Journal of the Grant Professionals Association

Dear Readers,

The GPA focuses upon the advancement of grantsmanship as a profession and upon the support of its practitioners. Methods for sharing knowledge among grant professionals are essential to this purpose. The GPA provides many such activities—the annual conference, a newsletter, the website, strategy papers, webinars, meetings, and of course the Journal of the GPA.

The Journal is a great knowledge-sharing method, because many people work and learn together. Writing a journal article is a great learning experience; Journal readers learn from the papers, and the peer reviewers and editors learn while volunteering. Both of us volunteered to work on the Journal very soon after joining the GPA—Amy in 2007, and Barbara in 2008. We have enjoyed the experience and learned much along the way. But now it's time for others to apply their visions for development of the grants profession to the Journal. Therefore, we are excited to introduce the two new Journal of the GPA co-editors, David Lindeman and Andy Rawdon.

David H. Lindeman, GPC, CFRE, is Senior Director for Development and External Relations at CRDF Global, a nonprofit in Arlington, VA that promotes international science and technology cooperation. He has 20 years of experience as a grants professional, including proposals to many types of funders for programs in health, science, education, and international development. David worked as a grantmaker and served as a reviewer for nonprofit educational exchange programs. He holds a Specialized Certificate in Copyediting; has served on the GPA E-Newsletter Committee, and is member of the GPA-National Capital Area chapter.

Andrew S. Rawdon, JD, has been the peer review manager for the Journal of the GPA for four years. Andy is Director of Development for Compeer Rochester, Inc., a mental-health mentoring agency in Rochester, NY. In addition to his 11-year career there and his work as a federal grant reviewer for the Department of Health and Human Services, he was a practicing attorney in Portland, ME for many years, handling elder law, estate, taxation, and health care planning matters. As peer review manager for the Journal, Andy professionalized our peer review procedures, implementing training and protecting our double-blind process. During formation of the strategy paper committee, he offered guidance for development of its peer review processes.

We are excited to have such capable new co-editors for the 2014 Journal of the GPA. Thanks David and Andy, and thanks to everyone who has written for or helped with the Journal over the years.

Amy Lamborg and Barbara Roberts
Former co-editors, Journal of the GPA
GPA Mission

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

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

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

Articles or proposals may be submitted at any time to the Editorial Board of the *Journal of the Grant Professionals Association* via email to journal@grantprofessionals.org. Submissions will be peer-reviewed anonymously, for comments, revisions and recommendations. The Board reserves the right to delay or withhold publication of any article submitted. Authors will be kept apprised.

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Articles must be relevant to the grants profession. If you have questions, please email journal@grantprofessionals.org. Submission deadlines are posted on the GPA website.
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Strategies and Benefits of Using the Bottom Line Up Front (BLUF) Writing Style in Grant Proposals

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Abstract
One of the most helpful strategies any grant development professional can follow is a writing style called “Bottom Line Up Front” (BLUF). Used extensively throughout the US Military, BLUF patterns an established journalistic technique that prioritizes information in relation to level of importance, print space, and word count limitations. BLUF has the writer present the main conclusion or recommendation within the first paragraph, followed by additional information of lesser importance in subsequent paragraphs. Promoting BLUF in team projects is helpful since most writers employ various styles, may not fully understand how reviewers want information presented, or know how the formal scoring process is conducted. Grant reviewers, however, eagerly want to read proposals that state the bottom-line points early, with main points clearly found. Reviewers also find it tedious when writers do not present requested information in a relevant, sequential order, or bury content within long sections of copy. This article describes how BLUF was initially developed, how writers can benefit from following BLUF’s supporting strategies and tools, and how these strategies translate into a more efficient grant review process. Content and examples advanced in this article may be useful for one-on-one and small group training, and to help contributing writers maintain focus during team writing projects.
Introduction
Writing styles have evolved over time. In recent years, this could be attributed to the many technological changes that impact the communications process. Today’s electronic grant-submission process is a good example. Proposal writers pull from a variety of skill-sets to ultimately produce a completed proposal. As grant professionals find themselves working more with others in the writing process, knowing how to share strategies that help orient contributing writers on ways to capture and maintain the reader’s attention are key lessons to share. The US Army established a quick reference process that helps writers from all skill levels stay focused on the context and purpose of their writing assignments. Communicating the “bottom line” aligns nicely with how today’s grant announcements ask to receive information. This article seeks to show how quick tutorials on bottom-line-up-front (BLUF) writing can help orient others on the process, and help produce useable content for inclusion in grant proposals.

Making Deadline is Not the Only Challenge Out There
Proposal writers face a wide range of challenges during each project. Writers work to present a compelling case for funding while following a parallel track of presenting historical points of fact about their organization. Reviewers expect to read well-developed sections of organizational performance and proposed activities. Information needs to be cohesive and readable throughout the proposal. For grant professionals, the key technique in learning how to write with greater clarity is learning to rewrite (Baker, 1988).

For some time now the military has worked to train personnel on an exacting method to communicate written material of both historic and analytical importance in a clear and concise way. Nowhere is this on greater display than in today’s military intelligence briefing community. “Intelligence analysts...usually present their work in person, sometimes only once, and often to a decision-making generalist who may not know as much about the topic as the analyst” (Marshall, 2005).

Military briefings are not unlike many of the initial compliance screens used in today’s grant-review process. However, it took years of refinement to get the military, a very large and bureaucratic organization, to effect change within the writer training programs they now offer. Getting to this level of proficiency took years of start and restarts. “Bottom Line Up Front” and the “BLUF” acronym are now familiar and commonly used throughout the military intelligence briefing community. Its origins, however, sprang from the need to gain clarity and order over chaotic and evolving modes of communication.
Wire Communications and the Birth of the Inverted Pyramid

Prior to the electronic transmission of words, the preferred style used by professional writers was rich and vivid. Writers relied heavily on protracted sentences to shape the contextual landscape for readers. For example, the classic poem *The Charge of the Light Brigade* by Alfred, Lord Tennyson is based on the 1854 news report from British correspondent William Howard Russell on the Battle of Balaklava during the Crimean War (Walch, 2012). Russell’s opening sentence runs a total of 59 words before the establishing facts (“who, what, where”) appear.

The invention of the telegraph by Samuel Morse in 1835, and the subsequent commercialization of wire service by Western Union in the decades that followed, forever altered the way writers composed news and information. The time it took to post news stories reduced from days to mere minutes, and the competitive nature to be first to file a story eliminated the vivid letter-writing correspondent. Despite the advantage of speed, the telegraph had one huge drawback—it was expensive. Western Union charged one cent per character, a great deal of money in the mid- to late 1800’s (Walch, 2012). Therefore, brevity became the more admired trait within the print news industry (Oseid, 2009).

During the American Civil War, newspapers relied heavily on wire services to report major battles—and spent hundreds of thousands of dollars in the process. To keep the cost down, correspondents stripped away their personal opinions and flowery language (Walch, 2012). Adding to the pressure, military censors routinely “clipped” field news reports before and during transmission (Scott, 1861). Since changes in censoring policy were daily occurrences (Gottschalk, 1990), field reporters had to develop a new writing style that could deliver the core elements of the story from the onset. What resulted was the development of a new structured reporting style called the “Inverted Pyramid.”

Most historians point to Secretary of War Edwin B. Stanton as a key example of how the Inverted Pyramid was effectively used. Stanton’s 1865 press release notified a war-weary nation that President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated. His release reads:

This evening at about 9:30 p.m. at Ford’s Theatre, the President, while sitting in his private box with Mrs. Lincoln, Mrs. Harris and Major Rathburn, was shot by an assassin, who suddenly entered the box and approached behind the President.

The assassin then leaped upon the stage, brandishing a large dagger or knife, and made his escape in the rear of the theatre.

The pistol ball entered the back of the President’s head and penetrated nearly through the head. The wound is mortal.
The President has been insensible ever since it was inflicted, and is now dying.

About the same hour an assassin, whether the same or not, entered Mr. Seward’s apartment and under pretense of having a prescription was shown to the Secretary’s sick chamber. The assassin immediately rushed to the bed and inflicted two or three stabs on the chest and two on the face.

It is hoped the wounds may not be mortal. My apprehension is that they will prove fatal.

The nurse alarmed Mr. Frederick Seward, who was in an adjoining room, and he hastened to the door of his father’s room, when he met the assassin, who inflicted upon him one or more dangerous wounds. The recovery of Frederick Seward is doubtful.

It is not probable that the President will live through the night. (Stanton, 1865)

As seen in Stanton’s press release, the Inverted Pyramid design (Figure 1) is simple and consists of three basic parts (Porter, 2010):

**Part One** – the opening paragraph (or lead) is where the questions “who, what, why, when, where and how” are answered. It consists of the “must have” information.

**Part Two** – additional information that is helpful to the reader, but not necessary. This can be information that adds color or supporting information.

**Part Three** – the least important information. This is the ‘nice to have’, not the ‘need to have’ stuff.

*Figure 1. The Inverted Pyramid*
Additional information of subordinate nature is included at the bottom of the pyramid as needed. However, the important point seen with Secretary Stanton’s example is that the most newsworthy information is communicated to the reader by the end of the first sentence in paragraph three. A total of 97 words communicate the closing chapter of America’s greatest domestic conflict.

**Origins of the Bottom Line Up Front Writing Style**

During periods of chaos, decision makers are challenged with the process of understanding what is actually happening. The time spent figuring out how best to respond and where to send supporting resources can make all the difference in command and control settings. In 1959, the US Army made an attempt to standardize the communications process, so that the written material advanced up the chain of command was “well organized [and] clear enough for the reader to understand in a single, rapid reading” (Leiby, 1987). The end result was the creation of a simple Army pamphlet entitled, “Improve your Writing.” Distributed throughout the service branch, this pamphlet contained several examples of “preferred standards,” and recommended the use of short paragraphs and sentences. The pamphlet apparently had no lasting impact. Program evaluators suggest the reason it failed was that it was “not part of a total program” and “lacked needed support from top Army leaders for change” (Leiby, 1987).

The next attempt to improve writing skills within the ranks began in 1977. A team visited field commands and conducted two-day workshops to demonstrate how “editorial controls [would serve] to enforce a more readable style” (Leiby, 1987). The training team recommended using more active verbs (e.g. “assess”, “organize”, “classify”) to improve clarity. Aside from creating a new word preference list, no evidence carried over to indicate actual improvements occurred. The Army eventually discontinued the traveling trainer teams in 1980 (Leiby, 1987).

Next, in 1986 the Army’s Communications Skills Office created two new training pamphlets specifically designed for career officers: “Effective Staff Writing Exercise Booklet,” and “Effective Writing for Army Leaders.” Both publications opened with a brief rationale on why a new branch-wide writing standard was needed.

Army writing does not communicate well and as a consequence wastes time and money. Poor writing is viewed ‘largely the result of habit.’ The outdated style can no longer be afforded, given information overload and complexity of the modern Army. (Baker, 1988)

The release of these new pamphlets also coincided with a favorable review of the Air Force’s “Effective Writing Course” by the Army’s Vice
Chief of Staff. The Army developed a comparable training course of their own, based on a series of printed training guides (Baker, 1988).

**Functional Components of Bottom Line Up Front**

Use of the Inverted Pyramid grew, with additional guidelines to encourage shorter writing sections. The Army established “Bottom Line Up Front” and the acronym “BLUF” as a quick way to orient writers on how they should approach written communication. BLUF consists of three basic components: structural changes, style changes, and the use of quick editing tools.

**Structural changes**

The principal approach to BLUF calls for writers at any skill level to focus on expressing their main point as the first task. It asks writers: “identify the one sentence you would keep if you had to eliminate all others” (Baker, 1988). This process ultimately serves to refine the information to a point where the reader suggests a recommendation, course of action, or summation from the onset.

The next step is “packaging.” The writer clearly separates each major sub-section by using short paragraphs, headers, or sectional titles. This process reduces the number of words needed for transitions, and orients the reader on the next general topic (Baker, 1988).

**Style changes**

Several recommendations help reduce the overall word count and keep information flowing smoothly for the benefit of the reader. The principal standard uses both structural and style changes to create a “reader-friendly bias.” (McIntosh, 1986)

- **Use active voice.** This mainly involves naming the specific person involved in the process or activity. Passive voice tends to hide the “doer” of the sentence. Active voice clarifies who is doing the action for the reader during the first read and helps reduce the number of words needed to communicate it.

- **Use I, you, we as subjects of sentences instead of this office, headquarters, etc.**

- **Use shorter words.** The goal is to have a document with only 15 percent of words having three syllables or more. (Example: replace “ameliorate” with “improve.”) A good online resource to reference syllable counts is www.wordcalc.com.

