposal writing, Maggie's strengths include research, website content development, and collaborative program design. Ms. Cunha received an MPH in Community Health Education from the University of Massachusetts-Amherst and a BS in Environmental Science from New Mexico State University. She can be reached through [linkedin.com/in/maggiacunha](https://www.linkedin.com/in/maggiacunha) or via email at maggie@freshgrants.com.

GPA Strategy Papers Volume 3, Issue 2

Steps to Develop a Grantsmanship Degree Program

Phyl Renninger, PhD, GPC

President, Grant Development & Management, LLC
Orange Park, FL

Karen Stinson, EdD

Director of Education, University of Wisconsin–Platteville
Platteville, WI

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 grants 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 grants 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 include:

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 grants 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 grants 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.

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Biographical Information

Phyllis Renninger, PhD, GPC, President of Grant Development & Management, LLC, is a founder and past-president of both the Grant Professionals Association (GPA) and the GPA Foundation, and served on the inaugural board of the Grant Professional Certification Institute (GPCI). Dr. Renninger helped found the North Florida Grant Professionals, a GPA Chapter, and served as the first president. Dr. Renninger conducts grant workshops nationwide and has co-written three books with Dr. Karen Stinson. Reach the authors at prenninger@aol.com.

Karen Stinson, EdD, is the Director of Education at UW-Platteville. Dr. Stinson served on the Executive Board of the Grant Professionals Association and founded the first Iowa Grant Professionals, A GPA Chapter in Iowa City. While serving as a teacher, school administrator, superintendent, college administrator, she also developed and was funded for millions of dollars in state and federal grants.

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Growing Grant Professionals: A Snapshot of Two Community-Focused Educational Programs

Christina Leigh Deitz

Instructor, Department of Public Affairs and Grant Development
Administrator, Syracuse University Maxwell School
Syracuse, NY

Melissa Whipps

Director, Foundation Relations, Syracuse University
Syracuse, NY

Abstract

Professional training in grant development is readily available. From in-person, week-long immersion classes with hefty price tags, to free hour-long webinars and self-paced online courses, there are many opportunities for professional development in this arena. However, what opportunities exist to grow the grants profession at the local level? This strategy paper describes two ongoing educational efforts in Syracuse, New York: 1) A grant writing and professional development workshop series hosted by a community foundation that aims to enhance nonprofit capacity and sustainability; and 2) An undergraduate service-learning class which pairs students with community-based nonprofits to teach grant skills while contributing to community development through the production of actual grant proposals.

Introduction

It is not unusual for nonprofit staff to have both fundraising and grant development as a part of their job responsibilities. Many have little or no formal education in these skills. Even for organizations that do not normally rely on grant funding, administrative staff may feel compelled to focus on grant applications because grants sometimes appear to

yield large rewards for less effort than other fundraising strategies (O'Neal-McElrath, 2013). As a result, many nonprofit staff members find themselves overwhelmed by the necessity to maintain best practices in grant writing techniques or to seek training for the first time.

Fortunately, there are many training opportunities available to grant novices. Common types of instructor-led options include: comprehensive, in-person, week-long immersion classes; two-day, single-topic, in-depth classes; and half-day or one-hour introductory sessions or single-topic overviews. These “in-house” trainings take place at organizational headquarters or in traveling workshops. For those who prefer self-directed training, both free and fee-based self-paced online courses are available. There are also many books on the subject. However, each of these training opportunities represents training for an individual. What happens when the focus is on improving the needs of the individual *and of the community?*

The authors of this paper are colleagues at the same university involved in separate, but similar, community-based and community-focused grant development training efforts. One is sponsored by the local community foundation with the goal of improving the quality of grant proposals received from area nonprofits. The other is an undergraduate college course offered through a long-standing, award-winning program known for community involvement. The following is a snapshot of each of these unique programs.

Community Foundation-Sponsored Grant Writing Workshops

The Central New York Community Foundation (CNYCF), established in 1927 and based in Syracuse, New York, is the largest charitable foundation in the region with assets of nearly \$190 million. In 2015, CNYCF awarded almost \$10 million in grants, primarily through its Community Grant Program, which supports nonprofit programs benefiting Onondaga and Cayuga County, New York. The Community Foundation works closely with local nonprofits and serves as a civic leader, convener, and sponsor of special initiatives designed to strengthen local nonprofits and to address the region's most pressing challenges.

