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Journal of the
American Association of Grant Professionals

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The American Association of Grant Professionals (AAGP), a nonprofit 501(c)(6) membership association, 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, AAGP:

- 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.
- Promotes positive relationships between grant professionals and stakeholders.

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About This Publication:
The Journal of the AAGP is a professional journal devoted to the improvement of the grants professional and the profession. It is a resource for teaching and learning within the profession and provides an outlet for sharing information about the profession. It also provides a forum for the discussion of issues within the grants profession and the expression of philosophical ideas.
Dear Reader:

The Editorial Board of the AAGP Journal thanks you for your readership of this publication. We appreciate your support and suggestions. We hope you enjoy this issue of the Journal and will continue to let us know what you want this publication to be.

We would like to make you aware of some coming changes. Our fall 2007 issue, which will be published by mid-November, will be dedicated to articles on ethics and the grants profession. One of AAGP’s main tenets is to provide guidance and uphold ethical standards for the profession. If you are interested in contributing to the upcoming issue, please see the Call for Papers on the AAGP website (www.grantprofessionals.org). Article proposals will be due May 15th and full articles will be due August 1st.

We have added a Letters to the Editor section. If you have comments or discussion on any of our content please send them to journal@grantprofessionals.org and we will publish them in the next issue unless you designate otherwise.

A major change in procedure for the next issue and those that follow is the article review process. Articles may be peer reviewed. This means articles are sent to volunteer reviewers without any author identification attached. Reviewers will not be on the Research and Authority Committee, the Journal Editorial Board, or part of the publishing process in any way. They will have signed a confidentiality agreement. Reviewers’ comments are forwarded to the author(s) for incorporation into article revision. If indicated, reviewers will be from the field designated by the article. For example, if the article deals with grant management by a city or small town, the reviewer must be familiar with, and have experience in, that field. This change will enhance the quality of the articles published. If you have questions about the peer review process or wish to become a peer reviewer, please email journal@grantprofessionals.org.

Again, thank you for supporting this publication. We continually strive to ensure it serves the needs of AAGP members.

Sincerely,

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Abstract

Have you ever wanted to share good ideas with your colleagues? Do you ever find yourself explaining a grant process more than once? Have you ever read an articles and thought that you could have written an article just like that (or better)? If so, you should consider writing for publication. This article takes the reader through typical obstacles that might keep you from publishing and explains how to overcome those concerns. This article will offer you the information needed to add “published articles” to your resume.

Narrative

Writing for publication in a professional journal provides the opportunity to see your name in print, help develop your profession, and enable you to include journal writing among the many accomplishments listed on your resume.

For every time that you have thought about writing in a professional publication, there have undoubtedly been many reasons why you have not written your ideas down or submitted written materials to a publication. When we have urged colleagues to write and publish in a professional journal, the three most common reasons we have heard for not sending manuscripts to editors are: 1) Not enough time to finish writing with all the other writing projects on the schedule; 2) Fear of rejection; and, 3) Not knowing the process. This article will provide you with tips to get past these three reasons, and get publishing!

Common Reason 1) – Not Enough Time to Write an Article

Not enough time may be a line used by many people, but we are a profession of time managers who meet deadlines for a living. Writing for publication is probably not one of our “lines” as grant professionals, but in this section we will share tips to help you find the time to write for publications.

Writing the First Draft

Start with what you know best. Use the work that you have already completed—PowerPoint presentations, workshop agendas, and notes from a team meeting or speeches to an
audience—to develop an article. Those presentations had an introduction, body, and conclusion, so you already have the outline of your article completed. Think about methods that you have adopted in your office or issues that you have explained repeatedly to proposal development teams. Those are things that you know best and could be the subject of an article. Write the first draft with the intent of getting those ideas down on paper quickly, with editing and proofreading to come later. The draft could be in an outline format or just a free flow of ideas.

**Maintaining a Topic List**

Quite often the ideas for articles will flow faster than you can write. In this case, maintain a list of future writing topics. By having a list of potential publication topics, material can be saved as authors read professional or personal publications. We tend to notice articles, magazine accounts, and newspaper stories that pertain to a topic in which we are interested. By maintaining a list, cumulating references, and jotting down ideas, you will format an article in a short period of time in an organized manner.

**Finding a Co-author**

Co-authors not only help with developing ideas and serving as a good sounding board, but also help with finding time for writing by sharing the task. To find that partner, look to presentation partners, fellow committee members, or an acquaintance you have met through your professional organizations, such as AAGP.

Co-workers also make great co-authors, especially if you are responding to needs identified in your daily work. If you ever find yourselves sharing concerns about a grant development experience, you can turn that into an article while providing solutions. The proximity of a co-worker as a co-author also saves time by limiting some distance or scheduling issues.

**Scheduling the Work**

Scheduling time to write is an essential task. If you are going to become a frequent writer for professional journals, prioritize your list of working topics into a long-term writing schedule. Writing to deadlines helps keep the writing projects current, prevents the references from becoming dated, and allows authors to evaluate projects at regular intervals in deciding whether to continue, to expand deadlines, or to abandon specific projects.

Establish a writing schedule and procedure that fits each individual. Family obligations, job responsibilities, vacations, and other variables can profoundly affect the time spent in writing, revising, and returning manuscripts. Allowing extra time in your writing schedule for emergencies can greatly reduce stress and increase opportunities for successful and timely completion of manuscripts.

**Common Reason 2) – Fear of Rejection**

No matter who you are, or how long you have been writing, you worry about having your ideas or writing rejected. What if you write something that a majority of people disagrees with or what if your issue is not a common one shared by others? Writing for publication is not much different than writing our first grant application. The phrase “Just do it” is probably the best advice for the first-time writer. In addition, we offer a few suggestions to reduce or eliminate the fear of rejection, especially for first-time writers.
Finding a Co-author

In addition to a co-author helping with time management or saving time-on-task, the co-author can help dispel some of the discomfort associated with writing. By having a co-author, you can also increase the probability of completing professional journal writing projects with a partner sharing the goal. This section will detail the advantages and disadvantages of co-authoring and then present suggestions for journal writing and publishing that have been helpful for the authors of this article.

First, a co-author provides an automatic editor. Locating a co-author and designing a workable system is the first and most difficult part, but it can be done and eliminates the need to rely on family, friends, and colleagues for the time-consuming rereading of manuscripts. A co-author has a vested interest in reading and rereading a manuscript that will bear both names.

Second, co-authors provide discipline. It is difficult to motivate yourself to continue on a project, particularly when extensive revising and editing are needed. The initial draft is usually the easiest and most exciting to write, but few authors are able to write just one draft. Many even write several versions before final publication in a journal. Working with a journal editor provides some external motivation, but most journal editors are also busy professionals with their own timetables and deadlines.

Third, co-authors provide added expertise to complement one’s own areas of interest. If the focus of the potential article is specific to a certain discipline (for example, American history), then two individuals in the field of American history, but possibly in different states, may be able to collaborate.

Fourth, co-authoring provides greater writing possibilities because of increased professional diversity. Many professional journals require membership for publication. By combining two professionals with different backgrounds, greater access is assured to professional publication possibilities. There are greater possibilities if authors split their tasks, with one initiating and one editing, or with team members alternating between two jobs. By having two different backgrounds, greater coverage of information and content is possible so that new trends can be noted that transcend a specific discipline.

Fifth, a critical benefit of working with co-authors is that your own writing skills are enhanced by having your work critically edited by a professional colleague. Not only are your own writing skills likely to improve, but also the writing project that you submit for publication will benefit from careful review. The extensive editing, revising, and compromise required in a co-author relationship often enhances the quality of the written manuscript and helps you become an even more proficient writer.

Other benefits of co-authoring are less tangible but nonetheless important considerations. Co-authors serve as benevolent “task masters,” forcing you to meet journal deadlines and continue sending revisions. Co-authoring can also expand your view of grant writing and the world. Working on projects with others can open a window to the knowledge, opinions, and feelings of other colleagues. Many long-lasting friendships and writing relationships are forged from co-authoring projects. Historically, established authors mentor novice journal writers by providing support, encouragement, and suggestions. The established author benefits by receiving new ideas and practical perspectives on current issues while the novice journal writer gains experience in the specifics of journal writing.

We would initially recommend writing with a colleague who works in a similar field. You will have more in common and will speak the same language. You will also have a more focused view for your first article with that colleague. Once you have established a writing
relationship, you can then easily include others from diverse backgrounds and areas of the country, especially if you are proficient with email and other technologies.

Before starting on a writing project, decide which name will appear first, who will get the original copy of the publication and how any expenses or gratuities will be divided. Many good writing teams have disbanded over misunderstandings about one of these issues.

Writing with a colleague can also have its drawbacks if careful planning does not initially go into writing and the establishment of the co-authoring relationship. Even if your original intent were to write only one manuscript, we would recommend that you carefully consider the following procedures to establish a positive writing experience.

**Dealing with Criticism or Understanding Rejection**

Rejection does not always mean that your article is not a good one—it may mean that you might need to look for a different venue to submit to or you might change the format of the article for resubmission to the same journal. Almost all journal editors will send back comments from the peer reviewers on how to improve the article and suggestions for other venues that are more appropriate for publication of the topic. If you persist, you will be a published author. Once again, publishing is very similar to grant development. We receive reviewer’s comments on a submitted application and often use those comments to improve our product. We are also rejected and our grant applications might not be funded for a variety of reasons. Writing for publications is the exact same way. We are not a profession of “quitters.” We are professionals who can take criticism or rejection, revamp, and resubmit for ultimate success.

**Common Reason 3) – Not Knowing the Process**

Once you have made the decision to write articles and perhaps have located a co-author, the next step is to start writing for publication. Not knowing the writing process is probably the biggest reason why a grant professional might not submit an article, but this next section will explain the process with suggestions that we have found useful in our own writing and editing.

**Writing for Success**

Brainstorming separately or together about possible writing topics is an excellent way to open communication and to explore the many different areas that you might develop in your writing. Each author can then indicate those topics that are of current interest. This time to brainstorm can also allow information gathering about subtopics and side topics where each author can provide expertise.

When you start to write an article, get your ideas down first. It helps to organize your thoughts by using an outline or logic model. Make sure your articles follow in a sequential fashion. You do not see many articles that ramble on without structure (they exist, but they usually are not published). When you write, remember the classic fourth-grade teacher’s advice: tell me what you are going to say, say it, and summarize what you said.

Decide who will write the first draft. First drafts can be written by the lead author of a particular manuscript, or written by co-authors together from sketchy outlines prepared in advance. Some co-authors prefer to brainstorm subtopics and divide portions of manuscripts to write, arranging to combine and develop transitions together at a later time. Other writing teams may work from completely developed outlines, each writing individual sections and revising as their work progresses. Whatever the method chosen, clear-cut methodologies should be decided
upon and, if practical, written out so that each team member is aware of expectations and responsibilities. Schedules need to be updated regularly to provide a practical, flexible system.

Do not fail to do research. Without research to back up statements, you do not have credibility. You can cite experiences, examples, or can quote information from professional sources. Lawyers do the same thing in court when trying to prove a point by citing previous court rulings to support a position. Your article is the same. Give yourself credibility when you write by providing examples or research citations.

This is also the critical time to decide on the journal. You will want to read the last few issues of the journal to see which topics have been recently discussed. Nothing aggravates editors more than an article that is clearly never intended for their journal.

Another “no-no” in article submission is to send the same article to two different journals. If both articles are accepted, the same information could be published at the same time, which is not considered acceptable or ethical in journal writing. (Many professional journals state in the Author Guidelines, “We do not accept dual or previously submitted manuscripts.”). If your intent were to write and submit multiple articles, this would be a good time to generate a list of journals and then divide the list for each author to seek out author guidelines, copies of the journals, and information regarding themed issues

Editing Your Work

Edit and revise extensively before submitting for publication. Editing is probably the least favorite job of most authors, but also the most important to ensure publication of a manuscript. Having good ideas and wonderful research is of no value if readers cannot understand what you have written or follow your presentation. Read your manuscript objectively, as if you were a member of the intended audience. In addition, read your manuscript aloud to make sure that your ideas flow and that there are no grammatical errors or incoherent sentences. If dealing with sensitive issues or time-dependent material, we would recommend adding a disclaimer. For example, if you are providing information about a Web site or state certification requirement, you will want to warn readers that they will need to make contact to ensure that the information is still accurate. Journal articles can take weeks to publish after submission and approval. You would not want to provide information that is not accurate or timely.

Editing is extremely important. The benefit of working with a co-author is that each writer can proofread for the other. Who better to thoroughly proofread your writing than your partner, whose name will appear on the article, and who has a stake in a quality presentation? Even though there are (at least) two of you, it is always advisable to have a third, non-involved party do a final review. We all know that as we work closely with our writing, we will often read what we think it is saying, instead of what it actually says. In addition, in this day and age of technology, spelling and grammar checks are wonderful, but cannot replace your knowledge (for example, using “that” or “which”). Another reason why a good co-author cannot be replaced by technology is that the electronic grammar checks might make a recommendation that is not your intent. Grammar and spell check, as you have undoubtedly noticed in your other professional writing, does not correct your work flawlessly.

Manuscript preparation

Prepare your final manuscript for publication in a very professional manner. The editor’s first and often only impression of you comes from the printed page you send. When submitting manuscripts in print copy:
• Double-space everything, including references.
• Use letter quality or near-letter quality print and good quality paper.
• If the journal required a print copy submission, put your manuscript in a folder and mail first class in a 9 x 12 envelope so that the manuscript arrives flat and readable. We suggest including either a self-addressed, stamped envelope or a self-addressed postcard so that you are notified of the receipt of the manuscript.
• Make sure you include the required number of copies and the recommended format for electronic transmittal. Most professional journals are peer reviewed, with three or more peer reviewers reading and commenting on your submission for publication.