- **“Express rather than impress.”** Simply put, “Write as you talk—if you wouldn’t say it, don’t write it.” The goal here is the writer should use “middle-style” words with an intermediate level tone of formality.
Strategies and Benefits of Using the Bottom Line Up Front
(BLUF) Writing Style in Grant Proposals

(Example: “stubborn” is a middle-styled word, contrasted with the formal “recalcitrant” and informal “hardnosed”.)

- **Aim for shorter word-counts for each sentence.** Sentences should have a goal of 15 words as a target average.

- **Avoid long paragraphs.** With few exceptions, paragraphs should be no more than one inch deep. The BLUF style guide recommends five sentences as a maximum length per paragraph. When supported with open line-space before and after, this gives the reader a brief moment to process the information before moving on.

- Avoid jargon, and limit excessive use of acronyms. Occasionally repeat the full descriptive words or phrase the acronym is based upon.

- Avoid sentences that begin with “It is …”, “There is …”, “There are …” (Baker, 1988; Joint Staff Officer Information Center, n.d.)

**Editing tools**

Use a strategy of proofreading documents three times. Each read checks for separate items. The *first read* is the “quick screen edit.” The reviewer scans for noticeable errors and marks them for correction. The reviewer identifies what and where the “bottom line” statement is and moves it up to an appropriate leadoff position (if not already there).

The *second read* checks effectiveness and organization of content. Are items presented in a cohesive, logical manner? Does the information flow for the reader? Are there any noticeable areas that require the reader to backtrack to ensure meaning was communicated? The *third read* checks sentence structure, diction and typographical consistency (Baker, 1988).

**How This is Applied in Training**

Incorporating less-experienced writers into the review process makes a good impromptu training event, especially if the trainer slips in a grant response with no obvious bottom line. Once the document makes its rounds, ask participants to share what the suitable bottom line point should be, then work down the pyramid adding subordinate points of fact till the response is complete.

An additional point to share for the sake of scholarly interest is that the Army’s BLUF editing process includes a fourth step called the “clarity index tool.” This serves “as a yardstick to measure how readable [an individual contributor’s] writing is” (Army Pamphlet 600-67). When BLUF’s clarity index tool is part of a small group training exercise, the results show participants how they trend over longer sections of copy. This tool is also useful for periodic self-assessments.
The assessment tool works as shown in Figure 2 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>Target Goal</th>
<th>Actual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Count the number of sentences.</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Count the number of words.</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Divide the number of words by the number of sentences to get the average sentence length.</td>
<td>Target is 15 word average per sentence 21.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Count the number of long words (those with three or more syllables). (Calendar years excluded.)</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Divide the number of long words by the total word count to determine the percentage of long words.</td>
<td>Target is 15% 15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Add the average sentence length to the percentage of long words (numerical value only).</td>
<td>21.4 + 15 = 36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>This sum represents the writer’s clarity index total.</td>
<td>Target is 30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A clarity index total of 20 means the writing is too abrupt. An index score of 40 means the writing is too hard to understand (Army Pamphlet 600-67).

Figure 2. BLUF Clarity Index Tool

Based on the two paragraphs reviewed, the sample sentence average is too long to meet the BLUF “rapid-read” requirement. However, the writer succeeded in keeping the syllable count down to a comfortable level. With regards to hitting a suitable stride on the clarity index, it would seem the historic reference to The Charge of the Light Brigade resulted in yet another casualty.
How BLUF Can Help Writers During the Proposal Writing Process

An important factor to understand is how the writer's prior experience can impact the overall pace and tone of a proposal. This is most noticeable in academic writing. Professional journals and scholarly articles are oriented for larger audiences and specialists within a given field. As two observers describe:

In this setting, writers are trying to advance a finding that must be methodically described to be reproducible. The evaluation of written material is not just on the final answer, but the thinking, previous research and cited work that got them there (Glover, 2012).

The major pitfall to this style is that authors tend to provide huge amounts of unfocused and never-ending background information and do not summarize the expected value of their new idea. (Flanagan, 2012)

Brevity is not on display here.

To minimize these pitfalls, a good strategy is to begin by putting together a narrative outline. Most funding announcements provide sufficient instruction on what information applicants should provide, and the sequence order they should follow. Many outlines can be structured point-for-point as presented from the funding announcement. Compile and share this draft document with all members of your writing team.

Next, hold a brief meeting and share how the grant-review process works. Remind writers that panel reviewers consist of a small number of volunteers who are also busy professionals. Reference the outline and discuss what content needs to go into each section, then draft the best and most likely responses in short summary statements. This bullet list now becomes the basis to refine the project’s bottom line responses. Remind people “if you get ‘off message,’ your audience will most likely not read the whole paper and you lose a key opportunity...” (Flanagan, 2012). If supported with a brief training demonstration on the clarity index tool, contributing writers are prompted to aim for shorter sentences.

How BLUF Translates Into a More Effective Grant Review

Turning the page to find a solid page of “unbroken ‘wall o’ text’ evokes a strong visceral reaction from most reviewers” (Denny, 2002). Some grant professionals call this “page cramming,” and as one grant trainer characterizes, page cramming can be the kiss of death for your proposal during the review process (Ibrahim, Ebodaghe, Hill, & Simon, 2012).
Seasoned grant professionals stress the importance of formatting the narrative even before composing any copy. BLUF’s structural style of “packaging” (supporting sections with sub-headers and breaks) serves to break up long sections of copy. This makes the document easier to review by drawing the eye immediately to key points sought by reviewers. Key information is also easier to find upon subsequent reads (Yang, 2012).

Less-experienced writers may be surprised to find out just how few people read and score final proposals. The National Institutes of Health readily shares that, due to the sheer volume of proposals they receive, typically only two people carefully read through applications (NIH, 2012). While larger grant review panels may convene to review and score grants, each reviewer typically only reads the abstract, significance, and specific aims (NIH, 2012). Often, it is left to only two or three principal readers (often generalists) to brief the full review panel. Having key points clustered in related sections makes it easier for the full panel to find items during discussion and scoring (Yang, 2012).

**Conclusion**

Assessing writing skills and familiarizing contributing writers on the grant-review process are excellent starting points for an organizational training program. Organization training on BLUF familiarizes contributing writers to the process, and helps orient them on ways they can contribute productively to the project. Ensuring bottom-line points are up front also helps ensure grant application questions get answered in a systematic way.

Developing training activities to help improve a writer’s ability to present proposal material with brevity and clarity are not the easiest activities to plan. However, the BLUF writing style works well in achieving these goals, and aligns nicely with how grant reviewers want to receive information in today's electronic proposal format.

BLUF’s quick screen edit is also a useful tool because it checks to see if answers are correctly placed (or marked for repositioning) within the document. This strategy is particularly helpful when combined with subheadings. Reviewers are able to identify the main points quickly, and move smoothly from one section to the next.

The supporting clarity index tool helps illustrate how shorter sentences serve to improve clarity across extended sections of copy. This training tool works best in more formal instructional settings with several different writing samples.

Finally, BLUF’s three-pass proofreading strategy ensures message clarity is optimized for a single rapid-read. However, additional research is needed to evaluate how effective BLUF is in maintaining the reader’s attention if frequent reference is made to supporting data and attachments located outside the narrative section.
References


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The Power of Persuasion: The Sustainability of Externally-Funded Projects in Higher Education After Funding Expires

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_GPCI Competency 03: Knowledge of strategies for effective program and project design and development_

Abstract
This article highlights characteristics and conditions that facilitate sustainability of externally funded projects at institutions of higher education after funding ends. In particular, grant development professionals and faculty Principal Investigators working as a grantwriting team derive benefit from a keen understanding of how the use of persuasion fosters project implementation and sustainability. A project without the support of colleagues, administrators, and community partners remains a great idea and nothing more. By successfully engaging a critical mass of supporters, the resulting project has maximal opportunity to be implemented and sustained. The Stages of Change model provides a useful tool for understanding the process of persuasion and how to apply it in various stages of managing a project.

Introduction
In a higher-education setting, grant development professionals and faculty Principal Investigators (PIs) should bear in mind that no matter how worthy the goal of their project, there is always some level of resistance in a change process (Kerns & Watson, 2008). According to Eulalia R. Cobb, Program Officer for the Fund to Improve Postsecondary Education at the United States Department of Education, “The lesson for those contemplating a substantial innovation is to expect faculty skepticism, accept it as evidence of intellectual liveliness, and get on with the reform” (US Department of Education, 2000, p. xviii). Even Machiavelli, in 1513, cited the challenge of resistance to change:
It ought to be remembered that there is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things. Because the innovator has for enemies all those who have done well under the old conditions and lukewarm defenders in those who may do well under the new (Machiavelli, 1513, chapter 6).

This quote from *The Prince* shows the need for an innovator to be adept in the art of persuasion. Persuasion is “the passing from one position to another” (dictionary.com, n.d.). Many externally-funded projects at institutions of higher education involve educational innovation, and therefore will require persuasion to get buy-in from stakeholders. The US Department of Education (2004) lists faculty buy-in and support of proposed change by campus administration as key to a project’s sustainability. The Business-Higher Education Forum (2008) describes the support needed for project success more broadly, including off-campus backing from community partners, with whom a savvy grantwriting team creates a powerful coalition based on shared vision. This article offers practical approaches in supporting the sustainability of projects beyond the term of their grant awards.

**Historical Overview**

Washington legislators, state personnel, and faculty members alike are traditionally concerned about the tendency of federally-funded social programs to cease their activities when the funding term ends. For instance, Title III was the first “billion-dollar breakthrough for massive federal support for elementary and secondary education” (Hearn, 1969a, p. 1). In 1967, Senator Peter H. Dominick of Colorado, member of the Congress’ Education Committee, expressed concern about Title III aid:

As a legislator, I am vitally concerned whether [Title III projects] are in fact accomplishing the objectives envisioned by Congress and whether the money appropriated is being properly spent. I am specifically concerned about whether the program conducted will have a lasting effect on the school—or if, when the money for a project is exhausted and the initial program is terminated, the tent will be folded with little imprint on the educational processes of the school (US Office of Education, as cited in Hearn, 1969a, p. 17).

Senator Dominick’s concern was that such a significant investment of federal dollars would be for naught if project activities were not to continue.
In 1969, Dr. Norman Hearn, then Chief of Program Analysis and Dissemination for the US Department of Education, described the frustration funding agencies experience when the contributions of a project they sponsored evaporate upon cessation of federal funds. His article’s title embodies the funders’ cynicism: “When Sugar Daddy’s Gone, Does Baby Starve?” (Hearn, 1969b). More recently, funders coined another derogatory term for evanescent projects: “drive-by philanthropy” (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2002, p. 8).

In 1975, California State University (CSU) Chancellor Glenn Dumke wrote that it is imperative for educational reform efforts funded by the State of California, the CSU, and the Fund to Improve Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) to continue past their period of funding. In the report, which studied 137 major projects, Dumke wrote that non-continuation of project activities not only represents a waste of taxpayer dollars, but also is a detriment to students and faculty as the educational reforms and innovations evaporate (Office of the CSU Chancellor, 1975).

In 1988, Dr. Neil Rabitoy, then a faculty member at California State University, Long Beach, studied 70 CSU projects funded by Academic Program Improvement (API) grants and piloted from 1980–1986. This study qualitatively analyzed the long-term impact of the API funding. Rabitoy found that after the end of the grant period only 28% of projects continued fully as implemented. He concluded that “the use of ... funds to demonstrate that an idea is sound has little importance to a campus or the CSU ... unless the idea is implemented and persists” (Rabitoy, 1988, p. 13).

The sentiments of these funders, policy makers, and researchers indicate a historical concern about the waste of state and federal dollars and about the post-funding loss of the pedagogical advances and student learning outcomes that the project activities had engendered.

The Stages of Change Model

The conceptual framework informing this article is the Stages of Change (SOC) model developed by Dr. James O. Prochaska in 1977 (Figure 1). The SOC is a model of change that describes how an individual adopts, enacts, or supports a new behavior. The model proposes that an individual moves through stages while making a behavior change. There are five stages: 1) pre-contemplation (in which an individual is not considering making a change), 2) contemplation (in which an individual weighs the pros and cons of the proposed change), 3) preparation (in which an individual prepares for the change by gathering information or receiving training), 4) action (in which an individual actively takes steps to implement the change), and 5) maintenance (in which an individual maintains the behavior change) (Sharma & Romas, 2012).
The Power of Persuasion: The Sustainability of Externally-Funded Projects in Higher Education After Funding Expires

Figure 1. Prochaska’s Stages of Change Model (Wikipedia, n.d.)