Toward this end, CNYCF started its Nonprofit Essentials Workshop Series (NEWS), a series of professional development courses for the nonprofit community. NEWS topics include: Board Development, Financial Management, Understanding Financial Statements, and Grant Writing. The Community Foundation partners with experts in the community to deliver these three-hour workshops at its facility and charges a nominal fee of \$25 to cover food and to encourage attendance. Presenters are not paid. CNYCF donates the speaker fee to a local nonprofit chosen by the presenter.

In 2011 the CNYCF, in partnership with Syracuse University, designed a Grant Writing Workshop for their NEWS series. These courses have been offered at least once every year since that time, have sold out at 35 participants each time offered, and have received “strongly favorable” participant evaluations.

The Introduction to Grant Writing Workshop covers a broad range of topics essential to any nonprofit professional involved in raising funds through grants. Many local nonprofits are too small to have dedicated fundraising positions, so attendees’ roles vary—communications, marketing, event coordinators, education specialists and board members. Fundraising and grant development are job expectations, but frequently formal training or experience is lacking. These nonprofit professionals express that they feel overwhelmed and unprepared when trying to accomplish their own jobs and also asked to keep their organization financially viable. While this cannot be fully remedied in three hours, this workshop provides a solid introduction to the field and an overview of techniques, tips, and pitfalls of grant writing.

Following the first introductory workshop, CNYCF conducted a survey to determine which grant topics participants and other nonprofit professionals would be most interested in exploring in more depth. The overwhelming response was for budgets and evaluation metrics. As a result, these topics became the focus of the three-hour Advanced Grant Writing Workshop. The Advanced Workshop follows a much more interactive format. Participants bring a current project that they are developing. In the session, they work through their theory of change, draft a logic model, define program outcomes and metrics, develop a budget, and brainstorm sustainability. Workshop evaluations indicate that participants appreciate the hands-on portions of the session, would like more, and would even appreciate more time for this advanced workshop.

The NEWS series developed by the Central New York Community Foundation is an excellent model for community foundations and other organizations interested in building local nonprofit capacity. CNYCF is a trusted entity in the region and, as such, nonprofits know they will receive high-quality information from CNYCF-sponsored training. The workshop series also benefits the Foundation, as the workshops have resulted in stronger proposals from better prepared nonprofit organizations, allowing more effective work to be done in the community.

There are a few key factors leading to the success of this format. Because the Community Foundation owns its own space and attracts speakers for minimal or no fees, costs to the participants are affordable, even for the smallest nonprofits. Other advantages are that the workshops are local (most participants drive fewer than 30 minutes to attend), in-person, and focused, and they require only a half-day time commitment. Reviews of the introductory course are overwhelmingly

favorable and indicate that participants feel that it is the right amount of material at the right pace. Attendees of the advanced workshop note that they appreciate the time allocated to work on current projects and that they would like even more time to brainstorm ideas with the interactive group with the goal of improving on current proposals in progress.

Undergraduate Grant Writing Education

The Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs Program at Syracuse University is home to the Public Policy Major, known for graduating students with the skills and intent to make the world a better place (Levy, 2007). Courses emphasize the development of skills including technical writing, public presentations, systematic evaluation, proficiency in Excel, and teamwork. The program itself emphasizes community service. A significant portion of the curriculum consists of hands-on field work—accomplished in partnership with community agencies—through internships, research projects, and service-learning courses. Over the past 40 years, the Public Affairs Program has helped hundreds of nonprofits and government organizations in Onondaga County and throughout the world with research and service projects.

Since 2003, a consistently popular offering has been Introduction to Grant Writing—a 15-week service-learning course, which places equal emphasis on the learning in the classroom and the service provided to the community (Furco, 1996). The course pairs students with community-based nonprofit organizations to learn about grant development by identifying appropriate funding opportunities for the organization, and creating a full grant proposal for submission. Class size is small (10-12 students) to facilitate ample feedback among the instructor, the students, and the partner organizations. Class time is divided equally between instruction, question and answer periods, and lab work, during which students either research relevant funder information and data for use in their proposals, or write proposal content and provide real-time peer reviews.

Course content focuses on basic elements of grant development. Two requirements the students meet are to research the community to validate the needs identified by their organizations and to manage and document their communications, including site visits, conference calls, and email exchanges.