The easier the process is for the editor to read and send out for review, the more likely you will be published. With your submission packet, make sure you enclose a cover letter briefly describing the article and providing brief biographical information and signed author assurances indicating that the manuscript you enclosed has not been previously published or simultaneously sent to another journal. We have included a sample cover letter for the *AAGP Journal* that is brief and includes all the essential components:

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AAGP Journal Editor,

Enclosed is our article entitled “Sharing Your Ideas in Publications.” This article is a call to publication for AAGP members. We are asking them to consider writing articles for publication in professional journals. The authors provide suggestions for writing clear, publishable articles as well as some comments on the advantages and potential pitfalls of co-authoring. We believe this article will provide some excellent suggestions to the readers of your journal and increase member participation in sharing experiences and ideas in print.

This article has not been previously published or simultaneously sent to another journal. We authorize you to send our manuscript out for review and publication in your journal.

Thank you for your consideration of this article. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
(Sign names)
```

If you intend to write for e-journals, the same general suggestions apply. You will want to make sure your manuscript is in the recommended format, either e-mailed, on a CD, or in a PDF format. Following these guidelines will ensure that the editor receives the manuscript in a format that is easily transmitted for review or publication.

**Things to Avoid in Publishing**

Just as we have in grant development, there are guidelines as well as rules, regulations, and ethical standards for publishing. A few helpful hints to keep in mind:

• Never submit an article to a journal that you have not read.
• Never submit an article to two journals at the same time.
• Do not submit any material that has been previously published by you. You would think that once you have written something, it belongs to you. But the reality is that once you publish, your words belong to that publication – so in order to use them again, you have to reference the article and publication
• Do not plagiarize. Check for proper citations and references.

Summary

Following these suggestions may not guarantee that you will have a published manuscript the first time, particularly if you send your materials to a major journal. National education journals, such as Reading Teacher, Journal of Reading, and Educational Researcher, have acceptance rates of less than five percent. However, you may have the hot topic that the editor knows will generate reader interest.

So, convince yourself that you have time to write. Find a co-author, schedule the work, think of ways to motivate yourself to write, ponder ideas that you could use as a subject for an article, write that first draft, and be sure to edit your work. Do not even think about rejection, especially for first-time writers. Just like grants, sometimes you will accomplish your goal (the grant award, the published paper) and sometimes you will not. Just keep trying, and write for success!

Short List of Journals
(Please note: The authors of this article recommend that you thoroughly research any journal or publication listed below. This list is simply provided to stimulate some ideas of the potential journals or where you could send articles to be published. It is not meant as an exclusive list or as an endorsement of any of the following publications)

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### Magazines and Professional Publications

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<td>Education Next</td>
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<td>Community College Review</td>
<td>Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management</td>
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Note: In addition to these national journals, there are also (in most areas) state journals for these professional organizations.

### References


Designing Grant Proposals and Evaluation Plans in the Age of No Child Left Behind

by

Jason W. Osborne, Amy S. Overbay, Ellen S. Vasu
North Carolina State University

Abstract

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) changed the rules for how the US Department of Education and other state and national governmental agencies evaluate education grant proposals. NCLB established a clear hierarchy for value or desirability of scientific evidence and a clear guideline for ranking or scoring proposals based on this hierarchy, with randomized experimental designs ranked as most desirable. Grant applications with true experimental research designs are therefore more likely to be funded than research designs utilizing matched comparison group designs, which in turn are more fundable than correlational designs, mixed (quantitative/qualitative) designs, or purely qualitative designs (e.g., case studies, focus groups).

While this sounds like good policy, it presents significant challenges for grantwriters in conceptualizing grant applications and evaluation plans. Despite the challenges, experimental methodologies in grant applications are possible (and highly desirable), but only if carefully planned and executed. We also discuss best practices in matched subjects designs (the second
most desirable methodology according to NCLB), as well as the issue of multiple outcomes, and the benefits of involving highly-qualified evaluators during the conceptualization and writing of grants, what constitutes a highly-qualified evaluator, and how to find them.

**Narrative**

Grant professionals are increasingly called upon to assist clients with embedding accountability and evaluation designs into their proposals. State and federal governmental granting agencies are particularly insistent on seeing a methodologically sound and desirable research design and/or evaluation plan for demonstrating that funds are used effectively. While other fields (e.g., medicine) have long had ways of ranking the strength of research designs and evidence, it is relatively recently, and particularly since the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, that the field of education has been forced to think in this fashion. In fact, one explicit goal of NCLB was to reform education into an “evidence-based field” like medicine or the natural sciences (US Department of Education, 2002). The accountability orientation of NCLB has a number of important ramifications, one of which is a de facto requirement that grant applications include a rigorous evaluation plan. But what, exactly, does that mean for grant professionals? How can we help our clients meet the “evidence-based” standards of NCLB?

**Step 1: Deciding what you want to know**

Generating an evaluation design is a multi-step process that is often driven by a number of real-world concerns, including cost and feasibility. Still, high-quality research and evaluation always starts with a question: What do you want to know? Do you want to know whether an intervention raises student test scores, lowers dropout rates, improves utilization of instructional technology, improves teacher retention, or decreases school violence? Challenge yourself and your clients to formulate a **defining question**--the single sentence that captures the goal of the project.

The clearer you and your clients are about the questions at the beginning, the better and more effective a grant application will be. The entire project rests on this defining question, and ancillary questions that relate to it, as the design of the project, and particularly the evaluation portion, will follow directly from it. Depending on the type of theoretical approach demanded by the situation, these questions may change and new ones may emerge during the course of the research project, but the questions posed at the outset of the project have a fundamental impact on the design of the research and the way in which it is carried out.

When generating research questions about the intervention under evaluation, it is important to think broadly about who and what will be affected by the program, and what kinds of outcomes the program is intended to have. For example, if the intervention is being deployed in a school, improved student achievement will probably be the penultimate outcome. However, achievement changes rarely happen in a vacuum. It is important to take a broad view of the range of possible effects of the program at different levels—for several reasons.

One reason is related to the thorny issues surrounding the statistical volatility of the student accountability designs used by many states (for example, see Hill and DePascale, 2003). Additionally, state-administered assessments may not be specifically tailored to measure the kinds of changes produced by the program under evaluation. It may be that your intervention is trying to improve critical thinking skills in students, but state achievement tests do not adequately measure critical thinking. There is no reason to expect these tests to show changes based on your intervention in this situation. Lastly, changes in student achievement may happen
as the end product of a long “chain” of outcomes, and may take a longer period of time to manifest than the duration of the evaluation. Thus, it is important for researchers to avoid putting all their eggs in the student achievement basket and take into account a number of different possible results of the intervention, based on the best available research in the field. You need to think about what constituencies are affected by a project and in what ways. Like a stone tossed into a quiet pond, any given project creates ripples that may be interesting and important. For example, schools are intended to serve students, but teachers, administration, staff, superintendents and other LEA administration, families (particularly parents and siblings), and entire communities may be involved in and affected by an intervention. In education, researchers are concerned with achievement, but achievement can be related to attitudes and values, beliefs, skills, behaviors, selfconcept or self-efficacy, and so forth. At times you will need to cast a broad net to see the full effect of projects.

We are involved in a large-scale evaluation of a major instructional technology integration model in high-need (Title I) elementary and middle schools. It is obvious that in our study, end-of-grade test scores are the 800-pound gorilla hiding in the closet, but it is also the case that many other outcomes of importance occur with an intervention of this type. Thus, it was important for us to examine multiple outcomes for students, teachers, administrators, and schools. Because the intervention involved the introduction of new technologies into the classroom, we examined variables such as attitudes toward technology and computer skills, in addition to scores from standardized end-of-grade tests. Because teachers were receiving intensive professional development, we studied their classroom practices, as well as their technology skills and attitudes. Because the intervention was being implemented school-wide, we examined its effects on school policies and programs (e.g., the use of the media center). By casting a broader investigative net, we were able to describe the effects of the intervention more comprehensively than if we had focused exclusively on student achievement.

The benefit of this type of approach is twofold. First, a more comprehensive view of the effects of a particular project makes it a more interesting project to more funding agencies and other constituencies. Secondly, and more practically, you are more likely to find something interesting if you look at multiple outcomes. Perhaps we will not see any increase in student achievement in our evaluation. If that is all we looked at, we would have to conclude the project was unsuccessful. But what if we see no achievement changes, yet we see teachers becoming more student-centered, skillful, and progressive in their teaching, more satisfied with their jobs? These kinds of outcomes might be even more important, because they bode well for the long-term health of the school, and lead us to expect rising achievement in the future. We would never have seen these patterns if we had not asked the questions.

**Step 2: How can you find out?**

After identifying the defining question(s) to be addressed by the evaluation, it is time to make decisions about what types of methodologies should be used to yield the best and most useful information. Different types of research questions lead to different types of research designs. For example, a question like “How do students work in groups after exposure to the intervention?” could be addressed through a qualitative design using document analysis, observation, and interviews. However, questions such as “To what extent was time on task related to student performance?” would be best addressed through a quantitative design that uses statistical analyses.
There is much literature on the relative advantages and disadvantages of qualitative and quantitative approaches. We will briefly say two things about this debate. First, it is somewhat irrelevant, as NCLB specifically ranks qualitative approaches near the bottom of desirable methodologies (more on this later). Second, we believe the debate is entirely misguided. There are few cases in which one type of data is completely sufficient to understand what is going on, regardless of the discipline or type of project. The experimental (quantitative) designs inform, and are informed, by rich, contextualized, detailed, qualitative data. A qualitative design that focuses on uncovering rich information about a single case will not yield statistically generalizable results. On the other hand, a quantitative design in which thousands of respondents are surveyed can give researchers a good idea about how another group of very similar respondents would answer the same exact questions—but may not tell us why, or provide us with a deeper understanding of those respondents.

Table 1 provides a brief overview of some of the characteristics of qualitative and quantitative research designs. It is important to note that some research methods lend themselves to both qualitative and quantitative uses; for example, case studies can be used in experimental research, and questionnaires can be interpreted qualitatively.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Key Terminology/Methods</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Qualitative Designs</strong></td>
<td>• Naturalistic • Provides rich description • Context-specific</td>
<td>• Ethnography • Interview • Observation • Document Analysis • Interpretation • Case study</td>
<td>• Provides richer information • Can help capture what “really” happened and why</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quantitative Designs</strong></td>
<td>• Researcher-controlled • Generalizable • Large-scale</td>
<td>• Experiment • Matched groups • Surveys • Tests • Statistical analysis</td>
<td>• Can identify trends • Can pinpoint/predict specific changes in outcomes • Allows more generalizations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
there is such a difference. Imagine now that in one school there is no elevator to move laptop
carts, smart boards, and other technology to the teachers on the second floor. An important
lesson is learned, but only because we had local site evaluators in the schools regularly talking to
faculty and administration.

Our approach has been to utilize “mixed method” designs that can tell us the broad trends
quantitatively and also allow us to answer the more interesting “why” and “how” questions via
more qualitative inquiry. Thus, we can provide answers to questions that no purely quantitative
or qualitative approach could address adequately.

**Step 3: How do I make my grant as competitive and methodologically sound as possible?**

A great deal has been written about current federal initiatives to improve research in
education. Many of these initiatives are driven in part by the National Research Council’s (NRC)
recommendations on “scientifically-based research” for educational interventions (NRC, 2002),
which emphasize the use of more rigorous quantitative approaches. In practice, this means that
federal funding priority is given to specific types of research designs, with experimental and
quasi-experimental designs heading the list (Whitehurst, 2001). Additionally, external evaluation
(as opposed to internal or formative evaluation) is a necessary component of the NRC’s
definition of scientific rigor. In brief, under NCLB, approximately 10% of the total budget for
the intervention should be spent on carrying out an external evaluation, ideally (from the
Department of Education’s perspective) using a strong quantitative (i.e., experimental or quasi-
experimental) design.

The reason that experimental designs have generated such strong interest at the federal
level is that: a) they allow for stronger inference; and, b) studies of this type are relatively rare in
education (for good reason).

What is a “true” experimental design? Randomized trials or experimental designs require
the ability to randomly assign individuals to condition (e.g., randomly assigning students to
receive either “Reading Intervention 1” or “standard practice” or “Reading Intervention 2”).
Another hallmark of a good experimental design is the ability to control the environment, so that
any differences between two or more groups are attributable only to the intervention. Imagine a
fictitious experiment designed to evaluate a new reading intervention against “standard practice.”
According to these guidelines, to do a randomized trial, you need to be able to randomly assign
students to either the “Reading Intervention” or “standard practice” group.

Randomized assignment requires that there is an equal probability of any given student to
be assigned to any given condition. For example, you could pull names out of a hat, or flip a coin
to assign students to condition. Student assignment to schools and teachers in the US is almost
never truly random, as it often depends on where a student lives, or an application process in the
case of magnet schools. Unfortunately, student assignment to schools or teachers is generally not
random. If partnering with school systems at the genesis of a grant, you can engineer a random
assignment process, but you are almost always assigning students within schools, rather than
among schools, which is better than no random assignment, but is not, technically, a truly
random assignment procedure.

Why is random assignment so important? Simply put, if you have true random
assignment and treatment integrity, you can assert that group differences at the end of a project
are most likely due to the project rather than other influences (such as having all the high
achieving students in one group). To further complicate things, you cannot force students and
teachers to “volunteer” for experimental interventions, and parents are often reluctant to allow