The model has a commonsense, practical appeal. While Prochaska originally intended the model to apply to addiction-therapy programs, researchers regularly apply the model in many disciplines as evidenced by its citation in thousands of academic journal articles (Sharma & Romas, 2012). The model also applies well to a university, as persuasion of key individuals to adopt educational innovation is a pivotal factor in the implementation and sustainability of educational reform efforts (Hargreaves, 1995). Because an institution of higher education is a collection of individuals, if grant-funded change is to be enacted, the faculty Principal Investigator (PI) and the grants development professional need to bring key individuals along the Stages of Change continuum. PIs need to persuade department chairs and deans of the efficacy of their project because those individuals must approve the application for funding. PIs need to bring large numbers of faculty along the SOC continuum if the project involves university curricular reform. The grant development team of faculty PI and grants professional must also sometimes bring community partners along the SOC continuum to support a project. The grants team brings individuals along the SOC continuum through various processes (Table 1).

Table 1. Processes to Move Individuals Along Stages of Change Continuum (Sharma & Romas, 2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages of Change (SOC)</th>
<th>Persuasive Processes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-contemplation</td>
<td>Consciousness raising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemplation</td>
<td>Consciousness raising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td>Offering training to develop self-efficacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Offering compelling data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance</td>
<td>Developing helping relationships</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Faculty may be content with their current pedagogy and curriculum, and not know that possible improvements exist (Sharma & Romas, 2012). Therefore consciousness raising is effective in the pre-contemplation and contemplation stages in helping individuals move forward as the benefits of the intervention are explained (Sharma & Romas, 2012).

An individual in the preparation phase who has recently been persuaded to support the project may need training in computer software, a new curriculum, or online pedagogy to develop the self-efficacy needed to enact the proposed change.

To progress an individual to action, offering compelling data about the importance of the innovation is a best practice (Rogers, 2003; Sharma & Romas, 2012). Another process, developing helping relationships, is important in the maintenance stage, as project partners develop trust, and build rapport and mutual respect so that powerful coalitions are built and maintained (Sharma & Romas, 2012).

The SOC model is useful in that it introduces a time element to behavior change (Johnson, Lee, & Prochaska, 1998). Persuasion is a process, not an event. To advance from one stage to the next can take minutes, or it can take months (Sharma & Romas, 2012). Advancing successfully from one stage to the next in a university setting usually requires persuading three groups to move along the SOC continuum: faculty, campus administrators and external partners. The following are strategies to garner participation of each of these three groups.

**Strategy 1: Persuasion of Faculty**

A reform effort will invariably impact other faculty at an institution beyond project PIs and grant-funded participants. These faculty may have to change their policies, practices, pedagogy or curriculum, and their help is crucial. For instance, if a PI proposes instituting a new engineering curriculum, he or she needs to persuade other faculty in the department to adopt the new curriculum. Some faculty may disagree with the adoption of the curricular reform, believing that the new pedagogical methods are inferior to existing methods in use at the institution (Lattuca & Stark, 2009). If a PI cannot persuade colleagues to implement the project, the chances of implementation, let alone long-term sustainability, are limited.

Understanding what motivates faculty is critical in persuading them to move along the Stages of Change continuum. Daems, *et al.* (2008) found that sources of motivation for faculty (both PIs and non-PIs) are either intrinsic or extrinsic. Intrinsic motivations include discovering more effective ways to educate students, personal satisfaction, and gaining personal knowledge. Extrinsic motivations include being acknowledged in departmental meetings or in college publications, being invited to appear on a panel discussion of the project at a national conference, and stipends or release time (US Department of Education,
2000). In the case of stipends and release time, allocating funds in the project budget is required. While these funds motivate faculty during the term of the grant, the participation of these colleagues upon cessation of funds is in jeopardy, putting the sustainability of the project at risk. Therefore a PI should give primacy to non-monetary extrinsic rewards (e.g. public acknowledgement of contributions) and intrinsic rewards.

High levels of faculty resistance are a threat to project implementation and to sustainability of project activities. Rabitoy (1988) found that projects characterized by high levels of faculty resistance were also characterized by low rates of project sustainability. Resisters display their resistance actively, by challenging PIs in public meetings or posting emails disparaging the project to a department LISTSERV, or passively, by not attending workshops and meetings regarding project implementation (US Department of Education, 2000). Both active and passive resistance are threats to project implementation and sustainability.

Faculty can be actively resistant if they anticipate that the proposed new intervention would alter what or how they teach, and they can react with suspicion and fear (Rabitoy, 1988). For instance, law professors at the University of Missouri-Columbia “feared losing control of their classes” when a fellow faculty member received Fund to Improve Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) funding to add new content into all five standard first-year courses (US Department of Education, 1990, p. 58). The goal of the new content was to add less-adversarial perspectives to legal education by highlighting the resolution of disputes in ways other than court, such as mediation, negotiation and arbitration. The PI underestimated the difficulty of persuading a large number of law professors to depart from accustomed content. These professors (in the “pre-contemplation” stage of the Stages of Change model) were content with the current curriculum. Also, many disliked devoting regular class time to the new content since this subtracted from time available for instruction in the established subject matter (US Department of Education, 1990). To tilt the decisional balance and persuade a critical mass of faculty to the “action” phase of the Stages of Change model (i.e., the adopting of the new curriculum), the PI offered over a two-year period an abundance of compelling data from multiple highly-credible sources. Specifically, the PI offered data gathered by a legal sociologist who interviewed students and faculty at the end of the first year of project implementation, two prominent law professors who reviewed the curriculum at the end of the first year of project implementation, two prominent law professors who reviewed the curriculum at the end of the second year, and multiple outside evaluators who analyzed the efficacy of the new content (US Department of Education, 1990). Ultimately, this project not only was sustained at University of Missouri-Columbia after cessation of FIPSE funds, but also was scaled up when the curriculum was adopted by 16 other law schools (thereby entering the “maintenance” stage of the SOC continuum).

Success for All (SFA) is an innovative curricular reform model for pre-kindergarten to twelfth-grade classrooms. In designing Success
for All, PI Dr. Robert Slavin of Johns Hopkins University realized early on that buy-in of the teachers at the school sites was key to the successful implementation and subsequent sustainability of his project. He developed a best practice that respected teachers’ autonomy and opinions by offering them a vote. When school personnel, having learned of SFA through journal articles or conferences, wish to use this model they contact Slavin. To raise the consciousness of the teachers in regard to the effectiveness of the SFA curriculum, presentations are conducted at potential new school sites. If there is interest among school personnel in adopting SFA, the school completes a Preliminary Data Form (this represents the “preparation” stage of the SOC continuum). After opportunities to visit existing SFA schools and after internal discussions, teachers vote via secret ballot on whether or not to adopt SFA. If less than 80% of the school staff votes in the affirmative, SFA will not contract with the school to enact its curriculum (Slavin & Madden, 2012). Success for All was first piloted in Baltimore in the 1987–1988 school year. Currently, 1,000 school sites across the nation use the Success for All curriculum.

The success of SFA shows that a PI need not persuade all affected personnel to implement and sustain a project. Rabitoy (1988) also found that if a critical mass was willing to adopt the proposed intervention, the resistance of some “did not prove to be a major obstacle” (p. 8).

**Strategy 2: Persuasion of Campus Administrators**

Identifying opportunities that fit with an organization’s strategic directions is a major concern of department chairs, deans, and provosts (Glassman et al., 2003). Campus administrators base their decisions regarding support of grant projects on the match of the project’s mission with the campus mission in addition to the benefits the project might accrue to the unit or the institution (Glassman et al., 2003). Centrality is the term generally used to describe this consonance of goals and is described as a best practice for project sustainability (RAND, 1975). Exercising centrality is especially important in this age of ever-shrinking financial support of public universities during which administrators must choose judiciously among proposed educational reform efforts, all of which are worthy (Barr, 2002; Goldstein, 2005).

Perez (1976) describes another sustainability best practice that grant development professionals and PIs can employ as they construct their project design: functional linkage support, in which one campus project buttresses another through the sharing of resources. Functional linkage support requires the support of campus administrators. Perez describes how the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) (funded by the State of California) at the University of Southern California (USC) improved its stability by developing compatible functional linkages with ethnic studies departments, which led to the acquiring of additional personnel.
and equipment for the EOP. Developing these linkages was clearly a positive sustainability factor, as the EOP at USC thrives 37 years later.

The National Institutes of Health provided funding to California State University, Northridge to train professional student advisors in the Biology Department. When external funding expired, campus administrators at first did not favor providing campus funds to continue. However, the PI was able to offer compelling data that showed that when the Department had professional student advisors there were fewer failures and repeated classes, thereby representing a net saving to the university. The administrators, convinced by the strength of these data, chose to internally fund the hiring of a stable cadre of professional student advisors in the Biology Department, thereby sustaining the project (Zavala, 2013). The newly-hired advisors were properly trained and so had the tools to enact the project, thereby achieving self-efficacy.

**Strategy 3: Persuasion of External Partners**

It takes time to develop meaningful collaborations with community partners on a grant. These partners can be other institutions of higher education, community colleges, social service agencies, nonprofits, school districts, charter schools or for-profit enterprises (such as local businesses, or forward-thinking companies such as Google, HP or VEX Robotics). Partners need to be educated about the goals and methodology of the project. Choosing community partners who share the same goals and values as the university at the outset eases the persuasion process (Licklider & Nossaman, 2012). Ideally, a strong collaboration has been established organically and is ready when an appropriate federal competition is announced (Licklider, 2012). A PI can memorialize the partnership by asking the partner to serve as co-PI (Smith, 2012).

External partners can be a bulwark against project discontinuation. Coburn (2012) states that building capacity of project partners increases the ability of the project to continue over time. She posits that building an infrastructure is a hedge against instability of personnel or policies. Coburn also recommends linking a project to other initiatives as this buffers the project activities against new approaches that are not congruent with the intervention (2012).

Slavin and Madden (2012) also found that partnerships foster project sustainability. They found that schools that adopted the Success for All curriculum, but were not part of an ongoing supportive network, at best could only “hang on for a few years” (Slavin & Madden, 2012, p. 11).

To build and maintain powerful coalitions, PIs must develop helping relationships with project partners. These relationships are developed through trust, rapport and mutual respect (Sharma & Romas, 2012). Campbell (2012) recommends building this trust through interpersonal networks, which build professional capacity through dialogues, connections and interactions. Unfortunately, Campbell found that only
a small percentage of the efforts of research projects are expended on this sort of systems building. Grant development professionals need to encourage PIs and their community partners to devote more time to systems building throughout both the planning and implementation stages to increase the chances of the project’s sustainability.

**Future research**

There are existing gaps in knowledge that could benefit from additional research. An area deserving of further exploration is the effect of the broader community environment on the sustainability of externally funded educational innovations. Surprisingly, RAND (1978) found that bureaucratic and political concerns were more important factors than the project evaluation findings in school district decisions in supporting the continuation of a project after federal funding ended. During its 30-year history, Success For All encountered some of these bureaucratic and political entanglements at the district and federal levels:

- At the district level, new superintendents on two different occasions impeded the growth of the project. One new superintendent was openly hostile to outside involvement, and had a particular antipathy towards a perceived encroachment in their district by Johns Hopkins University. Another new superintendent was intent on eradicating the accomplishments of his predecessor, who had been named Superintendent of the Year—primarily based on her bringing Success for All to her school district.

- At the federal level, the administration of George W. Bush opposed Comprehensive School Reform, a federally-funded reform effort, from which Success For All received a significant portion of its operating budget. Cutbacks to Comprehensive School Reform reduced the number of school sites implementing SFA curriculum by half, from around 1,500 to 750 schools!

Slavin encountered the limits of the Stages of Change model. Consciousness raising and offering compelling data would not have changed the decisional balance of the Bush administration and the superintendents described above. Just as RAND (1978) stated, political concerns trumped the decades-long record of student success. Further research is needed to determine how the Stages of Change model can be adapted or extended to promote change that is more resistant to political pressure.

**Conclusion**

Sustainable change takes more than passion, merit, and intellect (Kerns & Watson, 2008). It takes selling a project to key individuals and key groups
of people (Zavala, 2013). For this reason grant development professionals should encourage PIs to meet regularly with faculty colleagues, campus administration and community partners not only during the planning phase of their project for the purpose of garnering support, but also during program implementation for the purpose of building capacity through developing faculty allies, creating functional linkage supports among campus units, and connecting a project with other initiatives off-campus. This ongoing communication will maximize the likelihood that consonance of goals will continue and, hence, so will project support when external funding ends.