Besides the final course product—a fully packaged proposal delivered to the organization for submission—a unique feature of the semester is an evening with local foundations. Students deliver three-minute “elevator speeches” about a community need and how their organizations propose to address that need. Executive Directors and Program Officers from local foundations provide insight on their foundation missions and methods of grant making to the students and invited organizational

representatives. The evening ends with a lively question and answer period, which provides more useful, and often candid, information. Foundation personnel respond to these events enthusiastically, calling them an enjoyable way to learn about new needs and organizations in their community, while fostering learning for the students and organizations. Students and organizational representatives consistently report that this Panel of Local Foundations event facilitates a greater understanding about philanthropic operations of the individual funders but also of the importance of relationships among funders in a single community.

Students gain skills, experience, and knowledge necessary to draft successful grant applications, with the intent of improving the quality of life in their community. Each graduate brings to a prospective employer applied experience in identifying funding targets, and technical grant development. Course reviews consistently point to the “real world” design of the course as the most valuable aspect: pairing with a community organization to produce a tangible product for potential local impact. Alumni of the Policy Studies program have gone on to be employed as nonprofit administrators, case workers, and researchers.

The impact of this course extends beyond the individual students. Each partner community organization receives a new, eager volunteer; one specifically tasked to identify, apply for, and hopefully secure a new funding stream for their programs. Organizational representatives are exposed to new materials on grantwriting, feedback from the instructor and local funders on their project ideas, and the potential for securing new funding for their organization. Local foundation representatives learn of community needs, and of organizations and projects responding to those needs. The instructor benefits each year from relationships with new and existing community-based nonprofits and learns about and draws attention to community needs. From this annual array of partnerships, the university-community relationship itself is strengthened through small but impactful collaborations.

Conclusion

While in-person and online grant development training opportunities exist in many forms, most focus on filling an information void for an individual. In contrast, the two educational offerings described in this paper developed to address individual skill-building while providing a positive community impact. The potential benefits realized through both forms of instruction, a community-based grant workshop and an undergraduate service learning course, are shown on the next page:

Table 1. Benefits of Community-Based Grant Writing Instruction

		Benefits					
		Grant writing skills	Nonprofit Management skills	Collaboration skills	Funding generated	Community awareness	Goodwill investment
Beneficiaries	Student	X	X	X		X	X
	Nonprofit rep	X	X	X	X		X
	Nonprofit org			X	X		X
	Instructor			X		X	X
	Foundation rep					X	X
	Community				X		X
	University					X	X

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Biographical Information

Christina Leigh Deitz, DPS-IM, MLS, is a part-time instructor and Grant Development Administrator at Syracuse University’s Maxwell School. Christina holds a Doctorate of Professional Studies in Information Management and Master of Library Science, both from Syracuse University’s School of Information Studies.

With 13 years of experience as a grants professional, she focuses on building and facilitating funding research and grantwriting skills at the undergraduate, graduate and faculty levels. Reach the authors at cldeitz@maxwell.syr.edu.

Melissa Whipps, MS, Director of Foundation Relations at Syracuse University, works with faculty to secure funding from local and national foundations. Melissa has been a fundraiser for eight years, prior to which she was Assistant Director for Research and Education with Oregon Sea Grant. Melissa holds a master's degree from Oregon State University in Oceanography and is pursuing a master's degree in Public Administration at Syracuse University's Maxwell School. Melissa is a frequent presenter on grantwriting.

GPA Strategy Papers Volume 3, Issue 4

Writing Grant Applications that Speak to Community Review

Leigh Nanney Hersey, PhD

Assistant Professor and MPA Coordinator,
University of Louisiana at Monroe
Monroe, LA

Abstract

Many grantmaking organizations now incorporate community members in the grant review process. Rather than depending solely on staff members, these organizations include community members to gather feedback from a larger population, to recruit and retain donors, or to increase civic engagement and leadership skills for citizens, members, or students. This shift has the potential to alter how grants professionals approach the grant application. This strategy paper identifies how funders use community members in the grant review process and suggests practices to write grant applications that appeal to these volunteers. The paper shares examples from the author's participation in community-based reviews and highlights strategies for connecting the issues of the grantseeking organization to the passions of the volunteers engaged in the community review process.

Introduction

The grant review process has evolved over the years. Founders of early philanthropic foundations heavily influenced which organizations received funding. In the 1970s, the field of philanthropy became more professionalized, leading to grant applications that were longer, more detailed, and outcomes-driven (Frumkin, 2006). Today, large national and international foundations still depend heavily on program officers for guidance in the grantmaking process. However, smaller foundations that focus on local issues and community-based nonprofit organizations increasingly include community members in the review process. This

shift toward community engagement can have an impact on how the grant application is reviewed.