their children to be “guinea pigs” in trying out new educational approaches, even if the odds are good that the new approaches are superior. You end up with two challenges to your methodology: (a) you have a self-selected sample that is willing to experience the intervention; and, (b) if these projects are happening in the schools, you have a conflict between school assignment for students and how you need to perform your project.

Another issue to deal with is treatment integrity. Should you be able to create true random assignment to condition, you have the challenge of assuring that members of each group should only be exposed to that particular intervention, all students in that group should receive exactly the same treatment, and no student outside that group should be exposed to that intervention.

From a practical point of view, treatment integrity is a huge challenge, but successfully dealing with it will move your grant to the top of the pile. There are two challenges here: making sure all group members are getting the same experience, and making sure that other (comparison group) members are not receiving any of the intervention. Making sure all teachers or schools are doing the same thing the same way is challenging enough, but ensuring that you do not have “condition creep” is also challenging. Teachers often talk with each other, and good teachers are eager adopters of new methods if they look promising. So how do you keep teachers who are not in “Reading Intervention 1” from adopting it if they hear in the teacher’s lounge how great it is? And what about students with siblings in other conditions? Treatment integrity is essential, yet difficult in practice.

Are experimental designs possible in education? Yes, but they are not easy. Before we start feeling too discouraged, many other fields have similar problems. In nursing and medical research, for example, patients are not generally randomly assigned to doctors, and patient compliance with experimental (or standard) medical regimens is often spotty at best. Doctors and nurses vary in the extent to which they adhere to experimental protocols, and like teachers, nurses and doctors talk to each other, as do patients. Yet in these fields, randomized clinical trials are not only performed, but performed often and usually quite well. It is possible to do in education as well if we do work up-front to establish relationships with the entities we desire to work with.

What if an experimental design is not possible? As evaluators, we often come into a project once it is already designed and funded, which means that often a true experimental design is not possible. Sometimes it is not possible or ethical to randomly assign participants to condition. For example, medical researchers cannot assign people randomly to be male or female, poor or wealthy, to smoke or not smoke.

Matched groups designs are used when experimental designs are not possible. They are almost as informative and are scored almost as highly by governmental agencies as experimental designs (these are also called quasi-experimental designs). In this type of approach, researchers start with an existing group of subjects, and pick a comparison group—ideally one that has been carefully matched on particular criteria, such as age, sex, race, socio-economic status, etc. Outcomes for these groups would then be compared, often before and after the intervention being studied.

In our evaluation of an instructional technology intervention, schools were selected to participate in the study by a grant application process, eliminating the possibility of assigning schools, teachers, or students randomly to condition. In this case we matched each intervention school with a comparison school not participating in the project. For our purposes we developed a multi-stage matching process that took into account school structure/type, geographical
location, student demographics and test scores, school size, and several other variables. We also did careful statistical analyses on our data to ensure we had close matches. For the most part, a well-constructed matching process will work well, as ours did, and through basic statistical analyses, you can demonstrate the efficacy of the matching.

In our case, having a longitudinal design (where students and teachers were tracked over several years) made this evaluation methodologically better than a one-group pre-post design. This is partly because we expect people and institutions to change over time. Not having a comparison group makes it difficult to ascertain how much of this change is due to the intervention and how much would have happened without the intervention.

Another option would have been to use a correlational study, one that uses regression analysis to look at different variables and the strength of their association. For example, in a correlational design, a researcher might use logistic regression to predict the association between certain factors, such as the relationship between poverty and the likelihood of dropping out of school. As with pre-post designs, there is nothing inherently “wrong” with correlational approaches. Some of our most important research, such as that linking smoking to cancer, was initially correlational in nature. However, like pre-post approaches, correlational designs do not allow researchers to draw strong inferences from their data.

Case studies are ranked just above anecdotal evidence within the US Department of Education’s list of different types of evidence. Presumably, their low ranking derives from the difficulty of generalizing about results provided by case studies. In other words, an in-depth study of a single school may not provide information that can be used to predict some type of outcome for other schools. As mentioned above, however, a good case study can tremendously illuminate the results of an experimental (or matched groups) design. However, these investigations are resource-intensive in terms of time and money and you have to weigh the benefits with the costs.

**Step 4: Closing the loop**

It is often the case that you get involved in writing a grant or designing a project or study, and when you are done writing it all up, you realize that you have strayed significantly from the original objective (the defining question). It is important to go back to the original questions that started you down the road of grant writing to see if the project or study you designed still addresses the questions you set out to answer. You would be surprised at how often our project evolves during the writing process. This is good, but can lead to embarrassing discrepancies between the stated goals of the grant and the research methods/evaluation plan proposed.

**Lessons Learned and Practical Suggestions**

The most important lesson we have learned is that the earlier you decide how you are going to evaluate your project, the better the entire project will ultimately be. It is important to start making plans for its evaluation at the outset—not in mid-stream, or worse, at the end.

There are many reasons to start planning for the evaluation early. By thinking ahead about what we want to know, and how we want to go about finding out, we can often identify some of the more troublesome issues with the intervention, like how this intervention is operationally different from standard practice and what kinds of results would be realistic for people exposed to the new treatment.

Since many funding agencies require external evaluation (e.g., evaluation of the project by “unbiased” or “objective” individuals not directly associated with the project) it is beneficial
to cultivate a relationship with the external evaluator while writing the grant. Not being part of the process, that person can ask questions you may not think of asking, and can also help you shape the evaluation of the project, to increase the odds of a successful proposal.

As mentioned above, we have been involved in many evaluations over many years, and while we would not claim to know all the answers, we have learned at least a few important lessons.

Choosing competent evaluators is critical

Competent, professional evaluators are central to the success of projects at every stage, from proposal to final reporting and dissemination. Yet not all people who call themselves evaluators are trained in the type of methodologies that we discuss above and that funding agencies are looking for. Finding a good evaluator is an art, not a science, but the odds are better if you talk to faculty at research intensive universities who have expertise in research methodology or evaluation. Faculty who are not necessarily interested can often recommend advanced doctoral students who are usually eager for the experience. Another source of referrals is professional organizations such as the American Evaluation Association (www.eval.org), and of course, recommendations from other people who have relationships with high-quality evaluation.

When choosing an evaluator, credentials are important, but not necessarily sufficient. Ask them important questions about their research experience. Can they identify high-quality measures for the kinds of outcomes you are interested in studying? Are they comfortable with rigorous statistical procedures, such as multi-level modeling (HLM)? Do they have experience in integrating qualitative and quantitative designs? Do they have experience with managing large datasets? Ask them what statistical software they are familiar with (e.g., SAS, SPSS, Stata, R, HLM, AMOS, Winsteps, etc.).

Recruitment and retention of participants is difficult

One of the single biggest challenges to projects in almost any field is securing the willing participation of individuals who are often underpaid and busy with other commitments. This can be especially true of professionals such as teachers, nurses, doctors, and principals. If you have a good project, many of them will be intrinsically motivated to participate in the intervention. But what about the comparison group? These individuals do not even have the incentive of participating in a new project, yet you will be asking them to spend significant amounts of time giving you data. Think carefully about how to create (ethical) incentives for your comparison group(s). This is a particularly important issue in longitudinal designs, where attrition can threaten the ability to draw conclusions at the end of your project.

Most scholars agree that providing cash for participation is not an effective incentive, and some would argue that it may be unethical. (In any case, researchers rarely have much spare cash to distribute!). In some situations, it may be possible to stagger the intervention so that members of the comparison group receive the treatment/training after the evaluation is over. Other incentives can include things such as classroom equipment or resources, or small personalized “thank-you” gifts, but you have to anticipate the need and cost in your grant budget. Note that not all agencies allow those sorts of budget items, so creative thinking is often needed. Additionally, researchers need to make certain that the incentives provided to the comparison group would not rise to the level of a mini-intervention that could compromise the study as a whole.
Will you have enough time to do everything you are promising to do?

Think carefully about the data collection and analysis timeline. In the drive to compete for scarce grant resources, we often promise the moon and stars without adequate resources to actually deliver them. Will there be enough time to measure all the outcomes? How long will it take to process the data? Can the data be captured electronically (e.g., through web-based surveys) in order to eliminate some data entry? Qualitative data, in particular, can take a long time to collect and analyze—will there be enough time and resources to thoroughly analyze the information (e.g., will you spend 200 hours transcribing interviews, or can you hire someone to do it)?

Do not collect data you do not have a clear use for

It is very easy to promise to collect mountains of data, but analysis of it is another issue. If you do not have a clear path from one of your defining questions to the data you are collecting, do not collect it. It is easy to get seduced into the “more is better” mindset of data packrats (we are as guilty of this as anyone). Here is a good practical reason not to do this: each piece of data you collect from a participant is a cost to them and you. You are taking their time in asking questions and it is unethical to require them to answer endless surveys you have no clear use for. Think of it as drawing blood. Do not take more data than you absolutely need. Each time you ask participants for data, you increase the odds they will quit the study.

Anticipate sources of contamination across groups

In a practical sense, education is a difficult environment in which to maintain treatment integrity. We have discovered teachers in our experimental group who collaborate with teachers in the comparison group, professional development programs that bring schools and teachers from different groups together, school districts (where comparison schools are) that implement the intervention on their own initiative in control schools, teachers that move from one school to another, married couples where one partner works in an intervention school and the other in a comparison school, and many more challenges to treatment integrity. While it is not possible to anticipate all of these potential sources of contamination, a little brainstorming up-front can save a lot of heartache at the end. Talk with the potential participants to see what formal structures are in place (e.g., planned joint professional development seminars) that could be a threat to treatment integrity. If these potential contaminants are not avoided, it may be possible to include additional measures within the study to serve as a form of triage (e.g., a survey that measures treatment “dosage,” or different levels of exposure to the intervention). However, planning for these kinds of problems will result in a cleaner study, a better grant proposal, fewer headaches at the data analysis stage, and stronger inference in the end.

Consider barriers to data collection

Who will actually administer questionnaires and surveys, and who will make sure your participants fill them out? Why should they? In other words, assume they are not intrinsically motivated as you are about the project, and figure out a way to provide incentives for them. Are there structural barriers to data collection within the organization or environment you are interested in? If you plan web-based surveys, for example, are you certain that all your participants know how to use computers and the internet, and that they will have access to the resources necessary to complete the survey?
What about diversity?

Think carefully about how to assess diverse populations. Are there members of the study group who cannot read (e.g., young children)? Are there participants who may not be able to respond on English-only assessments? If you use an online data collection system, will lack of access to computers diminish the response rate of poor students?

Consider the ethical issues at stake

Projects are rarely free of ethical implications. Will a proposed project cause unanticipated adverse consequences for either the participants or the comparison group? Will someone become relatively deprived or worse off than if the project had not occurred? And what happens if/when you disseminate the results? How will you protect the privacy of participants and stakeholders? What if your project reveals information that would cost someone their job? What if your project pulls much needed resources from one group to give to another and unintentionally causes harm?

We suggest that grantwriters and researchers revisit their assumptions about what they want to know and why they want to know it. As Hostetler (2005) argues, educational research can have a profound impact:

*About leaving no child behind, if we are herding the lemmings together toward the cliff, I am not sure we do the laggards a favor by making sure they keep up with the pack... We need to think about how we can make life better for people. We need to think beyond our taken-for-granted ideas of well-being and what is good and make those ideas the objects of serious, communal inquiry (pp. 17, 21).*

When writing proposals to fund educational (or any) interventions, and when constructing research initiatives to evaluate these interventions, we necessarily have an impact on lives of people we do not know, who have not consented to being part of our manipulation. As researchers discovered early in the 1900s (e.g., Roethlisberger and Dickson, 1939 and Mayo, 1933, the first researchers to articulate the fabled “Hawthorne effect”), the researcher never has a completely inert presence—merely observing or measuring a phenomenon changes it, and we should never be casual about tinkering with individuals’ experiences in schools. However, we also have an opportunity to improve these experiences by generating more information about the effects of educational initiatives so that teachers, administrators, and policy-makers can make better decisions about how to spend their time and money. As grant professionals, we have an opportunity, as well as a responsibility, to give our best advice to our clients as they negotiate these difficult issues. The more we all learn about creating effective research design, the more valuable our input can be.

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References


Occupational Regulation of Grant Professionals

by

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Abstract

Occupational regulation, registration, credentialing, and certification have become important issues in the past decade and continue to be a current topic of great professional interest. Occupational regulation becomes more popular when there is a perception of harm to the public or a potential scandal. Increased occupational regulation also becomes of greater interest if there are new federal or state laws that impact large groups of professionals. Mandatory licenses are established through state or federal laws while credentialing is voluntary although it may be required by certain employers. This article briefly reviews the historical process of professional credentialing and provides discussion of the future direction of occupational regulation for the grants profession. The current state of occupational regulation is compared with other professions evolution to infer some potential future pathways.

Narrative

Occupational regulation of grant professionals is a topic of great interest to grant officers, their employers and clients, and to the grant funding organizations (foundation, state, and federal). With concerns over misuse of state and federal funds and the increased activities in charitable giving, occupational regulation has also become of great interest to the public as there are increased demands for greater regulation. The topic of occupational regulation is also one that is very complex and often fraught with high levels of emotional concern. Additional credentialing or certification generally implies extra classes, forms, or processes that will be needed and the resulting added time and money that will be used to meet the new requirements.