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Knowledge Management in Proposal Development: Grant Professionals’ Innovations in Information Storage, Retrieval, and Sharing

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Towson University, Towson, MD

Abstract
This study presents the results of a large-scale online survey and interviews on knowledge management practices within the nonprofit fundraising sector. Hurley and Green (2005) define knowledge management (KM) as the process individuals use to “create, capture, acquire, and use knowledge to support and improve the performance of the organization” (p. 1). The study describes fundraisers’ information storage and retrieval strategies and highlights lead users’ innovations. If an existing organizational KM strategy does not meet writers’ job needs, lead users will re-appropriate existing software or online technologies. Some of the re-appropriated technologies include blogs for sorting and tagging information, multi-author wikis/document sharing services, and customized databases. Grant professionals should realize and value their contributions to institutional memory and consider sharing their KM strategies with colleagues, managers, and partners. Grant stakeholders who share KM strategies may maximize their knowledge resources, develop best practices, and advance grant readiness.
Introduction

Throughout the past decade, an increasing number of grant-seeking nonprofit organizations (NPOs) competed for program funding (Lettieri, Borga, & Savoldelli, 2004). As federal and state program cuts continue, nonprofits must rethink their strategies to fill the gaps in community social services. Individual organizations operating in isolation will not alleviate societal problems. NPOs should share their best practices and collaborate within similar communities to effectively leverage grant dollars (Hurley & Green, 2005; Schorr, 2004).

Documenting procedures helps identify and promote best practices. However, for organizations to share their best practices, the originating employees must have a successful knowledge management (KM) strategy in place. Ensuring accessibility of information is the first step to reducing time spent on research and duplication of services. This paper discusses the importance of knowledge management within the grants sector, identifies innovative techniques of information storage and retrieval, and argues that proposal writers should hold a powerful role within organizational KM systems.

The institutional value of a strong KM system

Hurley and Green define knowledge management as the process by which organizations “create, capture, acquire, and use knowledge to support and improve the performance of the organization,” including knowledge development and transfer processes (2005, p.1). KM involves the acquisition, storage, retrieval, use, production, and reuse of knowledge assets of an organization (Watson, 2003). A knowledge-management system is a structured method of organizing information storage and retrieval processes, such as using an organization-wide intranet to store documents. KM systems often use keyword search functions to allow multiple users to access the information (Capozzi, 2007). Ideally, KM systems combine user-centered design, institutional memory, and informational storage and retrieval processes that are central to organizational efficiency (Blankenhorn & del Valle, 1992; Child, 2007; Iverson & Burkhart, 2007; and many others).

Researchers often study knowledge management in large, multinational corporations. Corporate studies indicate successful KM ventures provide immediate, measurable value. Some of these values include increasing or improving organizational performance, institutional memory, innovation, and lessons learned (Baehr & Alex-Brown, 2010; O’Dell & Grayson, 1998; Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998; Watson, 2003). Additionally, studies show KM enhances operational excellence and maximizes corporate competitiveness (Bixler, 2005; O’Dell & Grayson, 1998; Schorr, 2004). KM systems also enhance employee relationships. It promotes sharing and collaboration among employees, helps identify best practices, and improves interpersonal communication (He, Qiao,
& Wei, 2009). KM systems may also reduce employee turnover and training time, streamline work processes, and avoid unnecessary reinvention (Battaglia, 1995; Hurley & Green, 2005; Peterson, 1993). Last, KM increases the capacity for creative capital (Blankenhorn & del Valle, 1992; Schorr, 2004). All of these positive traits are beneficial to nonprofit organizations, which depend on grants and donations to survive.

Compared to the nonprofit sector, corporate KM studies tend to have more financial resources dedicated to them as managers strive to contain costs, streamline procedures and gain a positive return on investment. The nonprofit industry may seek benefits similar to those identified in corporate studies. These potential benefits may justify studies in the nonprofit sector, where financial resources are scarce and immediate value difficult to quantify (Gilbert, 2005; Hurley & Green, 2005).

Successful KM benefits the nonprofit fundraising sector

At this time, little research exists on knowledge management in the nonprofit sector (Gilbert, 2002; Gilbert, 2005; Schorr, 2004). Of the few available studies, none focuses on KM from proposal writers’ perspectives. The most recent studies on fundraising professionals focus on job satisfaction (Georgia Tech Consulting Services [GTCS], 2004; Healey, Bartolini, Maehara, & Williams, 2010; Horstman, 2006). Few studies describe fundraisers’ daily processes and technologies used to complete their work duties (Davidson, 2009; Zachry, Spinuzzi, & Hart-Davidson, 2006).

Proposal developers are central to their organizations’ knowledge production and management activities. The process of proposal development is often fast-paced and stressful, operates on a deadline, and relies heavily on information-seeking activities (McIsaac & Aschauer, 1990; Zachry et al., 2006). Fundraisers use project outcomes, statistics, and constituents’ stories to develop their arguments. Proposal writers use both explicit (“know about”) and implicit (“know how”) knowledge in their work (Hurley & Green, 2005). However, programmatic knowledge tends to reside within its department of origin, creating an information specialization “silo effect” (Gilbert, 2005; O’Dell & Grayson, 1998; Rockley, 2003; Schorr, 2004). Gilbert maintains that knowledge-capture is the most difficult barrier in a knowledge-management process (2005), meaning most programmatic knowledge is tacit, or unspoken. Searching for misplaced or missing content drains energy from the problem-solving process. Fragmented knowledge reduces the potential effectiveness of actions, wastes money, and makes cross-fertilization among the ideas and solutions difficult (Lettieri et al., 2004, p. 17).

Nonprofit organizations (NPOs) need to manage the efficiency of all available financial, human, and programmatic resources, and one way to do this is by maximizing institutional knowledge. Creating relationships
among multiple information sources makes the process more useful to proposal writers. Meaningful documentation helps proposal writers synthesize background information while brainstorming the problemsolving aspect of the proposal. Once NPOs optimize knowledge resources, they can disburse financial and personnel resources more effectively, engaging a wider audience of participants and service recipients (Lettieri et al., 2004).

**Studying “lead users” may identify KM best practices and innovation**

Nonprofit organizations often have limited infrastructure funds for technology compared to their corporate counterparts. For example, an NPO may use a ten-year-old intranet or filing system due to operational cost restrictions on grant funds. However, individual employees often develop solutions to meet their workplace needs, such as adopting social media for marketing or donations. The innovators—“lead users”—who initiate these types of solutions are a key population for studying nonprofit KM.

*Lead users* are individuals who use a technology but often initiate some re-invention methods to improve their own experience with the technology (Rogers, 1995). Researchers identify lead users as “innovators,” representing 2.5 percent of the population, and “early adopters,” representing 13.5 percent of the population (Rogers, 1995). Lead users play a key role in identifying errors in current procedures and identifying best practices. For example, a study on 111 innovations in scientific instruments found that the technology’s users suggest 80 percent of the innovation ideas, rather than the manufacturer (von Hippel, 1976). Through product testing, lead users play a significant role in the way companies redesign technologies before placing the items on the market. Identifying problems and solutions before market placement can positively affect the popularity and/or usability of a product. Lead user experiences tend to pave the way for average users (Kujala & Kauppinen, 2004). Therefore, lead users’ experiences may identify solutions to information storage and retrieval without requiring a system overhaul or expensive software.

The purpose of this study is to provide insight on proposal writers’ individual and organizational knowledge management, from both an industry-wide and lead-user standpoint. Asking lead users about their KM solutions may provide fast-track solutions to issues commonly found in nonprofit systems. Ideally, this study will provide insight to nonprofit managers, KM software developers, and grant professionals to maximize knowledge resources and aid grant preparedness.

**The study addresses the following research questions:**

RQ1. What are common KM strategies for nonprofit proposal writers?

RQ2. How do “lead user” proposal writers describe their own KM systems?
Methodology

The study used a small portion of a 2012 online survey of 1,715 grant professionals (n = 580 respondents) (Gunning, 2013). The study used a “snowball sample,” meaning the researcher emailed a link to an online survey to known grant professionals and asked the fundraisers to share the survey with field colleagues (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2000). Ninety-four percent of respondents identified as members of a professional organization, such as the Grant Professionals Association, American Grant Writers’ Association, Association of Fundraising Professionals, and/or Council of Resource Development.

Using survey responses to identify lead users

The researcher selected the interviewees using eight of 126 survey questions:

- How long have you worked with your current employer?
- How long have you worked in the fundraising profession?
- If I could not come to work for some reason, it would be easy for another person to pick up where I left off during the fundraising process.
- I am willing to contribute to my organization’s formal knowledge base, even if it takes a little extra time to document my processes.
- In general, it is easy for me to get the information I need to do my job.
- My organization has out-of-date equipment.
- The system for training new fundraisers is adequate.
- (Satisfaction with) the amount of project planning my organization completes.

The filter questions sorted respondents into categories of Howell’s stages of learning (1982) or lead users (Kujala & Kauppinen, 2004). The respondents’ levels of experience did not often align with the false binary of experienced/inexperienced classifications, but this is common in sampling (Frey et al., 2000). Some respondents worked in their positions only a short time, yet exhibited characteristics of lead users; others worked at their jobs for a long time and were perfectly content with using less-innovative systems. The researcher selected three interviewees as lead users based on open-ended responses describing uncommon technologies found within nonprofit organizations.

The phone interview questions investigated writers’ information management and seeking processes, their relationships with colleagues and managers, and their comfort and willingness to contribute to KM processes. The researcher tested the questions using think-aloud protocol.
with two other researchers. Questions include items such as, “how does your organization store the information you need to do your job?” and “how do you get the information you need for development activities?” The questions attempted to obtain a sense of the users’ natural information-seeking strategies. The researcher designed the telephone interviews to take about 20 minutes, although each of the 12 interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes.

The purpose of the post-survey interviews was to gain in-depth, exploratory content about technology use and adaptation based on the experience and attitudes of fundraisers in various stages of their careers.

Table 1. Comparison of demographic data in recent surveys on fundraisers

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<tr>
<td>Response rate</td>
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<td>24.0%</td>
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<td>Social services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health</td>
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<td>17.5%</td>
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Results and Findings
This section discusses the demographics of the study’s sample, the results of research questions, and the lead users’ knowledge management innovations.

Demographic representation closely aligned with prior studies on fundraisers
As shown in Table 1, the study’s sample closely aligned with prior studies on fundraisers conducted within the past ten years in terms of gender, age, educational level and organizational interest (GTCS, 2004; Healey et al., 2010).

Based on the demographic information, the snowball sample adequately aligns with previously conducted, large-scale studies on fundraising and grant professionals. Therefore, the results may be applicable to fundraisers outside of the study (Frey et al., 2000).

Research question 1: What are common KM strategies for nonprofit proposal writers?
To answer this question, it is necessary to provide a brief overview of the software commonly used in nonprofit organizations (Figure 1). Survey respondents prioritized the use of email, external databases and/or internet use, internal databases/intranets, personal storage methods, and multi-author collaborative software (such as wikis or document sharing systems).

![Figure 1. Survey respondents’ (n = 580) prioritization of the importance of common software/technology found within nonprofit organizations. Scale adapted from Kuzic & Giannatos, 2006.](image)

The prioritization of resources shown in Figure 1 mirrors the interviewees’ preferences as they gain experience in the grants management
process. Novice writers (or those new to the organization’s processes) tend to rely more heavily on resources readily available to all members of an organization (email, intranet). As the writers become more comfortable with their job duties or emerge as lead users, they are more willing to adapt to multi-author collaborative technologies.

All 12 interviewees noted it took them between six and 12 months to feel confident conducting their daily job duties. Although 10 of the 12 writers held positions in the grant profession before their current jobs, all faced steep learning curves when learning to represent their organizations’ proposed programs. Deadlines require the writers to work quickly. One writer stated, “we have six weeks between the time an RFP comes out and when the proposal is due. We must be able to pull our partners together and create a convincing narrative … if we want to be funded.” When asked what was the easiest way to find the information they needed, the most common response was “(using a search box) and hoping it comes up” or “asking someone” if searching took too long. Two of the novice writers felt less comfortable searching for key words; they were still learning them. Writer 3 started a list of key words to save time. The longer the writers were at their jobs, the more they felt confident about obtaining the information needed. The more experienced writers tend to tailor the use of technology to meet their needs rather than let the technology dictate how to store information. The following section describes lead-user interviewees’ experiences adapting or creating a system to meet their information storage and retrieval needs.

RQ2. How do “lead user” proposal writers describe their own KM systems?