Similarly, many corporations now conduct voting contests on social media to award resources to nonprofit organizations. For example, the Toyota “Cars for Good” program ran from 2011 to 2013 “to involve and engage communities across the US...to determine which one hundred NGOs will receive free Toyota autos” (Kesavan et al., 2013). While the application process tends to be significantly shorter than traditional applications, this corporate social responsibility program speaks to the trend of engaging the community in philanthropic efforts. This paper helps grant professionals identify some ways that funding organizations include community members in the review process and suggests how grant professionals can adapt their writing to appeal to this group of reviewers.

Types of Community Review

Although some organizations traditionally engage community members in the grants process, this trend has recently increased to include a broader scope of reviewers in grant evaluation. The local offices of United Way of America have long depended on volunteers to participate in allocating funds to the member agencies. Membership organizations that award grants depend heavily on their members to review grant applications. However, more recently, foundations such as the Durfee Foundation and the Triangle Community Foundation began including community members and representatives from previous grants in the review process (Bourns, 2010). Also, university students often review grants through courses that include student philanthropy.

This section identifies the primary ways that community members may participate in the grant review process and influence decision-making for grants. The most common ways to include community members in the grant review process are through federated fundraising campaigns, membership organizations, giving circles, community foundations, and student philanthropy.

Community members have historically helped allocate funds from federated fundraising campaigns, such as those conducted by the United Way of America or Jewish federations. These organizations act as intermediaries “receiving gifts and often making decisions on the donor’s behalf out of a general fund” (McCambridge, 2013). The local affiliates of United Way of America recruit volunteers from workplace campaigns to visit member agencies and assess their programming before making funding recommendations to local boards of directors. Since many volunteers in the review process lack topical program expertise, United Way offers training for volunteers on the criteria expected of a successful partner (Harris et al., 2011).

Jewish federations also have a long history of supporting their communities through federated fundraising campaigns and subsequent grantmaking. While Jewish federations are successful in fundraising, many recognize the need to improve their grantmaking strategies (Edelsburg, 2004). In an effort to accomplish this goal, some Jewish federations engage in more participatory philanthropy that creates interactive experiences for donors and demonstrates that contributed dollars make a difference in the community (Edelsburg, 2004).

Another way community volunteers play a role in grantmaking is through various membership organizations. For example, members of the Junior League develop leadership skills and give back to the community through volunteerism and grantmaking. The organization focuses on developing leadership skills for women (Association of Junior League International, Inc., 2016) and incorporates grantmaking as an activity that helps meet this goal. Members participate in the review of applications for grant funds that will help their communities. While Junior League is one of the more prominent membership organizations currently awarding grants, many cities have other local groups that conduct similar programs.

Giving circles are another area of community-based philanthropy showing recent growth. Giving circles encourage “individuals pooling money and other resources and then deciding together how and where to give these away” (Eikenberry, 2007). Some giving circles have more structure than others, leading to differences in the decision-making process. Giving circles vary from other membership-based organizations in that their sole purpose is philanthropy.

Community foundations connect philanthropists to local nonprofit organizations through donor-advised funds. The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation (2012) recognizes that keys to success for community foundations include incorporating local leaders and residents and representing the entire community in the foundation’s governance and decision making. Community foundations include local leaders and residents through programs that encourage younger donors to contribute smaller amounts of money. “This innovative program allows members to pool their money and, for a dollar a day, to make a positive impact on our community” (Community Foundation of Greater Memphis, 2016). Donors to the fund make a collective decision about which organizations receive grants.

The final category of community review is student philanthropy, or “an experiential learning approach that provides students with the opportunity to study social problems and nonprofit organizations, and then make decisions about investing funds in them” (Olberding, 2009). For example, the Learning by Giving Foundation supports student philanthropy in more than 40 colleges and universities (Learning by Giving Foundation, 2016). Other programs of note include those at the

University of Oregon and Northern Kentucky University. However, unlike other forms of community review, students in these programs are less likely to contribute financially to the grant award.