A 2006 survey of American Association of Grant Professionals (AAGP) members (draft report) found that 66% of respondents thought a grantsmanship credential was extremely important or essential to the profession. Participants in the survey included private consultants, nonprofit members, and government employees. Further survey analysis revealed that 48% of respondents did not know how well AAGP was doing with creating and promoting a grantsmanship credential; and 38% though that the association was doing a good or very good job. The need for credentials was also highly correlated with the external threats that were impacting the grants profession. Follow-up focus groups in October of 2005 found that respondents believed that the two major external threats to the grants profession are state regulation of grant professionals and proliferation of “get rich quick” schemes. Both of these threats are discussed in relation to occupational regulation in this article.
Definitions

In order to understand the complex nature of occupational regulation, some interchangeable used terms are defined. Part of the difficulty with using occupational regulation terms is that the same terminology can mean different things to persons in different occupations.

- **Credentialing** - Occupational credentialing or occupational regulation are general terms often used to describe the full spectrum of programs that confer a recognition to individuals, organizations, programs, products or processes based on meeting some predefined standards (Rops, 2004). A mandatory license of a professional is established through state or federal laws while credentialing is a voluntary process. Even though voluntary, some employers may require a credential for employment. The credential, in this case, is used to “prove” that the employee had met specified levels of knowledge or skills. A credential may be part of the employer’s process to protect them from liability issues, for public relations in which a statement might include “All of our employees are credentialed in grant management,” or to ensure consistency in their staff.

- **Licensure** - Licensure is legislatively mandated and a minimum prerequisite to practice in a profession. For example, teachers are licensed in each state and must pass all of the statutory requirements before they are allowed to teach students. Because it is in a legislative statute, there are specific requirements for the applicant to meet and a specific set of legal and ethical guidelines that the licensed person agrees to follow. The applicant must meet all the requirements before they are licensed and maintain meeting them in order to keep the license current. For example, to renew the professional license, teachers must send in transcripts of professional education courses, while nurses must take and send in CEU credits. Included in the license is a requirement to continue to receive training and be licensed as mandatory reporters for child and adult abuse, etc. The authorizing agency, the state Department of Education, Department of Health, etc., has the right and duty to deny or remove a license for just cause. Because of the regulating agencies duties, there are specific renewal requirements and there are due process rights for the individual. Usually, licensure is geographically bound. For instance, you can be licensed in Iowa to teach but have to apply and take additional courses to teach in Florida or Minnesota.

- **Certification** - Certification is a much more informal process that is typically not regulated or required. A certification is generally a record of the completion of some training but is not a professional license or credential. A certification shows that the person has attended the training and not that the person has met any specific level of competency in the subject matter or activities. For example, one can be certified in CPR because the person attended the necessary coursework but still not be able to perform the procedure in a satisfactory manner to save someone’s life.

- **Registration** - Registration requires a person who is in a certain occupation to “register” with a state or federal agency. Usually registration is for a specific geographic area like a county or a state. For example, a person can register as a small business owner. Registration provides the agency with a list of persons who provide that kind of service in the area but does not make any claim for the competency of the person on the list. There is no requirement to send in proof of competence, education or courses. For example, to be “registered” as a targeted small business, a person has to send in their most recent tax form showing they completed the business section on their return and that they are minority or female. The one advantage of having registration is that the agency can locate
the person if there are concerns; the disadvantage is that registration is usually specific to one geographic area. If a person is banned in one county or state, they can then go to another one and receive a new registration from that area or not register at all if it is not required.

**Other Professions’ Regulation Processes**

The issue of occupational regulation of grant professional is very complex and emotional because there are currently very few educational degrees or training programs specific to the field. Most grant professionals are learning by doing, rather than receiving formal training. Unlike many other fields where there is strict external regulation and requirements (such as teachers and nurses) there is no requirement for a specific major, pre-requisite classes, mandatory hands-on practice, or exiting requirements for grant professionals. The grant profession can learn from the earlier work on licensure, registration, and credentialing that other professions have undergone.

- **Educators** - Teaching licensure is required of all who practice in their profession in each state although there are some alternative licensures that are now being proposed. Teachers, counselors (James and Greenwalt, 2001), administrators, and health professionals have mandatory practicum hands-on experience required for licensure to demonstrate their skills under a trained supervisor before they are licensed. There are various levels of licensure depending on the degree, the history, and the need for professionals in that area. In the recent past, teachers who held master’s degrees and a minimum numbers of years of experience could receive permanent professional licensure in many states but it has not been offered since the early 1970’s. In the 1970’s, research emerged to show that quality professional development increased a teacher’s skills and increased academic achievement of students. A permanent license was eliminated in favor of requirements for additional education and training for teachers. Instead of a single license format, additional layers of licensure have been added including conditional (for new teachers) and master teachers (for those with experience and higher educational levels). With the increasing shortage of special education and vocational teachers, temporary licensure has been granted to many teachers with the caveat that they must complete the coursework and other requirements within a certain period.

- **Educational School Counselors** - Professional school counselors (at least at the high school level) are required by law and/or regulation in every state to be employed in a public school district (Lum, 2003). The terms used to describe the occupational regulation varies from “certification” to “licensure” with both meaning the same thing. However, budget shortages and state funding shortfalls have seen the repeal of legislation for elementary and middle school counselors in many states. School districts then developed creative terms such as Dean of Students or at-risk coordinator to provide similar services to students and parents. These individuals typically have no specific license or certification.

- **Educational Administrators** - Educational administrators including building principals, superintendents, and others with supervisory roles and advanced degrees have been licensed through each state individually although there is now a move for national certification (Archer, 2002). The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) and the standards for school leaders, has worked to develop standards and benchmarks to define the role of administrators (Murphy, 2003). This consortium is in
place to develop the criteria necessary to develop the models for voluntary credentialing. This process has not yet moved beyond the development of standards. The new administrative credentialing (certification) program requires: additional graduate school course work, participation in a structured mentoring program, a portfolio, and a professional growth plan (Lashway, 2003). Special education administration has initiated similar changes in credentialing. However, recent shortages in all areas of special education has short-circuited the renewal process (Lashley and Boscardin, 2003). Shortages in school finance officers have also led to diminished demands for certification. Currently, less than a third of all states require some form of licensure for school finance officers (Archer, 2003). Increased shortages in all educational fields has led to alternative licensure of many professionals, significantly undermining any previous efforts to increase professionalism and requirements (Wayman, Foster, Mantle-Bromley, Wilson, 2003). Education and the other fields have developed occupational regulation over many years, learning from the mistakes and the successes of others (Board, 2003). The major factor that has affected education has been staffing availability and funding considerations. With adequate staff and funding, licensing becomes more stringent. With shortages of funds or staff, licensing requirements are loosened and temporary, alternative or no licensing requirements take place.

• **Medical Professionals** - One of the professions with a long history of regulation comes from medicine. When the profession first emerged in America back in the early 1700s, a doctor or dentist served as an assistant or were apprenticed to a practicing professional. The apprentice learned the “trade” from the professional, just as a blacksmith, silversmith, or other tradesperson learned their craft. These medical apprentices generally received little or no formal education. The reason for the early and swift licensure and regulation of the medical professional was due to the degree of potential harm to the consumer (Spivey, 2005). An unethical or incompetent medical person can cause death or disability. A recent survey of medical health professionals indicated that the majority supported national certification (Hagus, 2000). National certification would allow medical professionals to go to other states and prevent doctors who were barred in one state from being able to practice in another. Not all medical professionals are in agreement with the stringent demands placed on the testing for licensure requirements (Reed and Hocott, 1995). All medical professionals are now looking at national licensure and credentials that will help meet the increased demand for staff in an increasingly mobile society (Guarino, 1995).

• **Business Professionals** - Many of the recent influences on credentialing and licensure come from business. Legislation at both the state and federal level demand increased accountability and information on who is providing services and at what level. This applies to many different kinds of related businesses, professions and services that previously had licensure and regulation, like CPAs.

• **Computer Professionals** - With the rapid expansion of computers in society and the increased potential for problems, there have been more public and legislative demands for mandatory licensure. Computer professionals at the same time have been scrambling to establish voluntary credential to protect the integrity of the profession (Betts, 1994; Naveda 2005). Increased demands on computer-generated testing, licensure, and registration has accelerated the need for highly qualified professionals to work with
people in other professions to develop distance learning and licensing, credentialing and registration practices (Bowen and Thomson, 1995).

- **Architecture** - Architects now have a licensing board that requires that architects take a battery of tests that are computer-based simulations that evaluate architectural practice, professional judgment, and cognitive knowledge. While this format has previously been used for training purposes, it is now being used for high stakes testing to determine licensure and credentialing (Architecture, 1999).

- **Engineers** - With new engineering technology came greater globalization and more intricate and complex infrastructure requiring greater levels of professional practice and higher levels of licensure. The professional association determined that it was not sufficient only to raise the entrance requirements of new professionals into the field. Additional licensure and professional practice was also needed for current professional engineers (Russell and Stouffer, 2003).

### Current State of Grant Professional Occupational Regulation

AAGP currently maintains a neutral position on the issue of licensure and registration of grant professionals, although AAGP is in the process of working with the Grant Professionals Certification Institute (GPCI) to create a professional credential.

In its 2005 Strategic Plan AAGP survey, respondents were asked to report whether their state required grant professionals to register with a state authority. Ten percent responded affirmatively, while 65% said that their state had no such requirement. Twenty-five percent reported that they were unsure or did not know. Additional research in the AAGP Journal reported the results of individually contacting state authority representatives in each state through letter, email, fax and or follow-up phone call (Stinson and Renninger, 2005). The process of determining registration indicated the clear difficulties grant professionals would have in trying to determine whether state registration was required. Each state had a different person who was responsible for registration of professionals. California clearly had grant professionals certification and required that professionals send in a copy of the grant contract prior to starting work on the project. In contacting an entire list of state authorities, the process of elimination indicated that Iowa does not have grant professional registration. Several state authorities confused registration of grant professionals with teacher credentials or health profession licensure.

### National Licensure and Credentials

Educational certification has now progressed to national certification. Teachers who receive credentials through the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards are able to transfer their teaching licenses and credentials to any other state in the union (Johnson, 2001). This is a voluntary national board certification process and is not mandated for any teachers. This is a national certification so teachers can teach anywhere; however, most states also require that any teachers in their state take two courses that are specific to their state. Each state usually requires that teachers take “history of the state” and “human relations of the state.”

A similar process to National Board of Professional Teaching Standards for teachers is also a voluntary program with school counselors. There are two national boards officially recognized by the American Counseling Association (ACA) that offer individual certification to professional counselors on a voluntary basis: the Council for Rehabilitation Counselor Certificate and the National Board of Certified Counselors. Possessing a national credential can
provide mobility (Robinson and Habben, 2003). Registration and licensure requirements can limit the professional to a specific geographic area whereas a national credential can provide the opportunity for mobility and tracking of professionals anywhere.

**Impact of Technology**

The proliferation of technology has led to significantly more complex regulation and credentialing issues. Cyber consulting is now growing at a rapid rate, erasing old geographic boundaries. This has led to fewer word of mouth referrals and less accountability making credentialing even more important to ensure that clients are protected and that the reputation of grants professionals is not diminished by the unethical behavior of a few individuals. Other professional organizations are also dealing with the dilemma created by advanced technology including counselors (Bloom and Walz, 2000; Hughes, 2000).

**Portfolios**

Several professions currently use portfolios to add to, or in lieu of other proof of competence including artists and architects. Professional portfolios (paper or electronic) have become one way to document competence and or previous success. These portfolios generally contain a vita or resume, a list of educational degrees and courses that include conferring institution and dates, a list of practicum and experiences that include roles and supervisor; and a list of work experiences (James and Greenwalt, 2001). A working portfolio can be one way to demonstrate the level of professionalism of the grant professional that could be used along with a credential to showcase accomplishments.

**Protected classes**

A caveat mentioned by all credentialing bodies is to ensure that credentialing does not exclude those who are competent but who may have special needs (Martin, 1995; Weiner, 1998). This caveat is intended for all individuals who may need special protection in order to become certified or to remain certified as a grant professional.

The many different names for and reactions to credentialing and registration are part of the problem. Other professions and professional associations recommended reviewing the works of other professions (Bradley, 1995). While this has been done by GPCI as part of the credentialing process, it is clear that additional research is needed to provide a body of information to help guide future directions.

**Future Directions - Potential Pathways**

AAGP has taken steps to strengthen and advance the field and should be applauded for the efforts to get feedback from members and to set a direction with GPCI for voluntary credentialing. AAGP must establish clear positions about the ideal future for grant professionals.

If GPCI does not provide voluntary credentialing, it is clear from the review of research of the path of other professional groups, that external entities will provide some kind of professional occupational regulation that could include national registration, licensure or certification of all grant professionals or statewide licensure that is similar to that currently used in education. For this reason, it is essential that the grant professional have ownership and clear involvement in the development of a regulation that will directly affect our livelihood.
References


Evaluating the Role of the Local Campus Coach in Reading First Schools

by

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Abstract