All 12 interviewees indicated their organization’s information storage and retrieval systems held shortcomings, but only the three lead users made efforts to improve their systems. The lead users described expanding existing organization-wide storage systems or creating a new system to meet their own needs. As the literature review notes, lead users’ experiences often identify shortcomings in current software and procedures, so it is valuable for nonprofit leaders and KM developers to listen for the lead users’ suggestions (Roberts, 1995). The three most innovative KM methods included tagging software (such as blogs); content-sharing software (such as wikis and Google Drive); and creating a custom database. The following section describes the lead users’ experiences with these technologies.

Tagging software, such as blog platforms

Lead User 1 developed an extensive tagging system for electronically storing and sorting her information. Using a free blog provider, she created secure pages for all her contacts and tagged each page with key words such as area of expertise. For example, if Lead User 1 met with a health-services worker, she tagged that person’s page with health expert,
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Youth, nutrition, WIC, or other descriptive key words. She states, “I can enter a tag and everything related shows up. I can see patterns I may have missed or filter what doesn’t work—it makes project planning so much faster.” Lead User 1 noted that filtering is especially important in her organization, which represents up to nine different initiatives at one time. She states, “If I want to pull up info on kids programs, I don’t necessarily want (information) on teens, so (descriptive tagging) saves me a lot of time rather than trying to remember the name in your contact list or what their business card looks like.” Tagging, if planned well, may help proposal writers become more efficient while building institutional knowledge.

Lead User 2 created a similar tagging system using a Box.net account (a file sharing and storing system) for storing copies of reports, proposals, meeting notes and contact details. The writer stated that searching for information on an intranet with 60 other users was cumbersome and that the “search” function was often inaccurate or slow. The writer used www.Box.net in one of her college courses, so she adapted it to meet her needs at work.

Collaborative document drives and wikis

Another way lead users have reported information storage and sharing success is through use of collaborative authoring sites, particularly when sharing content across multiple writers. Collaborative document sharing programs, such as wikis and GoogleDrive, are popular with lead users. However, the systems are not yet popular with average users. A wiki (such as wikipedia.com) is a website developed by a community of users, which allows individuals to upload and edit content. Lead User 2 created a wiki because it allowed her to collaborate with her partners more effectively than with phone and email exchanges. Lead User 2 states, “I need (written) input from the people who are going to run the program (I am proposing).” She described the difficulty of sharing a single Microsoft Word document on an intranet with multiple authors. Additionally, the organization’s intranet did not allow partners outside her organization to access the document. Instead, Lead User 2 set up a wiki, creating a permission-locked folder for each major project. She emails wiki invitations to her contacts at partner organizations. The wiki allows her to section off areas of the narrative to identify missing content.

The wiki allows the lead proposal writer to manage projects and deadlines more efficiently. Lead User 2 describes her role as the wiki administrator: “I can give access to only certain folders to certain people. If someone leaves a project, I can remove that individual from the folder permissions. It is a great way to let project managers visualize the grant proposal process, and see exactly where the holes lie within the narrative that require their input.” She also set her email preferences for notifications when one of her collaborators makes changes to the wiki or fails to meet a deadline.
Wikis and other multi-author document-sharing methods, such as www.Box.net and Google Drive, can ensure that the document is the most recent version. Some web-based services, such as Google Drive, show when users edit documents in real time. The software uses text color-coding to highlight changes made by different authors, even if the writers are editing at the same time. Box.net locks the document while users edit it and automatically timestamps and notes the name of the last editor.

Lead users mentioned Box.net and Google Drive collaborative services as the most frequently used services during the 2012 interviews, but they are not the only multi-author sharing solution. Campfire, Evernote, and other collaborative solutions have many potential benefits for proposal development. Last, organizations may consider building their own database-driven KM solution if financial, personnel, and temporal resources allow.

Creating a custom database

In early 2012, Lead User 3’s organization was in the late stages of building a custom database to manage data about its population and services provided. The database helps the organization track clients, results, and statistics. Before the database, Lead User 3 struggled to get updated statistics for her proposals. She lamented, “If I wanted to know who has your organization served in the past 12 months?, it was this constantly moving number, and ... we have to keep going into spreadsheets and counting things over and over.” She hopes the new database encourages the organization’s employees to maintain current records. The records will facilitate both the proposal development and reporting requirements of the organization’s grant awards.

Several experienced writers in the process of building their department reported taking great care in their technology selection. One writer, employed at her organization for six months, is still shopping around for an effective system. She states, “We don’t have (an organization-wide system) yet—we are very low-tech right now—just storing content on my computer. I talk about it with my colleagues, seeing what they are using.” She regularly speaks with others at similar institutions about the pros and cons of new systems. One of her professional contacts recently implemented an expensive database that did not meet the users’ needs. The story left an impression on the writer. She states:

Do I need a $10k database? I don’t know. My colleague who is disappointed in her new software would rather go back to a simple Access® database. I have not yet decided on what I want for my organization. Some of the software out there is nice, but not designed by (proposal) writers. I’ve got to be here a little longer to figure out our needs.
Lead User 3 echoed the long-term approach to adapting new systems:

My (information) categorization (process) has gotten more sophisticated over time, but it is a gradual process. It can be hard to control and maintain the content, keeping it clean and usable. At some point in time, you need to take the time to reorganize content and make the retrieval more efficient, which is often a question of time management. It is always easier to look at something in hindsight, but the priority is to look ahead: deadlines loom.

Although average users ranked multi-author collaborative software last in KM options, the software is gaining in popularity among lead users due to speed and adaptability. Lead users are pleased with how much the collaborative technologies have facilitated their daily tasks. Although the Lead User sample is small, lead users often pave the way for the average worker within their organizations, and “average” users may soon begin to adopt collaborative software.

**Conclusion**

The interview results echoed prior studies on proposal writers regarding the importance of immediate access to information (Gilbert, 2005). The results are not surprising, considering proposal writers’ work on deadlines. The ability to sift through vast amounts of information, check on the progress of a multi-author document, and store this information for later use is essential for those in the grants profession. If nonprofit organizations want to remain competitive with their programs and services, rapid access to information is what will give their fundraisers an advantage when pairing partners and services.

The experiences of lead users indicate that tagging and having real-time multi-author collaborative programs help fundraisers operate more efficiently. Grant professionals may take advantage of the time- and author-stamp notifications provided by collaborative authoring tools, particularly when deadlines loom. Creating a documented project management process may help writers maximize their knowledge resources, build relationships with partner organizations, and facilitate the general grant application process.

Last, proposal writers should discuss their information storage and sharing needs with organizational leaders. Nonprofit managers should recognize and respect the role that proposal writers hold regarding the organization’s institutional memory. Thus, proposal writers should serve as key stakeholders when organizational KM systems undergo revision. A commitment to KM will help all NPO employees implement practices that advance grant readiness. Stronger professional relationships may help
build long-term commitments among proposal development staff and management.

Interest in studying lead users evolved from hearing writers’ ideas throughout the interview process. At the start of the study, the researcher did not intend to study lead users apart from the general fundraising population. However, the raw interview data indicates this area needs further study. Sampling 2.5 percent of the study’s participants for “innovators” and another 13.5 percent for “early adopters” will be necessary in additional studies on lead users. As is, this study provides a glimpse into the ideas that lead users provide to their organizations.

All proposal writers may benefit from sharing individual KM processes with their colleagues and partners. Sharing strong KM process may lead to an increase in successful collaborations, reduce learning curves, and help facilitate interpersonal relationships, as found in corporate studies (He et al., 2009).

References


Knowledge Management in Proposal Development: Grant
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**Biographical Information**

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Increasing Grant and Research-Related Compliance through Website Modification

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

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

Abstract
This exploratory survey and usability study of randomly selected university faculty, administration, and staff examined features of a research administration website that could help to increase knowledge of and compliance with federal and university rules and regulations related to grants and research administration. The number of participants was too low to generalize results. However, findings suggested that website redesign may improve knowledge and compliance. These improvements could include: understanding institutional review board (IRB) protocol, familiarity with and importance of time and effort reporting, limits on allowable expenditures for contracted services, knowledge of whom to contact regarding contracted services, and how to find information on financial conflict of interest.

Introduction
Demand for public accountability has increased and the regulatory environment has expanded. Accordingly, there is a greater need for grants compliance by colleges and universities, medical institutions, government laboratories, and independent for-profit and not-for-profit organizations. One means of increasing compliance related to grant funding might be improvement in website design based on the principles of usability testing.

A research administration office typically has pre- and post-award responsibilities including proposal writing and grant management. One
such research administration office at a small public university in the Midwest recently experienced dramatic shifts in staffing and leadership due, in part, to decreasing grant revenue. This led to decreased staffing levels, going from a full-time director, full-time grant accountant, and part-time coordinator to a full-time director and half-time financial specialist. The decreased staffing also led to decreased attention to key administrative functions including pre-award assistance, post-award monitoring, and a general lack of communication from the office to the university community. As a result, there were numerous problems associated with grants compliance such as late project reporting, a lack of time and effort reporting, lack of knowledge of grants budgeting, non-compliance with procurement and contracting regulations, and more.

The purpose of this study was to determine whether the information located on the research administration website could be modified to improve compliance with policies and procedures related to grant pre- and post-award processes.

Review of Literature

Little has been published about electronic policy and procedures for a research administration office. Many of these publications are specific to the rules and regulations of federal grant management and to the skill of grant-proposal writing. As a result, the review of literature focused upon two topics: managing an office of research administration, and creating electronic publications and websites.

Existing grants management resources include professional organizations such as the Grant Professionals Association, the Society of Research Administrators, and the National Council of University Research Administrators. The latter issued several micrographs related to the management of a sponsored programs (grants) office. Additionally, *Research Administration and Management*, by Eliott C. Kulakowski and Lynne U. Chronister (2006), is a mainstay in the research administrator’s office. It covers topics applicable to research administration including sections on Pre-Award Administration, Post-Award and Financial Requirements, and more.

Among the many responsibilities of a research administration office, disseminating funding information to faculty and staff is one of the most time-consuming. While there are several methods to pass on guidance, there is a risk of communicating too much information—overwhelming faculty and staff with numerous emails or other forms of communication may cause them to eventually ignore the messages. On the other hand, not having enough communication can lead to disengagement, poor post-award monitoring, and decreased grant revenue. Authors Kulakowski and Chronister (2006) recommend that research administrators utilize “funding newsletters, deadlines lists, and websites … for disseminating funding information.” The authors go on to say that “keeping faculty
aware of the services and resources that an institution has available to assist them … is difficult but absolutely essential activity … a functional and easy-to-navigate, content-rich home page … is the best way for letting faculty customers know about what is out there to help them” (p. 44).

The Role of Research Administration (Erickson et al., 2007) provides those new to research administration with an overview of the functions of the position and office. Erickson et al. say, “The basic goal for all research administrators is to serve the faculty and other researchers so they can pursue their research and scholarly endeavors” (p. 6). Erickson et al. also write that the research administrator serves in an advocacy role to “work toward improving and stimulating the institutional climate for these activities. Research administrators may also take on the role of policy developer when institutional polices and processes need adjustment to comply with various sponsor requirements” (p.8). Yet, in that regard, research administrators have a responsibility to develop systems to inform university administrators of concerns related to policy or lack thereof. Due to increasing federal regulation and the complexity of administering grants and contracts, having proper systems in place is of great concern during pre- and post-award periods. Issues related to timely performance reports, misappropriation of funds and poor fiscal monitoring are just a few of those concerns.

This is also communicated by Erickson et al. (2007), who say “an institution must agree to comply with mandated requirements by signing a set of certifications and representations…. the government views certifications as enforceable and effective tools for achieving cost reduction, research integrity and attaining many desired social goals” (p. 24). Finally, according to the US Department of Health and Human Services’ guidebook Managing Public Grants (n.d.) (part of the Strengthening Nonprofits: A Capacity-Builders Resource Library series), “the grants management officer is the official responsible for the business management…. these activities include … providing consultation and technical assistance to applicants and recipients” (p.8). It is the role of the research administrator to develop systems to inform and ensure compliance with federal regulations.

In Getting Your Organization Grant-Ready, Kurup and Butler (2008) discuss practices that advance grant-readiness. Of these, educating staff and administration is a commonly overlooked area. They say “To assume that a clinician or a faculty member understands what grants entail is equivalent to assuming that the grant professional has the expertise and knowledge of the clinician’s or the faculty’s work” (p. 11). Kurup and Butler (2008) go on to say, “presentations about the grants process, regular newsletters from the grants office and grant trainings for the staff, might facilitate this educational process” (p.12).