Writing for Community Review

Johnson (2016) found that the processes leading to final decisions on grant awards vary between foundations with traditional boards and those with community boards, suggesting that grant professionals need to adapt their applications to target this review audience. Five key strategies will help grant professionals make this adaptation: 1) know the review process, 2) connect the heart and the head, 3) speak the community reviewers' language, 4) help the reviewers understand the problem and the solution, and 5) pretend the reviewers do not know the grantseeking organization. While some grant professionals may already incorporate these strategies, they may need to make additional adjustments to address this review strategy. The point here is *not* that community-based grant review is new, but that grantseeking organizations still experience difficulties in connecting to this group of reviewers.

Know the Review Process

The first key to understanding how to write grant applications for community-based review is to understand the process. While all examples depend on the community for input, the final decision-making process may vary. For example, in the case of student reviewers, students can either make the final grant decisions (direct philanthropy) or be part of a multi-tiered review process (indirect philanthropy) with staff members from the funding organization making the final decision (Olberding, 2009). Giving circles can also vary in the amount of input members have in the decision-making process, from all members reaching a consensus to a subcommittee of some members deciding on the awards (Eikenberry, 2007).

Connect the Heart and Head

Grant opportunities are increasingly results-oriented and depend on the grant seeker's ability to demonstrate impact. While this is also true with grants selected with input from community members, the heart still plays an important role in the decision-making process. When writing for community reviewers, grant professionals must ensure that they address the problem at hand and connect the reviewer to those impacted by the problem. Even if the organization's results are impressive, if the reviewers do not connect to the need, the impact will seem unimportant to them.

Communicating this need to student reviewers may be a particular challenge for some organizations. Many students have limited experience

with the issues at hand and do not understand their full impact. For example, in one philanthropy course, the student review team could not connect to a grant application on senior transportation. The students did not understand why seniors were not comfortable calling a taxi or ride-share driver. The students failed to recognize the underlying needs of the population which made existing transportation options unfavorable. The inability to make this connection through the grant application led to poor reviews by the students.

Speak Their Language

The best practice of avoiding jargon in grant applications is especially important when community members are the reviewers. Program officers who focus on a specific issue will become familiar with common industry terms. However, community reviewers are less likely to be familiar with these terms. Therefore, the narrative of the grant application should use more common language. If students are the reviewers, grant professionals should pay particular attention to avoid language that students may not grasp. For example, people who work for organizations addressing hunger issues may be familiar with terms like 'food insecurity' and 'food deserts.' However, students may lack exposure to these terms and not clearly understand the meaning. Grant professionals can increase understanding by providing brief definitions of these terms in the narrative of the grant application.

Help the Reviewers Understand the Problem and the Solution

Many community reviewers may be informed of community issues as reported by the mainstream media. However, they may not be familiar with the underlying research behind the problem and how the proposed project will make an impact. Grant professionals should include data that clearly state the problem and the methods the organization will use to address the issue. In addition to providing quantitative data, grant professionals should provide a narrative example that will help the reviewers connect with the issue on a personal level.

Pretend the Reviewers Do Not Know the Organization

Community members that serve on review teams may be interested in impacting their communities and may consider themselves knowledgeable about community issues and the nonprofit organizations available to solve them. However, most of them have other jobs and are unable to dedicate a significant amount of time to researching the issues and organizations beyond the applications. Additionally, reviewers new to the community may participate in a collective grant making opportunity as a way to meet people and are unfamiliar with local organizations. This contrasts to foundation program directors and

government agencies with paid staff who spend a large part of their days addressing community issues. Therefore, the grant professional should assume the reviewers do not know much about the grant seeking organization. The application should provide reviewers with complete information about the organization that will help them understand the organization and its approach to community problems. This clear context can help an organization stand out and garner further discussion during the grant review process.

Conclusion

Experienced grant professionals understand the importance of adapting grant applications to the values of the funding organization. Even with this knowledge, the pressure of deadlines and work with multiple types of funding organizations can lead to overlooking some best practices. This paper presents best practices in making particular adjustments when writing grant applications for organizations that incorporate community members in the funding decisions rather than depend solely on staff members. Grant professionals who are purposeful in making the connection between the organization and the review team will improve the likelihood of the application's receiving the full, thoughtful review it deserves.

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Biographical Information

Dr. Leigh Nanney Hersey is an Assistant Professor and MPA Coordinator in Political Science and Public Administration at the University of Louisiana at Monroe. She entered academia after working in the nonprofit sector for more than a dozen years, including both writing and reviewing grants. For the past four years Dr. Hersey has taught an undergraduate course that includes a student philanthropy component. In addition, she sits on several community-based grant review teams. Contact Dr. Hersey at leigh.hersey@att.net.