The Reading First grant (NCLB, 2001) represents a step toward linking program implementation and accountability. Many states have previously used literacy coaches or local campus coaches to ensure faithful implementation of scientifically-based reading instruction. The roles for coaches in this context, however, may create tensions not originally envisioned. This paper describes a grant evaluation that specifically addresses the role of these coaches in one school district. Coaches were interviewed during the first year of grant implementation. They indicted three main types of activities: helping, coaching, and informing. Coaches in grant-receiving schools with supportive building administrators engaged in more sophisticated coaching activities. Coaches without support felt compelled to supervise and to adopt more administrative roles. All coaches reported changes in their role during year one. Discussion focuses on factors that enable coaches to function in the manner intended, obstacles to fulfilling their roles, and questions for policy and evaluation.

Narrative

Since the 1960’s, Title I programs have attempted to use federal funding to create equality in educational opportunities for children living in poverty. In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) continued this course with its renamed Title I – Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged. The purpose of this title is to “ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and state academic assessments” (NCLB, Sec. 1001. Statement of Purpose.) According to the law, this goal can be accomplished by, among other strategies: (1) holding schools, districts, and states accountable from improving student achievement; and, (2) promoting school-wide reform and ensuring the access of children to effective, scientifically based instructional strategies and challenging academic content.

Changes in Accountability and Implementation Expectations

Accountability and program implementation are related aspects of current Title I programs, but there has not always been such a close association between these two. Previously, implementation simply meant an accounting of how federal funding was spent and determining, to the extent possible, whether funding was spent for the purpose it was designed. As accountability expectations have evolved, implementation of Title I programs has come to mean
questioning the effectiveness of programs (i.e., Does the program accomplish the goals for which it was designed?) (Borman, 2000; Fitzpatrick, et al., 2004).

Current accountability measures present in NCLB (2001) represents a significant change in the degree to which expectations of program achievement will be monitored and enforced (Anderson, 2005). The reason for increased levels of monitoring and enforcement is the belief that without accountability mechanisms, implementation and effectiveness of Title I programs will be reduced (Borman, 2000). The stakes for implementation become even higher when programs are expected to be effective because they are derived from scientifically-based research evidence. This is especially true in the case of Reading First programs.

**Program Implementation Under Reading First**

Reading First (Title I, Part B Student Reading Skills Improvement Grants) was designed to assist “state and local education agencies in establishing reading programs for students in kindergarten through grade 3 that are based on scientifically based reading research to ensure that every student can read at grade level or above no later than the end of grade 3” (Sec. 1201. Purposes). Districts that receive this funding must use it to select and administer assessments, select and implement a program of instruction based on scientific reading research, purchase program materials, provide professional development for teachers in K-3 and K-12 special education teachers, report data for all students, and promote reading and library programs.

The developers of the federal program guidelines were, no doubt, aware of the challenges associated with implementation of new instructional programs aimed at reform, and likely learned from the implementation experiences of the CSRD program. Nowhere is this more evident than in the provision that, in addition to full staff development, including participation of building and district administrators, Reading First guidelines required “the use of coaches and other teachers of reading who provide feedback as instructional strategies are put into practice” (USDE, 2002). Placing literacy coaches on Reading First campuses highlights the priority this legislation gives to program implementation.

**Literacy coaches will facilitate program implementation**

In many states, such as Texas, Michigan, and New York, SEA officials decided to meet this requirement by utilizing literacy coaches, or local campus coaches (LCC). This implementation strategy is similar to ones found in reading-focused school reform programs, such as Success For All, and Literacy Collaborative (Northwest Regional Education Laboratory, 2004). In Texas, the SEA translated this guidance into the requirement that funded districts would guarantee the presence of an individual at each Reading First campus who is knowledgeable about the five essential components of reading instruction, would provide teachers and administrators with professional development in the area of reading and reading instruction, and would be responsible for the implementation of the core reading program on that campus (Texas Education Agency, 2003).

**Additional roles for Texas coaches**

In Texas’ Reading First application for LEA, as in many other states, the description of the position of local campus coach is complex and multifaceted. In Texas, in particular, coaches are expected to serve in a leadership capacity at the campus level. The local campus coach, as described in the Texas guidance, is expected to extend and focus administrative efforts on improving reading achievement in Reading First schools by improving the quality and duration
of reading instruction. Reading instruction will be improved, according to the guidelines, by fully implementing a core reading program that is constructed from scientifically-based reading research, and includes provisions for three tiers, or levels, of reading instruction. Coaches are to work with teams of teachers and campus administrators to identify student needs, monitor student performance, and utilize data for decision-making.

Coaches are also expected to provide technical assistance to teachers and to campus leaders. An important part of technical assistance is working directly with teachers. This work may include: assisting with implementation of intervention for struggling readers; providing professional development and modeling instruction to support the implementation of the core reading program; arranging schedules for literacy blocks; and assisting with interpretation of assessment data for classrooms and campuses. These duties position the local campus coach to act as a direct overseer of the implementation of the core reading program (a goal relevant to accountability concerns), and to focus on instructional effectiveness in the classroom (a goal relevant to reading specialists) (Walpole and McKenna, 2004).

On the surface, these goals and duties (i.e., implementation and effective instruction) appear to be complimentary inasmuch as the scientifically-based core reading program represents effective literacy instruction. The role description contained in Texas’ SEA program guidance, however, could potentially create tension between the role, as envisioned by the reading research community, and the role as defined by state-level program directors.

Focus of the Current Study
The purpose of this paper is to describe the implementation of an important policy component of many state-level Reading First initiatives. Specifically, this paper is concerned with describing the manner in which the role of “local campus coach” or “literacy coach” is being implemented. This paper will describe the way coaches have carried out their roles of instructional leadership and technical assistance provider, and factors that influence their success on Reading First campuses.

Methods
Participants
Participants in this study were 18 Reading First local campus coaches (LCC) at Reading First campuses in a large, independent school district in West Texas. All participants were female and had served at their campus in some capacity prior to assuming the role of LCC. Of the 18 coaches, four reported holding a master’s degree in language and literacy; five reported serving as early literacy coordinators on their respective campuses; two had been reading recovery teachers; and the balance of coaches were classroom teachers who reported at least a bachelor’s degree with a reading background, a minimum of 20 hours of professional development, and many with graduate-level coursework in a reading-related field. At the beginning of program implementation, six of the coaches continued to serve as teachers until early December when full-time substitutes were hired to replace them in the classroom.

District and campus context.
Two notes about the specific context of the district are important to consider. First, Texas districts that won the competitive grant in the first-round of Reading First were awarded funding in mid-September, following the beginning of the SY 2003-2004. Implementation of the program in this district began in late-October, well after the school year had commenced.
Second, prior to the adoption of the Reading First core program (i.e., Voyager Universal Literacy System), the identified campuses had utilized a variety of approaches to reading instruction. One of the most widely used approaches was the Literacy Collaborative (e.g., Lyons and Pinnell, 2001). Due to apparent structural and philosophical differences between this approach and the Voyager System (especially the scripted nature of the new program), implementation fidelity represented a real concern for district administrators and the program director.

Data source and procedure

Data was collected in two structured interviews conducted via e-mail: first in November, and second in May of the first year of the grant program (see Appendix for interview items). Coaches were sent a series of open-ended questions pertaining to their role on their respective campuses and asked to respond within one week. Response rate for each administration of the questionnaire was 94%. Coaches were also interviewed in focus groups during December. Two focus groups were held interviewing one-half of the coaches at each session.

Results

Types of Assistance Provided by Coaches

Assistance during start-up

In the initial interviews, coaches listed an average of 3.29 responses to the prompt asking them to describe the ways they have supported teachers during the initial implementation of the new, core reading program. Responses were categorized based on the distinct roles of the coach (Walpole and McKenna, 2004). The majority of the responses (52%) indicated activity related to the coach as helper/facilitator. Coaches described assisting teachers with organizing and locating teaching materials, helping teachers by administering initial student assessments and providing reading instruction when the teacher was absent. A smaller percentage of responses (30%) suggested activities related to the coach as an advisor/consultant. For example, coaches reported observing teachers during reading instruction and providing feedback, modeling reading instruction in classrooms, providing professional development, and working with teachers to resolve implementation and scheduling difficulties. Finally, the smallest proportion of activities was related to the coach as communicator/distributor of information. In this capacity, coaches addressed questions on behalf of teachers to the program director, or directly to the program vendor. Coaches also communicated district policy to teachers, especially related to questions about implementation fidelity and daily classroom reading instruction.

The activities classified as helping and communicating did seem appropriate to the coach role as defined under Reading First. Coaches, at this early stage of work, seemed to be performing activities that were primarily intended to facilitate program implementation (Toll, 2005).

Refining the coaching role

During focus group interviews in December, coaches reported that there had been somewhat of a shift in their responsibilities. Coaches reported that teachers continued to need instructional support for implementing the new reading program: “They need more support now than before. It has been like an awakening since the benchmark scores, especially since some kids were thrown back into the ‘struggling’ category.” Coaches felt that the assistance with
Evaluating the Role of the Local Campus Coach in Reading First Schools

Instruction they were providing in December was more demanding than during the initial phase of program adoption. “Before, we were mostly concerned with the procedures of the program – doing the reading stations, doing the teaching stations. Now my teachers are asking more about the finer points of daily practice – using the proscribed instructional models or using the program language at the teaching station, for example.” These comments seem to suggest that coaches may have been refocusing more of their “coaching” efforts away from simple program implementation and toward providing on-the-spot professional development for teachers on their campuses.

Assistance at the end of the year

During follow-up interviews in early-May, a number of changes were detected in coaches’ responses. At this time, coaches provided an average of 5.48 responses, indicating that as the year has progressed, coaches were much more articulate about the nature of their position. As before, coaches’ activities were classified as helper/facilitator, coach/consultant, or communicator/distributor of information.

Coaches continued to describe the greatest amount (41%) of their activities in terms consistent with the helper/facilitator role. Coaches described activities such as assisting with testing, entering assessment data, coordinating intervention services, processing mobile students, and working directly with students in classrooms. For example, “I still help with the intervention for 2nd and 3rd graders since they have some strugglers who needed some individual attention.” Another said, “I offer to help in their rooms in any way that they need me.”

Slightly fewer comments by coaches during this interview (29%) were classified as advising/consulting. Coaches did list activities such as observing in classrooms, modeling lessons, identifying solutions to instructional difficulties, and helping with classroom management, but it seemed to be a less prominent role for coaches than it had been during the initial phase of program implementation. For example, coaches said, “I am doing observations in every classroom. I debrief and problem-solve with teachers about issues with the curriculum or about specific students.” “I observe [reading] lessons and I do daily walk-throughs. I’m available to answer questions and make suggestions.”

Coaches seemed to report a greater frequency (30%) of activities that were classified as communicator/distributor of information. Coaches reported answering teachers’ questions, finding answers to questions, and communicating information from the district to teachers. For example, “I address questions related to the program, about the different assessments, and helping with the handheld devices.” “I relay information to teachers from the program manager’s office.”

Coaches’ Opinion About Changes in the Role During Year One

Shift from helper to consultant?

During the follow-up interview, coaches were asked directly to describe any ways they felt their role as coach had changed during the initial year of the Reading First program. A majority of the coaches felt that there had been a shift in their role. In many instances, this shift might best be described as a change from helper/facilitator to one more concerned with coaching/consulting. Although previous responses did not seem to confirm the fact of a dramatic shift (i.e., coaches still reported “helper” activities as the most frequent type of activity), many coaches clearly believed a change had occurred.
For example, one coach said, “At the beginning of this program, I discussed lessons with the teachers primarily for clarification. Now it is to bounce and idea around or to figure out a way to help a specific student.” Another said, “At the beginning of the year, most of the teachers’ needs were in the area of materials and procedures. Now, they have become more comfortable with things, and we have concentrated more on the quality of instruction and student progress.”

Other coaches also perceived a change in their role, but the change seemed to be more related to different “helper” activities. “Now I’m supporting teachers by giving them assistance with assessments and giving them moral support as they finish the year. In the beginning, I was getting materials, modeling stations, and assisting with stations.” “Some things are a little different from when the program started. I don’t help Kindergarten gather and sort materials like I did at the beginning because they haven’t needed as much help with that later in the year.”

Finally, a few coaches indicated that their role had not changed significantly since the inception of the program. One coach believed her role has not changed because her role has always been to support implementation. “Basically, my role has been to support teachers in the implementation of [the reading program] all year.” Another coach who was having a particularly difficult time felt her role had not changed because she was unable to force teachers to comply with requirements. “It has been the same as the first of the year in that the LCC is not authorized to enforce compliance.”

Changes in administrative duties

Coaches were asked to compare the amount of administrative work they are currently performing with the amount they were performing at the beginning of the year. This question is important in order to estimate whether the coaches are moving away from their intended role, or whether this role needed to become more administrative-like in specific school circumstances. Overall 50% of coaches said that, although they do perform administrative tasks, they do not feel these tasks have increased over the course of the school year. For example, one coach said, “More administrative duties now than at the beginning of the year? Not really. The beginning and end of the year are about the same. I feel that I am a ‘coach’ with my principal’s support.” Another put it this way, “I do manage materials and analyze data and coordinate intervention that I have done from the beginning. I have never been asked or expected to discipline teachers or students.”

On the other hand, 36% of the coaches did say that their administrative duties have increased. This increase in administrative duties, in part, is due to the assumption of non-program activities, which suggests that the coach’s role on these campuses is susceptible to becoming diffused. One coach said, “The duties have changed somewhat. There just seems to be more non-program duties added—such as state assessments, summer school, etc.”

Comments from two other coaches suggest circumstances at their campus may account for this shift in role. “I am performing more duties than before in part because our assistant principal has been assigned to another school. Many of the duties are related to [another reading program] and summer school.” Another said, “I have always been given more responsibility for administrative kinds of tasks. This is in part because I sought out those opportunities and partly because of the situation with our principal being on [personal] leave.” Statements about coaches working directly with teachers were conspicuously absent toward the end of the school year.