The National Council of University Research Administrators (NCURA) micrograph, Establishing and Managing an Office of Sponsored Programs at Non-Research Intensive Colleges and Universities, (Hansen, Ofosu, &
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Johnson, 2008) includes topics such as pre-award services, post-award services, and ethical compliance. The purpose of the micrograph is to “outline the basic functions of an office of sponsored programs to present various strategies predominantly undergraduate colleges and universities utilize in organizing and managing sponsored programs” (p. 1). The micrograph covers responsibilities typically under the auspices of research administration offices including organizational models, pre-award services, post-award services, ethical compliance, intellectual property and technology transfer, and staffing. According to the authors, “The institution needs a sponsored program administrator who understands the complex layers of regulation and who can develop and manage an appropriate system that assures compliance with the regulations” and “issues such as time extensions and sub-contracting, demand management skills” (p. 12).

The authors further state, “Institutional policies must be in place to assure proper compliance with these regulations and to provide appropriate training programs for all faculty, pertinent staff and students” (p. 19). To ensure proper compliance with federal regulations, sponsored program administrators, in some instances, are now required to utilize web-based documents and tutorials. These resources help faculty, staff, and universities remain compliant with federal regulations as mandated by the US Department of Health and Human Services:

An Institution applying for or receiving NIH funding from a grant or cooperative agreement must be in compliance with all of the revised regulatory requirements no later than 365 days after publication of the regulation in the Federal Register, i.e., August 24, 2012, and immediately upon making the Institution’s Financial Conflict of Interest policy publicly accessible as described in 42 CFR part 50.604(a) (National Institutes of Health, 2011).

Simply posting documents and processes on a website will not ensure that a user understands or can locate the information, let alone ensure compliance. In a time of decreasing state and federal funding and increasing faculty and staff workloads, choosing the best method of communication is key to re-engaging faculty and staff in the entire grants process. Email adds to the already-full inboxes, and hard-copy documents are quickly becoming an antiquated method of communication. However, a web presence offers convenience and portability plus the ability to provide all the information a researcher needs to complete both pre- and post-award functions.

Therefore, a research administration website must be easily accessible and user-friendly. According to Rubin (2012), content author of HowTo.gov, “Customers cannot find what they’re looking for on Websites about
60 percent of the time, according to recent research. This leads to wasted time, increased frustration, and loss of visitors and trust.” The results section of this paper also references faculty and staff frustration locating information on the university’s research administration website. Usability consultant and author Steve Krug (2006) has found that people do not read websites. Rather, they scan them “looking for words or phrases that catch our eye.” According to Krug, people scan because they are in a hurry and do not have time to “read any more than necessary” (Chapter 2, para. 8). Janice Redish (2007) agrees and states that “most people skim and scan a lot on the web. They hurry through all navigation, wanting to get to the page that has what they came for…. they are trying to do a task. They want to read only what is necessary to do the task” (Redish, 2007, Chapter 1).

A research administration website designer should consider this tendency for users to scan rather than read when creating content for the site. Ideally, a well-thought-out website reduces user frustration and loss of trust and increases frequency of visits and collaboration. Steve Krug (2006) states that “a Web page … should be self-evident. Obvious. Self-explanatory … when you’re creating a site, your job is to get rid of question marks” (Chapter 1, para. 6). This approach can result in the user's increased knowledge of the grants process and related policy.

To assess the ease of use and “learnability” of a website, research administrators and web designers can conduct a usability study. Learnability is a measure of the degree to which a user interface, such as a website, can be learned rapidly and effectively. As cited in “How to Build a Better Website” by Mary K. Pratt (2007), and according to Kerry Bodine, an analyst at Forrester Research, Incorporated, “You want to see where [they] stumble, what they’re confused by....” Companies with the highest-ranked sites run usability tests frequently” (p. 34).

As cited in Reynolds (2008), international web usability authority Jakob Nielsen, Ph.D. explains that usability testing of a website should only include “five users per round....testing with more than five users per round does not significantly change the study results” (p. 45).

Janice Redish, in Letting Go of the Words: Writing Web Content That Works (2007) supports usability testing of current website content and contends that everything on a website “should relate to at least one scenario that a real user might have for coming to the website” (Chapter 2, para. 51). The purpose of a home page is for users to find information needed and move on. Reddish contends that home pages “set the tone and personality of the site ... start key tasks immediately ... sending each person on the right way, effectively and efficiently” (Chapter 3, para. 6 & 7).

This suggests that an upgraded research administration website can improve communication between the research administration office and the university community. These upgrades can also improve pre- and post-award grants compliance.
Methodology

The research methodology included a pre-survey, usability study, and a post-survey. The pre-survey measured knowledge of current relevant grants and research-related policy and procedures. The survey was created using Qualtrics software (a provider of enterprise survey software) and was emailed as a link to 693 university faculty and staff.

A usability study was designed and conducted based on those pre-survey results which indicated a need for improvement. The usability study began with researching the research administrator role, federal resources including websites and other documentation, and other sources such as books, guides, and periodicals for language on grants-related policy. The researcher also referenced sources for usability studies and website design. The results of the usability study guided website revisions.

After the website revisions were complete, a post-survey was distributed via email to the same list of recipients who received the pre-survey. After one week, to increase the post-survey responses, the researcher resubmitted the email request.

Subject Selection and Description

All 693 faculty and academic staff received an email inviting them to participate in the surveys. From the pool of survey respondents, the researcher selected ten invitees, based on their grant-related experience and role within the grants process, to receive an email invitation to participate in the usability study. Five agreed to participate (a desirable number according to Jakob Nielsen [in Reynolds, 2008]). The role of participants in the grants process formed the basis of their selection for participation in the usability study. These participants included two faculty members (one with grants experience and one without), two program assistants (one with grants experience and one without), and one academic staff member with grants experience.

Instrumentation

The 35-question Qualtrics pre- and post-survey designed for this study included data elements related to pre- and post-award grants processes. An eight-task usability study was conducted to determine if the current website contained the information and resources that faculty and staff require to appropriately manage their grant awards.

Data Collection Procedure

The pre-survey response rate was four percent (4%) after two weeks. To acquire additional respondents, the survey was reissued to the same group, but only garnered a handful of additional responses. The overall response rate was six percent (6%).
The eight-task usability study measured the user’s experience when searching for information on the research administration website. Scheduling the study at each subject’s office reduced extraneous variables, and promoted a high comfort level and familiarity with computer and web browser. After introductions, the researcher explained the purpose of the study, discussed the consent form and secured the signature. The researcher provided two scenarios to each subject:

1. You are a researcher at the university and would like to apply for a federal grant.

2. You were recently awarded a federal grant. You will need to monitor your grant outcomes, budget, and remain in compliance with university and federal requirements. Your grant also includes research.

Each subject performed seven tasks using the sponsored projects website, and they were asked to think aloud as they did the tasks. The time to complete the tasks was recorded as well as participant comments as they performed each task. The subjects were given five minutes to complete each task, but they were not told that they had a time limit to avoid errors and delays caused by anxiety. Tasks were as follows:

1. You are interested in a federal funding opportunity for your research. Locate the pre-award process research administration and grants website.

2. Locate the information to log in to Pivot (a funding search engine).

3. Can you locate any policy on the use of indirect costs?

4. Can you locate the post-award process?

5. View the Institutional Review Board policies on conducting research using human subjects. Locate the process to gain approval for your research.

6. Can you locate any resources on allowable grant costs?

7. From the research administration website, please find your grant budget in the university financial system.

After reviewing the survey responses and usability results, the researcher worked with a computer science student intern to discuss the results and potential website improvements. The survey responses that indicated the greatest lack of knowledge guided modifications of the website, as did usability study results. Among these revisions were a detailed description of time and effort reporting, sample time and effort reports, and contact information for questions. According to the US Office of Management and Budget, effort reporting is “perhaps the most contentious and
audit-vulnerable area of the research enterprise” (Erickson, p. 13). After the redesign was complete, a post-survey was emailed to the same pool of respondents to measure faculty and staff knowledge of grants and research related procedure and policy. The website redesign was complete near the end of August 2012.

Results

Pre-survey Analysis

Pre-survey results indicate that faculty and staff reported being knowledgeable about many key aspects of grants compliance such as understanding IRB protocol (26% strongly agree and 44% agree). However, an overwhelming proportion were not familiar with time and effort reporting (32% disagree and 5% strongly disagree; and 18% neither agree nor disagree). Fifty-four percent agreed that time and effort reporting was valuable (18% strongly agree and 36% agree). Figure 1 illustrates the results.

![Figure 1. Pre-Survey Results](image)

Further, the survey demonstrated that grant accounting was a strength area, as 54% reported knowing allowable costs under the grants on which they were working. Yet, 51% reported not knowing how to account for cash match. Contracting with vendors was another area in which respondents demonstrated lack of knowledge. Fifty percent of respondents did not know the limits on allowable expenditures for contracted services, and 28% did not know who to contact for
information regarding contracted services. Finally, 34% of respondents knew how to find information on financial conflict of interest.

**Usability Study Analysis**

Usability study results (Table 1) revealed several flaws in the design of the research administration website.

**Table 1: Usability Study Results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Time to complete or abandon task (min/sec)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Locate policy on use of indirect costs</td>
<td>2:04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locate resources on allowable grant costs</td>
<td>1:43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locate university financial system login page</td>
<td>:59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locate pre award process</td>
<td>:20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locate information to login to Pivot</td>
<td>:17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All of the five participants could not locate policy on the use of indirect costs with an average time to abandon the task of two minutes four seconds (2:04). All of the respondents clicked on other links and three of the five went outside of the research administration website to search for the information. None of the participants could locate resources on allowable grant costs with an average task abandonment time of one minute 43 seconds (1:43).

None of the participants could locate the university financial system login page with an average task abandonment time of 58.8 seconds. Every participant commented that it was difficult to find the information to log in, and one participant was not familiar with the university financial system.

Ease in locating the pre-award process was one of the quickest to complete and garnered the most favorable responses. All five participants located the pre-award process with an average time to complete the task of nearly 20 seconds. Three participants commented regarding the ease of locating the information.

Locating information to log into the Pivot funding search engine also revealed a fast task time with five participants able to locate the information with an average time of 17 seconds. Two respondents commented that they were not familiar with Pivot. Overall, when participants could not locate the requested information, they clicked on the “Grant Tips” page, the grants transmittal form link, or searched outside of the research administration website and the university website.

Once the usability study was finalized and the website redesign complete, the same pool that received the pre-survey request received a
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post-survey email. After viewing the redesigned research administration website, the post-survey (Figure 2) measured respondents’ knowledge of current grants and research-related policy and procedures.

After two email messages requested that respondents view the updated website and then complete the survey, the post survey garnered a response rate of 1%. Post survey respondents included usability study participants.

Post-survey Analysis

As displayed in Figure 2 below, post-survey results demonstrated the following increases in knowledge:

- Understanding IRB protocol (increased from 26% strongly agree in pre-survey to 75% strongly agree in post-survey),
- Familiarity and importance of time and effort reporting (increased, respectively, from 36% and 62% strongly agree or agree to 60% strongly agree and 100% agree in post-survey),
- Limits on allowable expenditures for contracted services (increased from 34% strongly agree and agree, to 75% agree),
- Knowledge of who to contact regarding contracted services (increased from 54% to 100% strongly agree or agree), and
- How to find information on financial conflict of interest (increased from 34% to 75% strongly agree or agree).

Figure 2. Post-Survey Results
Discussion
The post-survey results suggest that the website redesign helped faculty and staff be more compliant with grants and research-related policy. These data suggest that prompting the participants to review website content, and the redesign of that content, were responsible for the reported increase in knowledge.

Limitations
Despite efforts to garner a larger response rate, only 1% of persons in the eligible participant pool participated in the post-survey. Therefore there can be no certainty about the causal relationship between website redesign and increased knowledge. These results should not be generalized to the university faculty and staff as a whole.

Recommendations
To garner a higher response rate, in future studies, pre- and post-surveys should be conducted when faculty return for the semester and not during winter or summer breaks. Ideally, an annual usability study could be conducted to keep the site current and relevant. Regular (semi-annual) monitoring of changes to federal regulations should be reflected in site content to keep faculty and staff abreast of changes in regulation and law.

Conclusions
Pre-survey results indicated that faculty and staff were knowledgeable about key aspects of grants compliance such as understanding IRB protocol. However, a substantial proportion were not familiar with time and effort reporting, an area noted by the Office of Management and Budget as contentious and audit-vulnerable (Erickson et al., 2007). Further, respondents also indicated lack of knowledge regarding how to account for cash match, contracting with vendors, limits on allowable expenditures for contracted services, knowing who to contact for information regarding contracted service, and how to find information on financial conflict of interest. These research findings led to website revisions designed to improve knowledge in these areas. Following modification of the website, post-survey results showed improvements in time and effort reporting, knowing limits on allowable expenditures, and knowing who to contact for further information. However, future studies should attempt to gather a much higher response rate.