No coach identified monitoring and evaluating activities as several had during the December focus group. A trend was detected in this data, however, when looking at the relationship between coaches’ description of their role, and whether they have assumed more
administrative duties. In most cases (4 of the 5), it seems that the less coaches described their role in terms of helping/facilitating, the more likely they were to report an increase in the amount of administrative duties they have assumed toward the end of the school year. This result may be due to circumstances that forced them to take on these roles, especially in situations where administrators were absent, or it could mean that coaches who were less inclined to serve the helper/facilitator roles tended to gravitate toward administrative duties.

**Marking a Shift from Coaching to Supervision and Administration**

*Tension between coaching and monitoring*

Another change that was evident in comments of a few coaches during the December focus groups was an increase in the proportion of time they felt they were acting in a supervisory capacity. Supervision, in the narrowest sense, is consistent with both the literacy-coach role as described by Walpole and McKenna (2004), and with TEA guidance, but some coaches appeared to indicate a more dramatic shift in the scope of responsibility was being undertaken, especially for five of the 18 coaches.

Several reasons may account for this shift toward supervision and administration. All coaches attributed this change to the fact that they felt accountable for students’ success in their school. “With the results and charts staring you in the face, you feel like you have to do something.” This response was especially acute for coaches on campuses where a high proportion of students were classified as “struggling readers” based upon a recent administration of benchmark assessments. Coaches also felt more like supervisors when there were a large number of K-3 teachers in their school (versus schools where there were two or fewer teachers at each grade level) because they were unable to see each teacher everyday during the literacy block. Coaches also felt they were acting in a more supervisory capacity when they had to address reading instruction difficulties that stemmed from issues like poor classroom management and a lack of organization.

In addition to this more widespread opinion about supervision, two important factors seemed to be at the root of the more acute change identified by the five coaches. These coaches tended to feel the need to act in an administrative capacity when they were working in schools where principal support was lacking due to either indifference or a limited familiarity with reading research (Biddle and Saha, 2002).

*Influence of administrator support on role implementation*

Coaches who were working with principals that were not knowledgeable about the reading program did not attend building-level professional development, or simply turned over the program to the coach felt that they needed to act in more monitoring and evaluative capacity. Coaches who were working in schools experiencing a relatively high degree of resistance to program change also felt they needed to act more as supervisors. Lack of principal support and issues of resistance to program change were present in four of the five schools in which coaches reported a greater degree of shift toward supervisory responsibilities.

According to the coaches’ view, teacher resistance and minimal principal support were inseparable issues. In these schools, the weakness of the collaborative leadership effort created an atmosphere where coaches were unable to foster teachers’ improvement due to difficulties associated with winning teacher compliance with program expectations. This situation serves as a poignant example of the complexity of the goals and roles under which coaches are
functioning, and seems to belie the underlying conflict inherent in the LCC position working in contexts where building administrators are not knowledgeable about reading or are indifferent to the program aims (Zeller, et al., 2003).

In schools where implementation fidelity remained an unresolved issue for the staff, coaches report needing to rely on the principal to enforce implementation requirements, and mentioned very little about the ways that they, themselves, ensure fidelity of implementation. Coaches in these schools describe principals who felt unable to “make” a teacher teach in a manner consistent with the program, and who were uninvolved with the program as a whole. Coaches felt that fidelity issues stem, in part, from principals who are not active supporters of the program.

On the other hand, when fidelity of implementation was not an issue in the school, coaches report a number of interesting and important activities in which they work directly with teachers and principals. These activities include reviewing instruction procedures with teachers, maintaining open lines of communication, encouraging collaboration among teachers, and sharing ideas with teachers and principals. One coach reported that teachers had found colleagues with whom they “buddy-up” to observe and provide feedback about one another’s reading instruction. Principals in these schools helped ensure the fidelity of implementation by conducting daily walk-throughs, making unscheduled visits to classrooms, and including fidelity of implementation as a criteria for teacher evaluation.

It was clear from this portion of the focus group that coaches see the importance of principal support for the goals and methods of the program. They felt this support is a key ingredient that would enable them to serve both in a leadership capacity and as a technical assistance provider. Without this support, the goals of the LCC position begin to collide.

Discussion

Complexities of the Coaching Role

The role of the local campus coach on Reading First campuses is unique in several respects. As specialists assigned to improve faculty capacity for reading instruction, coaches may have to navigate uncertain waters between administrative and professional development roles (Walpole and McKenna, 2004). As personnel charged with the implementation of reading programs at the campus level, coaches carry significant responsibility related to both accountability and program implementation (Texas Education Agency, 2003). As a strategy for school improvement, coaches represent a focal point for change in the instructional program of Reading First schools (Wren and Biggers, 2003). Data gathered from interviews and focus groups with local campus coaches confirm the complexity of this role and suggest that, without proper support from building administrators, this role can easily become imbalanced creating situations that make it difficult for coaches to achieve their intended purposes.

Progress toward the intended purposes of coaches

The coaches participating in this study appeared to begin their work in Reading First schools in a manner consistent with patterns of coaching identified by Walpole and McKenna (2004). A majority of the activities reported by coaches appeared to focusing on helping teachers implement the new core reading program. These activities included finding or gathering materials, and performing task teachers were unable to accomplish during the school day. Walpole and McKenna suggested that this activity focus is entirely appropriate at the outset of a school year because it helps coaches establish rapport with teachers, gain access to classrooms,
and build trust between teachers and coach. By the end of the school year, however, it seems reasonable to expect that coaches’ role should be more concerned with coaching and consulting with classroom teachers rather than continuing directly to assist teachers with the accomplishment of tasks. Coaches did report a qualitative shift in the types of coaching/consulting activities they were performing, but they continued to report helping activities with a greater frequency than the other activities.

**Obstacles to coaches’ success**

The findings reported here identify several pitfalls and areas of need related to the effective implementation of the role of the campus literacy coach. The most salient features of local campus coaches’ success seems to be the degree to which they are incorporated into a campus leadership team, and the extent to which that leadership team is able to focus on implementing the core reading program (Spillane et al, 2001). Coaches in schools where administrative support was evident seemed to be able to engage teachers in activities consistent with this leadership and instructional role. Coaches at campuses where administrative support was not as evident tended to be stymied in their efforts at building teacher capacity.

Principal support and teachers’ beliefs about reading instruction represent two areas that can undermine the effectiveness local campus coaches. These findings, while not entirely surprising to those working in the area school reform, do represent early documentation that similar dynamics are at work in schools attempting to bring about change in reading instruction and student achievement.

**Limitations of the current study**

There are a number of limitations to the current study. First, the data for this report comes solely from the viewpoint of the coaches in one Texas district. It is unclear whether teachers and administrators would have perceived the same changes identified by the coaches, especially related to coaching activities and support from administration, and whether these views might generalize to coaches in other districts and states. Second, if there are differences between campuses and changes in roles for coaches over time, it is not clear how these changes are related to student reading achievement. It seems reasonable to expect that coaches who focus more on professional development of teachers would have a greater impact on student achievement, but that assertion was not examined in the context of this study. Finally, since there have been few longitudinal research studies on the evolution of the literacy coaching role, it is not exactly clear what to expect as coaches and teachers continue working in Reading First schools past the first year of implementation.

**Implications for Policy-Makers and Grant Evaluators**

**Lingering questions**

Several important questions remain concerning the effectiveness of Local Campus Coaches in Reading First schools. First, what does a literacy coach add to a core reading program that is based on scientific reading research? For example, core reading programs that are more scripted in nature, such as Voyager Universal Literacy Systems or Success for All, may require a different type of coach support than do approaches like the Literacy Collaborative. Might the type of coaching activities (e.g., helping, coaching, providing information) depend, in part, on the type of core reading program adopted by the Reading First schools (Toll, 2005)?
Second, how will Texas and other SEAs evaluate the effectiveness of the local campus coach in the Reading First program? Presumably, literacy coaches influence the fidelity with which any program is implemented in a school and literacy coaches are also a point-guard for program accountability. If student achievement fails to improve, is it due to the program itself or to the actions of the literacy coach? Given the emphasis in LEA applications on identifying factors that contribute to student achievement, how will coach-effects be disentangled from program-effects? At the present time, no plans for examining this issue are publicly available from TEA.

Finally, how will coaches’ roles continue to evolve over the course of the grant in a Reading First school? Will coaches begin to take on roles outside of the three areas identified in this study (e.g., will coaches begin to take on more supervisory roles)? Will the activities coaches assume change as LEAs assume an increasing proportion of the cost for coaches?

Each of these questions is important for state-level education administrators who are responsible for crafting and rolling-out school reform policy. If the practice of linking accountability with program implementation remains, then greater attention needs to be directed to how best, from a policy perspective, to structure this coaching role. The effectiveness of literacy coaching as a strategy for increasing accountability also seems to carry important implications for implementation of programs in other content areas such as mathematics and science.

These questions are also important to program evaluators. Internal evaluators who monitor impact within an agency or school organization must be clear about expectations related to the scope of responsibility envisioned for coaches in specific settings. External evaluators too are likely to be concerned with untangling the effects of programs and personnel on student achievement, and for documenting unintended outcomes associated with policy implementation at the local level.

Finally, these questions are relevant to all stakeholders in education who are concerned with the wisdom and feasibility of marrying accountability and program implementation. This study of the implementation of the LCC role in one district suggests that such a union can be beneficial if accountability extends to all who have a role in program implementation.

References


Evaluating the Role of the Local Campus Coach in Reading First Schools


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Appendix

Relevant Interview Questions for Local Campus Coaches

November Interview
1. How much of an issue has “implementation fidelity” been for you at your school?
2. In what ways so far have you been able to support teachers as they implement the new core reading program?

December Focus Group
3. In what ways do teachers need your support now after several months of implementing the new core reading program?

May Interview
4. How much of an issue has “program fidelity” been for you at your school during this latter part of the school year? Is it different from when the program first started? If it has changed, why? If it hasn’t changed, why not?
5. In what ways have you supported teachers as they implement the core reading program? Is this different from when the program started?
6. How has the principal participated in the implementation of the core reading program? Do you feel supported in your efforts by the principal?
7. At the focus group in December, several coaches commented that they were performing more “administrative” functions than they had at the first of the school year. Do you feel you are performing more administrative duties now than you were at the beginning of the year? If so, what are some of those duties, and why have these changes occurred?
The Design Team
for Program or Project Development

by
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Abstract

“We are all something, but none of us are everything” (Pascal, 2006). With that premise, it is easy to imagine that the more you combine knowledge with that of others, the more information you will have collectively. An example of collective knowledge is Wikipedia, the on-line encyclopedia founded by Jimmy Wales and Larry Sanger (Levack, 2003). The founders started gathering information, combined information, increased contributions with input by others, and soon had approximately 7,000 contributors from around the world. Wikipedia’s success is based on the philosophy that you are collectively smarter than you are individually. Although you do not need 7,000 people on a grant development team, the philosophy will serve us well in proposal development. By bringing talented individuals together -- you establish a Design Team for program or project development.

Narrative

Definition

“Two heads are better than one”
- John Heywood, English writer, 1546

A Design Team is a holistic group unified in a joint effort which could include a variety of players including content professionals, grant facilitators, recorders, proofreaders, key partners, or fiscal managers. In Winning Strategies for Developing Grant Proposals, Browning states that it is critical to the success of a project that all stakeholders have input into the plan and proposal. While no two teams are the same, there are key ingredients for success. These include ownership in the plan; commitment to the project, perhaps with intent to do the project with or without the grant; knowledge of the roles and responsibilities of the key players; and a clear timeline for program development as well as delivery.
Why is a Design Team Important?
“No one wants advice, only collaboration.”
-John Steinbeck (1902-1968)

In a typical organization, while everyone agrees that a topic is important, some do not realize that it takes more than a grant professional to bring an idea from a wishful thought to a reality. In his publication, Kiritz describes successful program development as a result of facilitation (2004). He states, “Developers of a proposal should act as facilitators, bringing together the needs of beneficiaries, applicant organization, and funding source in one coherent and logical plan” (Kiritz, 2004, p. 2). The necessity of having a team approach to grant development exists for many reasons, including time management, fields of expertise, contractual obligations, and brainstorming power.

As with many things, there is never enough time; grant writing is no different. With deadlines and significant workloads, time is precious to many grant professionals. Teams are necessary in order to maximize time in program development. By making available information, members of the team expedite the grant process. After all, as Miner, Miner, and Griffith state, “Successful proposal writers recognize that it is difficult to sit down and write a proposal” (1998, p. 5). The planning through a team approach is critical to maximizing time efficiency. One of the best ways to gain the collaboration of your team is to be extremely organized; this shows the Design Team respect by valuing their time. Have an agenda and sign in sheet for all meetings. The agenda keeps the meeting organized and on task while the sign in sheet shows that their attendance is important. You should always present yourself as a professional and show the team that they can depend on you to be concise, efficient, and organized.

Even a grant professional who has been in an organization for many years is not an expert on every topic; nor should they be. As the Wikipedia example shows, the more collaboration you have, the better your output will be. By acting as a facilitator, a grant professional can pull in stakeholders with expertise in many fields together to collaboratively design a program.

A proposal is not simply an idealistic litany of what an organization hopes to do if awarded funds. If accepted, a proposal becomes a contract between the applicant and funding source. This point must be recognized in an organization. Most programmatic people do not want their grant professional (either in-house or contractor) writing a plan that will become a legal contract without sharing their input. This collaborative effort allows for a well-planned and well-written design.

Most people benefit from group brainstorming. If they did not, then why do we attend so many daily meetings and annual organizational retreats? Design Teams are necessary for brainstorming. This allows all parties to think through an idea to ensure it is feasible and fundable. Miner, Miner, and Griffith state “as you develop ideas internally, you may soon discover that what you want is not what you initially thought you wanted” (1998, p. 7). Without these brainstorming sessions, organizations may submit proposals for unrealistic programs. A well thought-out program is not only beneficial to the organization, but is also more likely to be funded. When you end the brainstorming meeting, make sure the Design Team meeting ends with next steps and the next meeting date. It would be a mistake to brainstorm ideas, get the team inspired, and then let them out the door without a clear funnel for their enthusiasm.
Composition of a Design Team

The grant development Design Team should be composed of: key personnel with content knowledge, administrators with implementation knowledge, players with grant development knowledge, and fiscal managers with budget knowledge – just to name a few. Each Design Team will look as different as the grant proposals under development. It is a fluid design that is custom tailored to meet the needs of the project and proposal at hand.

The diversity of players in a Design Team represents the same diversity that we see all around us – from our best grant projects to our own professional organization. For example, the American Association of Grant Professionals (AAGP, 2006) has developed into a strong organization partly because of the diversity of services and the ability to provide solutions to everyone’s diverse needs (Renninger, 2005). Your Design Team composition will be strengthened by identifying the particular needs of your program and following through with soliciting assistance from all necessary parties. It is important to note here, the design team may or may not be solely composed of internal team members. At a minimum, all interested stakeholders should play a role in program development. For example, in human services organizations, the Design Team must include the consumers or recipients of the service in order to ensure their needs are adequately met. In education grants, the Design Team should include faculty or teachers who will implement the program. The following are two examples of initial Design Teams composition.

1. A request for proposal (RFP) has been received asking bidders to develop a program for children with autism in order to help them develop increased socialization skills. The Design Team in this instance may include parents of students with autism, teachers, behavioral therapists, a fiscal representative, program administrators, and grant professionals.

2. An RFP has been received for a training grant to increase workers’ skills and allow them the opportunity to make more money. An initial meeting for this grant would possibly include the training manager, program administrator, a fiscal representative, grant professional, and representatives from the department that will receive the training.

The two examples are similar in that they both address the particular needs of the grant proposal. They are different though, because the first example uses multiple stakeholders from outside the organization. For the first example, it was necessary to pull in outside resources. In the second example, the grant was an internal program and participation from outside stakeholders was not as critical. The bottom line in choosing the Design Team is to involve all persons concerned with the grant and make them part of the planning process - especially those who will be involved in implementation once the grant is awarded.

Private Nonprofits

A common theme throughout the non-profit sector is that agencies tend to be understaffed and people over-worked. Many people in the world need assistance. Non-profit organizations take it upon themselves to address these needs. Often, they work with limited funds and try to help the most people possible. This lack of time and staff, as well as a constant need for more money, are the most significant issues present in private sector Design Teams. “My program needs money” is a common phrase heard in the non-profit world. The obstacle for the private sector grant professional is gaining the cooperation of Design Team members who are almost constantly busy. The first task as the Grant professional is to impress upon the team the importance of planning. The reasons teams are important must be shared with the team before
you begin. Gaining the strong support of the Agency Director and having an enthusiastic Project Director are crucial for a successful proposal development effort.

If your organization is well-established, it may be more difficult to do this, as people are likely comfortable with how the organization (including the grant acquisition process) has run and may be resistant to change. In this instance, it may be more effective to take a show-not-tell approach. You may want to hold a training session for all potential design team members or, preferably, your organization as a whole. Use successful proposals as examples and focus on how the planning process went for those applicants. Use your workshop as an additional practice and hold a mock-planning session. Begin with an RFP for the staff to review and brainstorm possible ideas.

If organizing the plan is a concern, it may be helpful to introduce a logic model to your staff (United Way, 1996; Kellogg, 2004). Have the staff attempt to complete the model for their project. This will show them the key ingredients of a program design. If they are unable to complete the model, chances are the program design is not feasible. By showing your staff the logic model, they will learn the complexities of the design process. This newfound appreciation should lead to more cooperation when the time comes to complete the proposal.

**Educational Institutions**

When is a team approach appropriate to preparing a proposal? For education, whether it is higher education, preschool, or K-12 education, a team approach is always essential. No matter what level of education, certain commonalities exist in the processes.

At the university level there are several players involved in even the simplest application: the project director who usually writes the document; a department-level budget specialist to provide salary information and advice on allowable costs, indirect cost calculation, and other financial issues; and a Contracts and Grants Officer to review the proposal, approve the final document, and ensure it conforms to university policies. Ideally, a grant professional would also be involved to assist the project director in making the proposal both compliant with the sponsor’s requirements and reviewer-friendly. The grant professional should NEVER be the sole author unless he or she is also the project director, the recipient of the service, and the provider of the service all rolled into one person.

All levels of education have requirements for Board of Director approval of the grants and must comply with the stated policies. No matter what level, one of the main obstacles is impact to other departments. For example, a teacher might write a beautiful proposal to receive computers and forget to consider the impact to the technology department. In that scenario, the teacher, administration, and technology department representatives should all be involved on the Design Team.

In K-12 education, most systems have levels of funding defined with procedures. If the project is a small-school based grant, teachers and parents might only be involved with the finance director and principal. For larger grants that must be run out of the district office, the grants office, fiscal department, and content area staff will need to be on the design team.

The community college team is often composed of the project administration, the faculty who will implement the project, a representative from the budget office, and the grant officer. The grant officer often facilitates the meetings with the faculty and administration personnel providing the content and goals. In some colleges, the grant officer handles the fiscal role as well as the proposal development role. Once again, depending on the college, the team should include
the compliance officer so they are aware of the plan; in some cases, the compliance officer and
the grant officer are the same person.

Grants are awarded to universities for a variety of program types, each of which has unique
requirements for Design Team staffing. Proposals for research funding are often easier to prepare
and may result in substantial awards. The Principle Investigator (PI), or lead project personnel,
should do the bulk of the writing, as he or she is most familiar with the research to be conducted.
The PI would be supported by department fiscal officers and the dean or department head to
resolve any staffing or laboratory space availability issues.

Proposals for large programs that would have university-wide impact such as building
construction, renovation, or grants to establish new curricula or student support programs, would
generally be developed by the President’s Office with the assistance of senior staff and the
Grants, Contracts, and Fiscal Offices.

Proposals for outreach and cooperative extension programs are analogous to those from
non-profit service organizations and many municipal applications. The membership of the
Design Team can vary widely depending on the size and complexity of the proposed program.

An expanded design or development team is needed whenever a proposal is large in both
scope and cost, has multiple and varied tasks, partners, either within the organization or external
to it, and subcontracted effort. The composition of the team depends on the characteristics of the
program to be developed, but in general should include the following:

• The Project Director or Principal Investigator (PI) should take the lead in the overall
  program design. He or she should supply the vision and the primary competence to
  formulate the overall structure and much of the content.

• Co-Project Directors or Co-Principal Investigators (CoPI) might be required on a large
  project that may be separated into major elements that would be directed by an identified
  individual. Particularly if these are to be subcontracted elements, they should be directed
  by a Co-Project Director who would take the lead in writing those particular sections of
  the proposal narrative.

• A Budget Specialist should be involved early in the design and writing of the proposal,
  especially if it is large or has several subcontracts. Not only will the budget person
  provide salary and other information, he or she will be invaluable in structuring the
  subcontracts and other cost elements to ensure they are both clearly stated and allowable.
  Their involvement also makes institutional review significantly easier.

• The Program Evaluator, especially in any large program (as opposed to research), should
  be identified early in the process and be involved in the design from the beginning. The
  Evaluator will be able to ensure that the needs statement and objectives are comparable
  and measurable, with appropriate indicators identified. He or she will also be able to
  identify the data items that need to be collected, the design for collection, and analysis
  strategies that are integral to the operation of the program, easing the data collection
  burden and providing interim results and feedback. This significantly strengthens both the
  proposal and the funded project. Quite often, the Evaluator will also write the evaluation
  sections of the proposal.

• The Proposal Manager and/or Logistic Facilitator. In some systems, this person is also
  the grant professional, pulling the component together into a cohesive application. The
  grant professional works closely with the PI, establishes and maintains the development
  schedule and assignments, and then completes the proposal forms. S/he also serves as the
  coordinator of the input and maintains the official draft of the proposal. The grant
professional serves as the preliminary reviewer, ensuring that all RFP requirements are met and the narrative is clear and consistent. The grant professional also compiles all letters of support and other attachments. If the proposal is to be submitted electronically, especially through the Federal Government website (www.grants.gov), the grant professional should be the single point of contact for entering information into the system. The grant professional should also ensure that if a human subject review is conducted, there is research data collected for which it would be required.

Sometimes, the grant professional may be the only person on the team who is not invested in the implementation of the proposal process. Often, with a limited knowledge of the subject area, s/he serves as a reality check team member to make sure all information is explained sufficiently for any reader to understand. This person often plays the role of the devil’s advocate. By looking at the proposal with a critical eye, the grant professional is likely to find areas needing clarification. This is important because if the grant professional has a question, the reader will likely share the same concern. The grant professional serves an important role in ensuring that the narrative is complete, compliant, and reviewer-friendly, and the budget is clear and supports the proposed activities.

Local Governments

Local governments also apply for several different types of grants, including both formula and block grants as well as funding for specific services. The project director and head of the design team should be from the department that will have oversight over the project. In general, the design team may include representatives from the Fiscal Office, Human Resources if staff is to be hired, and the grant professional. Stakeholder participation, including potential participants and neighborhood associations, is critical in the grant development process; this is especially true for service provision grants. Many RFPs from federal agencies require documentation of significant client/stakeholder participation in both program and proposal development. This requirement is becoming increasingly ever-present in many RFP guidelines and applications. The reasons for this may vary among funding sources, but is likely to be attributed to the increasing competitiveness for grant funding. Although not the subject of this paper, the focus on collaboration among agencies is beneficial for all involved. Collaborations often lead to larger grants which offer more to the beneficiaries. Individual agencies can rarely provide the same amount of services as a consortium.

Implementing the Design Team

“To succeed as a team is to hold all of the members accountable for their expertise.”
- Mitchell Caplan, CEO, E*Trade Group Inc.

Successful implementation of the design team depends heavily on two basic principles: clearly defined roles and responsibilities and a development schedule that has been endorsed by all members of the team. These should both be thoroughly discussed and agreed upon by all team members at the initial meeting. In addition, all team members should receive a copy of the development plan.

The disbursement of roles and responsibilities will vary among agencies and is a critical component of the grant development process. Each member of the Design Team must know their role from the onset. These should be clearly defined at the first meeting and should be included in your written plan. Roles may change as the process unfolds and it is imperative for the grant
professional to allow for flexibility. Many times, the grant professional will find they are tackling many jobs which were not initially theirs. While this may need to be addressed on a systemic level, the grant professional must simply move forward in order to meet the grant deadline.

Perhaps the most common weakness of the proposal development process is not allowing sufficient time at the beginning of the process to develop the program adequately, or at the end for internal review and approval. Each of these can be fatal to successful grant seeking.

In many cases program development activity must begin several months before the RFP is released, particularly when a client’s or stakeholder’s input is required, or the program is to be a collaborative effort with other agencies. This is especially true with state and federal RFPs which typically give a one-month to 45-day turnaround. In this preliminary stage the Project Director and grant professional will be involved most heavily, as will stakeholders and clients. As additional partners are identified, they can be brought into the team and their roles – and tentative share of the budget – defined. By the time the RFP is released, this core team will be well established and ready to begin writing.

For too many of us the final review and signoff process is accompanied by barely-controlled panic as the deadline looms. The institutional review process can take much longer than anticipated, particularly if multiple departments or institutions are involved or there are complex budgetary issues. If human subject review is required, the grant professional and Project Director will need to begin the process early in the development period. On occasion, review can be halted entirely if a key person in the chain is unexpectedly unavailable. The grant professional should alert the reviewers that the proposal is nearing completion and ensure that they, or a designee, will be available.

In order for all team members to stay focused and meet deadlines, the development plan, distributed to all Design Team members, should keep everyone on track. Many departments or organizations develop a set of procedures for the grant process that helps the Design Team know the steps and policies. Your plan should include a policy on submission and roles and responsibilities of all team members. An outline or template can be developed with the general steps and the details filled in to match the current RFP requirements. A written policy or procedure eliminates misunderstandings and miscommunication; it also portrays the grant professional as organized and practiced in your approach to a complicated process.

**Summary**

With any good Design Team, it is important to remember that “Grant seeking is a process, not an event” (New & Quick, 2001, p. 61). As in any process, there are steps and procedures. Below are some suggestions that may help you successfully manage your Design Team:

1. Identify the key players and talent essential to a successful proposal.
2. Set a planning meeting, have an agenda, and review background knowledge (Project CRISS, 2006; Strangman & Hall, 2004).
3. Develop a proposal process and present it at the first meeting.
4. Define roles and responsibilities of the team members.
5. Establish, review, and follow a timeline for project completion.
6. Know how to develop and use a logic model.
7. Have an agenda and sign in sheet for all meetings.
8. Set a timeline or flow chart for project completion.
9. End all meetings with a clear statement of next steps.
10. Maintain communication with all team members.

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Strategic Planning: Five Steps to a More Secure Future
by
Carl Richardson