References
Increasing Grant and Research-Related Compliance through Website Modification


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How to Deal With Deadlines

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_GPCI Competency 04: Knowledge of how to craft, construct, and submit an effective grant application_

Abstract

Everyone deals with stress differently. Some proposal writers seem to thrive on the pressure and do their best work under those circumstances. Others struggle with the situation by paying a price in their emotional well-being and even in their health. This article utilizes interviews with funding professionals and a review of literature in the field to give proposal writers tools to help them meet deadlines without undergoing unhealthy stress. One of the key factors to avoiding deadline stress is advanced planning. Many professionals in this field find that the best way to approach an application is to work backwards from the due date and to set deadlines for individual steps which will occur prior to that. The entire process ensures that the project is on track, with the idea that if the team misses the first one or two deadlines, the application may not be feasible. It is these final deadlines that often cause the most stress for proposal writers. By planning their writing process, grant professionals oftentimes find deadline-related stress problems to be greatly reduced, if not eliminated. Effectively managing one’s time and resources on projects such as grant applications makes the proposal writer’s life much easier.

Introduction

The grant development field is stressful because organizations depend on their proposal writers to secure funding, without which important projects grind to a halt. To produce tangible products, the grant professional needs to remain focused. One cannot be complacent when
there is a submission deadline to meet. Organizations that fail to produce applications on time lose credibility very quickly. Not meeting the deadline and, therefore, failing to submit an application, results in the proposal writer finding it difficult to acquire future work. This article will discuss various ways in which grantwriters can deal with the stress of performing with frequent deadlines.

This type of situation produces pressure to perform, which, in extreme cases, induces performance anxiety. Additionally, grant development is a highly competitive field. In the case of most federal and state grant opportunities, all municipalities, counties, or nonprofits compete with one another, and the competition is often quite intense.

**The Problem of Stress**

Stress is a problem for many workers and is common to many professions. Job stress often becomes defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources or needs of the worker. Job stress leads to poor health and even injury (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 1999, p. 6). Working conditions often play a key role in the amount of stress one experiences. Major causes of stress are long hours, harsh deadlines, and conflicting demands (p. 6).

While eliminating the root causes of stress is the obvious way to make one’s life easier, stress likely exists to some extent depending on the job. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health suggests that having a support network of friends and coworkers goes a long way towards limiting the stress experienced (CDC, 1999). A relaxed and positive outlook helps, though one’s ability to have such an outlook varies from person to person. Balancing the stress at work with family and personal life is important. Having work be the only driving force in life easily leads to stress and hardship (p. 8).

**Challenges of the Profession**

It seems to be human nature to wait until the last minute to meet a deadline. Often, the press of daily business, along with other deadlines which precede the one in question, make it difficult to remain focused. Requesting supporting information early after deciding to apply to a particular grant helps as an important part of the grant process. It takes discipline, but the importance of setting aside even a small amount of time each day to work on the grant application helps immensely. One may find it helpful to develop a plan which specifies how far in advance the project starts.

The grant-proposal writing field is inherently full of pressure. Grant professionals must prepare and submit applications to meet non-negotiable deadlines. The funding agencies almost never give an
individual applicant an extension, and this causes a degree of stress. They either get the money, get part of what was requested or get nothing at all. It is possible that some writers could fall into the trap of becoming too personally identified with the results of the applications they write. This might make them feel that a rejection is due solely to their lack of skill in writing the application. This could not be further from the truth, as there are many other reasons for the rejection of applications, such as other applicants with a greater level of need, or a proposed project that is not ready to be implemented or will not resolve the need.

The Experts Speak

Eric Brenner, the Director of the Maryland Governor's Grants Office in Annapolis, MD, has had a distinguished career in the grants field, having worked directly with three governors. His responsibilities in Maryland include informing and educating state, county, municipal, and nonprofit officials of various grant opportunities. Mr. Brenner has also worked closely with a number of Maryland state agencies on large federal applications. His office gives frequent webinars on how to search for grants, how to write a winning grant application and how to administer a grant properly.

During an interview, Mr. Brenner stressed the importance of teamwork in meeting deadlines. A well-thought-out plan involving a number of team members with expertise in various critical areas was also important. He thinks that the more time spent developing an effective plan, the higher the likelihood of success. Mr. Brenner expressed it as setting eight to ten deadlines prior to the official grant submission due date. In his opinion, the best way to accomplish this is by working backward, deciding first when the deadline will be for the completion of the application itself in order to allow enough time for copying and packaging. Prior to that final deadline, he suggests setting deadlines for having certain parts of the application written, having various pieces of research completed, and gathering the needed information. This process, depending on the complexity of the grant application, would also involve a number of team meetings. At these meetings, attendees should review progress, and discuss any foreseen challenges.

Mr. Brenner stressed that missing two or three deadlines early in the process means it might be time to reconsider the feasibility of continuing. In his opinion, the more specific the assignment of each team member, the higher the chances are of success. In addition, people who find success in carrying out their assignments nearly always encourage others to strive to do their best work. For example, members of the grant team who may be lagging in their efforts feel the need to catch up to their more productive colleagues in order not to lose influence on the team. In his experience, one of the best ways to reduce stress relating to grant deadlines is to detail people from other offices and agencies. This allows
the project to obtain enough staff resources and the right mix of expertise to complete the application in the most professional manner.

Mr. Brenner states that the pressure of meeting deadlines is one of the foremost concerns of grant writers. The team approach is the most fundamental predictor of success. Learning to work together with the goal in mind is paramount. Having to deal with this sort of stress comes with the territory. However, being able to successfully produce a great piece of work, especially when it gets funded, brings a sense of pride that is not always so evident in other professions. Being able to see the results of the work and how it benefits others is a real morale booster and makes it worthwhile. (E. Brenner, personal communication, February 5, 2013).

The second grant professional interviewed was Debra Beavin, formerly a staff member with the Region III office of the Economic Development Administration (EDA), US Department of Commerce, in Philadelphia. Ms. Beavin also associated and worked with Southwest Indiana WIRED, and the Indiana 15 Regional Planning Commission.

Ms. Beavin’s input is invaluable because she is one of that exclusive group of people who worked both as a proposal writer and as a federal official. Ms. Beavin explained that this gave her a unique perspective and that the experience helped her at EDA. She was better able to understand the challenges that some of the applicants encountered in meeting their deadlines.

Ms. Beavin’s main piece of advice is very simple, but sometimes difficult to put into practice. She recommends much the same as Mr. Brenner did; to work backwards from the final grant deadline and create smaller deadlines along the way. Ms. Beavin stressed the importance of this type of detailed planning. In her experience, the most successful proposal writers work with a firm plan and deadlines, and stick to the plan as long as new circumstances do not dictate changes. Along with the responsibility to adhere to a sound plan comes a responsibility to reevaluate it if the situation warrants it.

Ms. Beavin also referred to a proposed rule published for public comment by the Office of Management and Budget. The rule streamlines a number of areas in federal grants and makes things more uniform in order to assist the applicants. One of the major issues discussed in the interview was the provision in that rule for a mandatory 90-day notice to the public of any grant opportunity. At the present time, federal agencies announce opportunities with deadlines as short as 30 days away or less. Ms. Beavin thinks that a 90-day period of time is reasonable to prepare a lengthy and complicated federal application. However, it is important that the grant professional make the best use of this extra time by using it to enhance the proposal process, rather than merely waiting until the final 30 days to begin. Ms. Beavin observed that it is the tendency of some applicants to wait until the very last minute to meet a deadline, regardless of how much time they have initially. It is Ms. Beavin’s opinion that this happens in some cases because the writer may be nervous about
the project and therefore procrastinates in order to avoid an unpleasant situation.

The discussion then turned to various methods whereby team leaders help to reduce stress on their employees when it comes to dealing with grant deadlines. One of the most important methods, in the opinion of Ms. Beavin, is not to micro-manage. The adage “You are only as good as the people around you” is certainly true in the pressure-cooker atmosphere of grant development. It is stressful enough without having a boss who appears to have very little confidence in the employees.

Finally, Ms. Beavin mentioned the use of outside resources as an excellent method of reducing stress on proposal writers. This includes bringing in consultants or technical experts in the subject matter of the grant application. This type of assistance is useful and economical, because the agency only pays for the amount of work it needs at that time, rather than being saddled with another full-time or part-time permanent position (D. Beavin, personal communication, February 7, 2013).

Relevant Literature

The popular grant-development book, *The Only Grant Writing Book You’ll Ever Need*, by Ellen Karsh and Arlen Sue Fox, offers several excellent suggestions in Appendix 1, “Fifty Tips” (p. 282). One of these tips is to “Write the proposal when you do not have to.” The authors suggest preparing a file in which various items needed for grant applications are kept until needed. These items can include information about the organization, programs, management and staff, participants, and community. Develop these items during slow times.

In addition, Karsh and Fox emphasize the importance of being mindful of the length of time it takes to complete an application, in order to reduce deadline-related stress. They state,

> Remember that in one study the average time it took to prepare a federal proposal was nearly 80 person-hours but for those proposals which received awards, the average preparation time was 150 hours. We have not seen any similar figures for local government proposals, but experience suggests it is pretty close (p. 282).

Dr. Beverly Browning, the author of numerous books and articles regarding grant development, also has some very helpful advice on how to deal with deadline pressure. Dr. Browning, now associated with eCivis, recently wrote an article which was published on the firm's blog. This article, entitled “Getting Your Organization Grant Ready: A Grant Writer’s Perspective” (2012), offers some solid advice on how to be better prepared to meet deadlines.
Dr. Browning outlines several steps to take early in the process, before the proposal writer arrives. One includes a thorough review of the Notice Of Funding Availability (NOFA). Another would be assembling organizational information which will be requested and identifying partners. Browning also suggests attending any meetings or webinars given by the funder. Lastly, creating a document which deals with the organization’s capability and grant history is a good idea as well.

Dr. Browning recommends the following steps once the proposal writer joins the team:

- Set up a conference line for all calls involving more than two persons.
- Subscribe to an online project workspace service to facilitate all file uploads and review downloads.
- Make sure that a third party (not the staff or the proposal writer) is available to act as an editor/proofer for all grant application documents.
- Double-check the grant registration information and make sure that it is current.
- Set the organization's grant application submission date at least 72 hours before the published deadline for submitting the application.
- Make sure that all relevant parties involved in the grant information and writing process will be accessible during the final critical 5 days before the due date.

An article in the *Houston Chronicle* by Molly Thompson, “How to Deal With Stress From Deadlines While Working at Home” (2012) also contains some excellent suggestions. Ms. Thompson has been writing for classified US government presentations and publications since 1980. Thompson established and runs a strategic analysis/research company.

Ms. Thompson has a five-step method for dealing with stress that relates to deadlines. Her steps are more general success tips. With these steps one should be able to take the edge off stress associated with approaching deadlines.

In the first step, Thompson says to prioritize the work flow into more manageable pieces. Step two describes the importance of a clean working environment, while step three looks at keeping work and home life separate. This step also involves the importance of letting loved ones know one may need time to work. The fourth step is to take breaks when needed; while the final step is simply to work longer hours when necessary to finish important projects (Thompson, 2012).

The Boeing Company Employee Assistance Program recognizes the benefits of working with their employees to reduce the anxiety
associated with having to meet deadlines. An article “Meeting Tight Deadlines: Minimizing Employee Stress” (2012) details some very simple yet effective ways to easily manage one’s work so that projects become completed before being due. The article was written by Judi Light Hopson, co-author of *Burnout to Balance: EMS Stress*.

Ms. Hopson points out that “Many studies suggest that meeting work deadlines causes more stress for workers than any other factor. In addition, managers and supervisors can feel this pressure even more severely.” (Hopson, 2012)

Ms. Hopson outlines a number of very effective techniques for working comfortably with deadlines:

- Avoid forcing outcomes. Be realistic and prepare for the possibility of drawing in additional colleagues, hiring temporary workers or outsourcing certain parts of the work.

- Tackle the most stubborn part of the problem first. This may be the single most important factor in meeting the deadline. “This prep work creates the flow and gets everyone’s energies in sync”.

- Have employees alert their supervisors early to problems. Some employees try to hide problems. “Sniff out any employees who are not coming through early”.

- Be honest with one’s own boss. Do not be afraid to ask for resources which are needed to complete the job on time.

- Have employees pace themselves. This involves being flexible and allowing the employees to create their own best environment by permitting flex time and telecommuting.

- Protect employees from energy drain. Help them to avoid interruptions, obtain focused time, and have a relaxed work space.

- Encourage rest breaks. Going without such breaks is counter-productive and results in employees' not producing the work they need to produce.

- Make sure everyone understands everyone else’s role.