Carl Richardson has twenty-seven years of experience in nonprofit management, fundraising, and organizational development, and has served a broad range of charitable organizations, from federal and state agencies to small grassroots organizations. In addition, he has taught board development, strategic planning, fundraising, grantwriting, and other nonprofit management topics for the University of New Hampshire Continuing Education Services, Brown University Learning Communities, the American Association of Grant Professionals, and the National Society of Grant Writing Professionals.

Narrative

An organization that is growing and hopes to sustain growth needs a set of strategies to guide its program development, build a solid financial foundation, and prepare for challenges that lie ahead. In other words, it needs a strategic plan. A strategic plan is a vision of your organization's future and the basic steps required to achieve that future. A good plan should include goals and objectives, desired outcomes, metrics for measuring your progress, timelines, and budgets.

Although the ultimate goal of the strategic planning process is to develop a plan, the value of the exercise often lies in the process itself. Strategic planning affords stakeholders in an organization the opportunity to learn more about the organization, to share their perceptions of its strengths and weaknesses, and to discuss critical issues affecting, or likely to affect, the organization in the future. The process should be designed to generate decisions arrived by consensus. Single-person planning, while efficient, usually eliminates the opportunity to distribute ownership of the plan — and, by extension, responsibility for the organization's future — among key stakeholders. In contrast, a consensual approach is likely to ensure that key stakeholders believe in the organization's vision of the future and are committed to achieving it.

Step One: Getting Started

Not every organization needs the in-depth approach required to create a formal strategic plan; in many cases, a two-page action plan to get you through the next eighteen months is sufficient. This is especially true of grassroots organizations, all-volunteer groups, and nonprofits in the start-up phase.

Once stakeholders in an organization have decided that a formal strategic plan is called for, the first thing you need to do is to plan to plan. Form a planning team that includes your board chair and/or ranking board leader, your CEO or executive director, key staff members, and, when appropriate, community leaders. You may also want to include other stakeholders such as long-time program volunteers, vendors, and staff or board members from partnering organizations. If possible, choose your team members for their ability to collaborate. Be wary of stakeholders who seem to have an individual agenda or who hold fast to predetermined notions.

Next, the team needs to establish an agenda for its first meeting. Topics of discussion should include:

1) Why do we need a strategic plan? Maybe you are a still-young organization struggling to gain traction. Maybe you are facing a critical issue or a changed environment for your services. Or maybe you simply want to continue the momentum developed under your current plan. Whatever your situation, before you can plan effectively you need to understand the reason why you are planning.
2) How far out should we plan? Not too many years ago, the typical strategic plan looked out five years or more. Today, many executives and consultants caution against planning more than two years out. I encourage my clients to do what makes sense for them: If you are a new start-up, think about developing a twelve-month plan designed to put your organization on solid footing; if you have been around awhile and achieved stability, a three-year plan might make sense; five-year (or longer) plans are not uncommon for public school systems, municipalities, and larger well-established nonprofits with intensive capital needs. Again, the best advice is to pick the time frame that's right for your particular organization and circumstance.

3) Should we hire a planning consultant? This question deserves careful consideration. A good consultant will move the process along and keep everyone on track, reducing the opportunities for complaining, finger-pointing, and other types of unproductive behavior.

If you decide to create the plan without the assistance of a consultant, do not, under any circumstance, allow your CEO to moderate subsequent planning discussions. Her (or his) input into the plan is simply too important for it to be diluted by things she will need to say and do in her role as planning leader. Instead, appoint another organizational leader to moderate the discussions and keep the process on track.

4) When do we need to have the finished plan in hand? Your planning timeline should be based on milestones rather than specific dates. Organize the process into stages: basic planning, information gathering, decision making, writing, review, and approval. Some stages will take longer than you think; others may go more quickly. Allow adequate time for each, but do not allow the process to drag. Remember, the point of the exercise is to finish with a workable plan, not meet a deadline.

Step Two: Gathering Information

Once the above questions have been answered, the next task is to gather information that describes your organization's current situation and the environment in which it operates. Planners often call this a situational analysis or audit. Typically, it includes a narrative description of your organization, including its history, values, mission, programs, leadership, staffing, and finances, and, in many cases, something called a SWOT analysis — a detailed description of your organization's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and (competitive) Threats. Some organizations take the process a step further and conduct a PEST analysis — an analysis of the Political, Environmental, Social, and Technical factors currently affecting the organization. Many organizations use both. If your organization is considering a radically different program for the community, is planning to purchase or build a new facility, or is examining the possibility of a merger, then you will probably want to do both. If, on the other hand, your organization is creating a strategic plan in response to a single issue or challenge, both may not be necessary. The choice will depend on the predisposition of your planning team and your particular circumstance.

Step Three: Decision-Making Time

Once you have gathered the information you need to determine the current state of your organization and its programs and activities, the next step is to make decisions based on that information. It is the responsibility of the planning team, in consultation with other stakeholders, to establish the organization's strategic direction and priorities; to identify goals and milestones on the road to achieving those priorities; and to craft objectives designed to meet those goals. In making these decisions, the planning team should keep its focus on the big picture — the things
most likely to result in positive change for the organization. Purchasing a boiler for your building or deciding to increase the size of your mailing list by five percent a year will not dramatically change or enhance your organization's prospects and are the kinds of operational decisions best left to staffers.

Step Four: Drafting the Plan

Once the planning team has established your strategic priorities and identified goals and objectives designed to realize those priorities, it is the job of executive management to draft a plan that outlines those priorities and goals, along with any new staff requirements needed to achieve the plan, budgets to support your efforts, and a timeline for turning the vision into reality. The plan should then be reviewed and revised by your planning team and presented to your governing committee for comments, suggestions, and approval. Do not be surprised if members of the governing committee send the draft to others for additional comment; that is their job.

When planning for the future, you can't be too careful. If, for example, your organization operates a community healthcare center and plans to expand its presence by purchasing several buildings over the next few years, you might want to send a draft of your plan to key community leaders who do not have a vested interest in the project and are in a position to attest to the validity of your vision and ambitions. If, on the other hand, your organization is an animal shelter that wants to expand its spay/neuter programs over eighteen months or so, broad community review is probably not necessary. Whether or not to seek community review is largely the prerogative of your planning team. If the basic temperament of the team is conservative and/or it believes your new strategic direction will have a deep impact on the community, then go ahead and offer the community an opportunity to comment.

Step Five: Implementation

The board has reviewed, commented on, and approved your plan. Now the fun begins. I have worked with a number of organizations that have paid handsomely to have their strategic plan bound in Corinthian leather with gold engraving and have literally put the plan on the shelf, never to look at it again. What a waste. A strategic plan, no matter how carefully conceived, is worth very little if it is not scrupulously implemented.

To ensure that your plan is and remains ever-present in the minds of your staff, volunteers, and other stakeholders, your governing committee (or its equivalent) should be tasked with monitoring progress toward the goals and objectives laid out in the plan. Direction-setting and -monitoring are core responsibilities of the board and should not be delegated to a planning team or other entity. Instead, the board as a whole should review the plan at regular intervals and, if necessary, suggest adjustments to keep the organization on track.

So there you have it: five steps to a more secure future. Just remember as you get ready to plan for your next — or very first — plan, that truly effective strategic planning requires equal measures of leadership, commitment, patience, trust, and the participation of many stakeholders. Beyond that, if you can remember to be rigorously honest about your organization's strengths and weaknesses; include a sufficient amount of implementation detail, and strike a balance between ambition and realism, then your chances of success are excellent. Good luck!
Hard Truths About Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is not an activity for all seasons. There are times when it makes sense to plan and other times when you want to avoid planning like the plague. Organizations that are already strapped for resources can save valuable money, time, and effort by avoiding the trap of using the planning tool to resolve problems that are systemic.

What Strategic Planning Is Not. Strategic planning is not the answer to many of the most common organizational problems, such as unanticipated deficits, failure to meet fundraising goals, executive management squabbles, or board disputes. These kinds of crises are generally best resolved with short-term planning tools, consensus building exercises, and/or conflict resolution activities.

Nor is strategic planning a single four-hour or day-long retreat. While your plan may not require months of painstaking soul-searching and fact-finding, the planning process should entail more than a single meeting of the board to discuss goals for the coming year. It takes time for a group of individuals — any group of individuals — to gather information, consider the relevant facts, and develop a strategic direction that makes sense for the organization.

Similarly, strategic planning is not a staff meeting convened for the purpose of setting goals. When done well, strategic plans articulate desired outcomes that often trigger new and/or improved core policies and practices. Staff input is critical to the process, but staff alone cannot and should not be expected to establish the strategic direction of the organization.

When to Avoid Strategic Planning. Your organization may well encounter legitimate circumstances that warrant the canceling — or at least the postponement — of a strategic planning exercise. These include, but are not limited to, times of trauma. A long-range plan will not alleviate the pain associated with the firing of an executive, the loss of an important volunteer leader, or the deepening of a financial crisis.

Do not engage in strategic planning when there is no chance that the plan will be implemented. Successful planning requires the commitment of stakeholders not only to the process, but to the implementation, evaluation, and adjustment of the plan.

Do not engage in strategic planning when the prospects for developing a sound plan are slight. A strong personality on a board or executive management team who makes it clear that he/she wants to use the planning process to install an agenda featuring a favorite but unneeded program, project, or facility will almost always doom the process to failure. In such cases, the organization is better served by postponing the strategic planning exercise until a resolution of the issue in dispute has been achieved.

Finally, and most importantly, do not engage in strategic planning if your key stakeholders are unwilling to commit time, money, and effort to the venture. Without such an investment, planning is a useless activity.
If you have a question about strategic planning, nonprofit management or fundraising or any other aspect of what it takes to be a sustainable nonprofit in the 21st century, you can ask Carl and other nonprofit professionals on the PND Talk message board. Or contact Carl directly at fundrazr@comcast.net

AAGP gratefully acknowledges Philanthropy News Digest for allowing us to reprint this article. "Copyright c 2004 Philanthropy News Digest".
People with high self-esteem can appreciate a Dummies book. The Dummies brand has so much credibility that their black and yellow covers are ubiquitous. You can make a present of a Dummies book without offending the recipient. Why read Grant Writing for Dummies when there are bare-bones articles available that explain grant writing essentials? My answer is that Ms. Browning’s book makes chasing after the money sound like fun. Not easy work, but fun.

GWfD starts by talking about what a swell line of work grant writing is. This is true, if you have a grant writing type of personality. It is terrific work, indeed. You can be an employee or a freelancer. You can write governmental grants, foundation grants, and corporate grants—all three or as a specialist in one. You can be a full-timer or someone who promotes hizerhur (“his/her”) career by snagging a grant now and then when an interesting opportunity comes into view. You can be a retiree or someone starting out in nonprofit work. You can, however, make a living, but not a fortune.

Ms. Browning does not say this, but you will not be out of work very long, if you can write grants. (Speaking strictly, you are writing a grant proposal or doing "grant proposal writing."). You can have almost any eccentricity or impediment imaginable, a criminal record, a closet full of clothing that has never seen a dry cleaner or laundromat, a yen to wear pajamas and slippers to work, a tendency to work in the wee hours, a gift for working for thirty-six hours in a row, hyper-competitiveness, a tendency to leave nose prints on your computer’s monitor—almost anything. If you can write a winning proposal and shove it through the slot in the post office on deadline, you can be a professional grant writer. If you can avoid irritating your co-dependents, so much the better.

The canonical form of a proposal is NEED, then OBJECTIVES, then METHODS, then QUALIFICATIONS, then BUDGET, then ATTACHMENTS. Funders often enforce their own standards, so that their reviewers can find what they want where they expect it to be and move their review at a fast clip. Ms. Browning’s presentation is too deliciously antic and expansive to follow such a rigorous structure. A good storyteller, she allows her narrative to wander for quite a bit, so you never stay on one point long enough to settle into a funk.

She begins to zig and zag when she explains the search for government grants, then how to fill out federal forms, then (with a worked out example) how to write a funding plan for your nonprofit, then the search for private money from foundations and corporations, then the terminology of grant writing, then review criteria, and on and on, touching on one subject, then letting go of it for a while, and returning to it in a later chapter.

If you are strongly committed to the linear form of presentation, you may find GWfD wildly disconcerting. But Ms. Browning's pedagogy makes perfectly good sense to someone who has taught grant writing for several years: you have to feed the information in spoonfuls, lest the student's balance between submissiveness and creativity swing too far toward formality.
Dear Editorial Board,

I can think of two reasons to write a letter to the editor. First, the Journal is changing, and you can help determine its future. When you write a letter commenting on the Journal’s content and style, the editors can respond to your needs, creating the best possible publication for all grant professionals.

Second, the Journal is a vehicle for development of the grants profession, and you can contribute to this development. When you write a letter commenting on an article you read in the Journal, you contribute your ideas, experience and expertise to the growing conversation about the grants profession. Your contributions will generate new ideas and knowledge, and help all of us reflect on what we have learned.

Please, contribute to the development of our profession by writing a letter to the editor!

Amy Lamborg
Grant Coordinator
Miami University Hamilton
Hamilton Ohio

Address your letters to journal@grantprofessionals.org
Author Guidelines

Articles or proposals may be submitted at anytime to the Editorial Board of the Journal of the American Association of Grant Professionals via email to journal@grantprofessionals.org. All submissions are read by the Editorial Board first. They may then be sent to peer reviewers, anonymously, for comments, revisions and recommendations. Submissions may be returned to the author for revisions. The completed submission is then forwarded to the Editorial Board for the final publication decision. The Board reserves the right to delay or withhold publication of any article submitted. Authors will be kept informed of such decisions.

All submissions accepted for publication (with a few exceptions, such as reprints of articles) will remain the copyrighted property of the American Association of Grant Professionals. Written permission must be obtained from AAGP to reprint any published article.

Articles should be submitted as e-mail attachments in Microsoft Word format. Any graphics or tables must be compatible with Word or Microsoft software. Each article must contain a short biography of each author (100 words) and an abstract (150 words) at the beginning. Formatting of references, punctuation, grammar usage, paragraph formatting, etc., must follow the APA Style Manual for Publication 5th Edition; articles not following this format will be returned to the author(s).

Articles must be relevant to the grants profession. If you have questions, please e-mail journal@grantprofessionals.org. Submission deadlines are posted on the AAGP Website.