- Draw a clear picture on paper of what is needed. This can be in written form or in the forms of charts and graphs. Ask employees to fill in the details of the leader’s broad ideas.

- Do the best work and do not worry. Worry does not help and will actually impair progress. Employees do their best work when calm and not anxious (Hopson, 2012).
From the Author’s Own Experience

Proposal writers’ methods of dealing with stress and time management will naturally have to take into account whether they are part-time or full-time. Whether they are a grant consultant or an employee of an agency which is seeking grants also factors in the length of time it takes to complete an application in a timely manner. The following are some specific techniques useful in meeting deadlines and working at a comfortable pace. Many proposal writers work on multiple projects at the same time.

One of the things which can help significantly is the use of dictation using computer software (such as *Dragon Naturally Speaking*). After an initial “training” period of 30 to 60 minutes, the software attunes to the user's voice. The user then dictates into a microphone, and the words appear on the screen automatically. This is a very easy and fast way of writing.

Another useful method for meeting application deadlines with minimal stress is to gather all documents needed from others prior to beginning an application. For example, a funding agency may request copies of audits, articles of incorporation, a list of board members and so forth. It is beneficial to get these documents together in the very beginning of the application development process.

Avoid unnecessary meetings in order to concentrate completely on the work needed to complete the application on time. Unfortunately, some team leaders feel that more is better when it comes to meetings. For critical meetings, encourage brevity by knowing ahead of time what needs to be said and what comes out of the meeting. In most cases, a motivated leader keeps meetings shorter, provided that the group is not too large.

All proposal writers who are employees must be frank with their supervisors about what they need in order to produce an application in the allotted time frame. This may be a reduction in other duties, allowing work at home, support from other staff, or access to research resources. Employers need to hear from employees about what it takes to produce an excellent and timely application. They do not know the employee’s needs unless the employee tells them.

Conclusions

Writing a grant proposal can be a highly stressful event for some people. Everyone manages stress differently, and what would not cause any problems for one writer could be problematic for another. However, the good news is that it is possible to not only survive, but to thrive in this type of environment by following just a few very basic steps.

While no one method guarantees to solve a proposal writer’s problems, some techniques suggested by experienced proposal writers
How to Deal with Deadlines

lessen the stress burden. This includes setting deadlines for various tasks associated with each step of preparing the application. This particular technique is widely recommended in the literature and in conversations with experts in the field to reduce stress associated with deadlines.

Finally, being able to spot problems early and tackle them aggressively will prevent last-minute issues. Likewise, taking the most difficult steps first will also save time, in the long run, and thus ease pressure.

References


Biographical Information

Valerie Mann has been working in the field of grantwriting for 36 years. Ms. Mann is the author of Getting Your Share of the Pie–The Complete Guide to Finding Grants, published by Praeger in August 2010. She has written approximately 700 grant applications, with more than 70% of them winning $125,000,000 in grant funds. Ms. Mann was President of the Fruitland City Council from October of 1992 to October of 1998. She served as the President of the Lower Eastern Shore Mayors’ Association, as the Treasurer of the Maryland Mayors’ Association, and as an alternate on the Legislative
Committee of the Maryland Municipal League. She gives grantwriting seminars throughout the US, as well as webinars. In May 2013, Ms. Mann presented two webinars for the Grant Professionals Association. In June 2013, Ms. Mann gave a workshop at the annual meeting of the Tennessee Municipal League and also at the annual meeting of the Maryland Municipal League. Her website is www.best-grant-writing-workshop.com.
Building Community Capacity Through Grant Development Collaborations in Public Health Settings: A Case Study

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

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

Abstract

This article describes a partnership between a university health education department (University of Wisconsin-La Crosse) and a healthcare system (Gundersen Health System) in Wisconsin. This partnership enhances the grant-development experiences for students enrolled in a community and public health education course. The collaboration, which began in 2011, provides students with basic and complex principles and practices of grantsmanship and organizational development. This occurs through a variety of regional and international public health and community projects. Health education students partner with health system staff members and learn skills for planning, developing, and evaluating approaches in grant seeking and in developing proposals. The health system proposal writer, an author of two books about grantsmanship, serves as a resource for the students as they work on their projects. Through this collaborative partnership, students learn many skills. They learn how to identify potential funding sources, conduct literature reviews, and complete letters of intent and proposals for a variety of “real-
life” health interventions and projects. These valuable grantsmanship skills are an asset for the students’ future employment in public health and non-profit sectors. Gundersen Health System benefits from this collaboration by building its capacity to provide additional outreach and services through grant funding. This article describes this collaboration, illustrates applicable GPC competencies, and discusses challenges and lessons learned.

Introduction

It is critical that communities have a strong public health workforce to provide preventative health care, screening and treatment interventions for individuals and families of all ages. Over the past decade, community and public health education preparation programs (baccalaureate and masters) have made strides to ensure a strong workforce. They now use evidence-based programming, incorporating competency-based curricula, and providing practicum and service learning projects (Porter, McGrath & Costello, 2008; Lindley, Wilson & Dunn, 2005). The National Commission for Health Education Credentialing, Inc. (NCHEC) identifies the areas of responsibilities and competencies for entry and advanced-level health education professionals. The Area of Responsibility V: Administer and Manage Health Education details a number of skills needed in garnering financial resources, working within collaborative partnerships, and managing budgets and personnel (National Commission for Health Education Credentialing, 2010). Proposal writing is a necessary skill for students preparing to work in hospitals, nonprofit organizations (Falk, 2011), state and county health departments, schools (Ledford, 2011) and universities (Sisk, 2011).

Since 2004, the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse’s (UW-L) Department of Health Education and Health Promotion (HEHP) offers an elective grantseeking course for undergraduate and graduate community and public health students. In 2005-2006, the Department of HEHP incorporated the course as a requirement for the baccalaureate degree and based it on national standards and local feedback from internship mentors and employers. A professor of health education began teaching the grantseeking course, partnering with a handful of community-based organizations, and students wrote proposals for a hypothetical or ideal place of employment.

The authors met in spring 2011 and discussed a possible partnership between Gundersen Health System and the university grantseeking course. Healthcare system staff members often want grant funding for projects which are primarily community-based and/or targeted to Gundersen Health System patients. The Gundersen Medical Foundation
Proposal writer surveyed staff to see if there was interest in working with university students to research available funding opportunities and write grant proposals for projects. Staff representing several departments responded positively and the partnership began in the fall semester of 2011.

This upper-level course, *Grantseeking for Health, Human Services and Education Professions*, is for undergraduate and graduate students in community and public health preparation programs. The course emphasizes community-based projects and grants that provide funding support for curricula, supplies and materials, contract work, and small community-based participatory research or evaluations. Due to time constraints and the content of the grantseeking course curriculum, research grants (specifically those requesting support from the National Institutes of Health) are not included. The students work with organizations to further build capacity for project and organizational development. Much of the work that students and staff members do is to define the mission and goals of the organizations, and their capacity for collaboration and project development. The course description is:

> The grantseeking enterprise is studied and applied. Generic grantseeking content, practices, and concepts are presented for application in most public health disciplines and areas of interest. Content includes locating and communicating with funding agencies, writing and reviewing grant proposals, analyzing requests for proposals, using technology in grantseeking, and implementing and evaluating grant funded projects. (Rees, 2011, p. 1)

**Process**

Approximately four to five weeks before each semester begins, the proposal writer contacts Gundersen Health System staff who may 1) want a literature review conducted to further develop a project idea for future funding; 2) need research done to identify potential funders for their project; and 3) identify a specific letter of intent or proposal that they would like written. The proposal writer compiles the project summaries and sends them to the instructor. On average, students have 10 to 12 projects to choose from for their assignment.

The instructor sends out the list of possible Gundersen Health System projects (and other nonprofit organizations' projects) one to two weeks prior to the beginning of the semester. Students rank their choices based on topic, interest and/or experiences. The instructor places students on teams based on these rankings, and notifies Gundersen Health System staff members of selected projects providing them with the names of their assigned UW-L student team.
The proposal writer conducts a presentation the second or third week of the class. She provides an introduction to Gundersen Health System, offers tips for working with Gundersen Health System staff effectively, describes the grantseeking resources she has available and discusses the roles and expectations of Gundersen Health System and grants office staff. During the semester the proposal writer serves as a resource for the students and answers questions related to specific projects and to grantsmanship issues. On request, she provides a short orientation to the grants funder database available at Gundersen and assists students with their research.

After this initial presentation, UW-L students and Gundersen Health System staff meet at the Medical Center to make introductions and to discuss their roles. They discuss the assigned project, collect information, schedule weekly or bi-weekly meetings and determine next steps to move the project forward.

The student teams spend the semester working with the departments on the outcomes determined at that initial meeting. Students meet for formal lecture and skill development one day per week and work with their teams and meet with the Gundersen Health System staff one day per week. The teams spend anywhere from four to eight hours per week in class and in meetings communicating with their assigned Gundersen Health System staff member, conducting grantseeking research, or literature reviews, or writing letters of intent and grant proposals. (Although students may not write an actual letter of intent or proposal for submission for their assigned Gundersen Health System project, they still write both of these documents as part of the course requirements.) At the end of the semester, the students compile a professional binder that includes:

1. Listing of Potential Funders (corporate, foundation, government)
2. Literature Review/Annotated Bibliographies of Evidence-Based Programming
3. Letter of Inquiry
4. Proposal (actual or generic)
5. References
6. Support Materials (letters of support, contracts, resumes, vendor bids or materials, timelines)
7. Additional materials the department requests.

**Benefits**

This collaboration benefits both Gundersen Health System and the university students. Primarily, students conducting literature reviews, researching funding opportunities, and developing letters of intent
and proposals, provide staffing assistance to the grants office. Having students conduct literature reviews and research viable funders allows the proposal writer to spend more of her time developing proposals and increases the number which are submitted. Utilizing UW-L students results in a larger number of Gundersen Health System staff receiving the grants-related assistance they need in a timely manner. Continuous communication in person and electronically with the students motivates Gundersen staff to continue moving forward through the grantsmanship process at a steady pace.

The students benefit from the partnership by working through a ‘live-time’ project timeline. Students provide Gundersen Health System staff, who might be new to the grantsmanship process, with valuable information needed to develop fundable projects and apply for grants. By asking questions and requesting information for proposal sections such as needs statements, goals and objectives, budgets and methodology, students play a key role in the project facilitation and proposal development processes. Communication skills are vital to the grantsmanship process, and this collaboration provides the students with professional development opportunities including emailing, public speaking and drafting proposals.

To date, three proposals written by student teams were funded totaling approximately $15,000. One project was funded twice by a regional Area Health Education Center and one project was funded by both a local and regional Rotary Club Foundation. In addition, one letter of intent and two proposals were submitted based on work done by the student teams. Table 1 describes student projects since 2011.

In January 2013, the grants office secured its first intern. This individual was a student in the prior semester’s grantseeking class. Based on her positive experience and what she learned in the class, the student applied for the internship position to learn more about grantsmanship and practice her proposal writing skills. Students in the class have served as interns in other departments at Gundersen Health System, and a few have become employees.

**Challenges/Barriers**

Initially, many students felt that the only measure of success for the class was to be able to report by the semester’s end that they submitted a proposal. Because of this self-imposed pressure, some students became frustrated by their inability to find funders within the timeframe of the semester. Others became anxious if a deadline was drawing near and it appeared that a proposal would not be submitted. Gundersen Health System staff held this same misconception about measuring success, and experienced similar frustration and anxiety. To address this concern, both the instructor and the proposal writer reinforce for both students...
### Table 1. Examples of the Partnership Projects

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<td>Teen Car Control Clinic</td>
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<td>Inpatient Rehab, Nursing</td>
<td>How Healing Arts Affects Patients</td>
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<td>Behavioral Health</td>
<td>Providing Mental Health Services to Youth at a Community-Based Teen Center</td>
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<td>Pine Ridge Reservation Healing Camp to Help Youth Cope with Trauma</td>
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<td>Health Camp for Students on Pine Ridge Reservation (Funded in 2012, 2013)</td>
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<td>Nicaragua Establish Community Library</td>
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<td>Nicaragua Helping Babies Breathe (Funded by 2 Foundations)</td>
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<td>Community and Preventive Care Services</td>
<td>Community Health Fair &amp; Expo</td>
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<td>Implementation of Walking Trail Features</td>
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and staff that the measure of success of their collaboration is having all individuals involved learn about the grantsmanship process.

Some proposals and letters of intent written by the students have a submission deadline that is outside of the course timeline. The proposal writer submits these in time for the deadlines. The students create a portfolio/binder that includes all the research, background and additional funding sources which the proposal writer can draw upon to re-use and re-formulate proposals when needed in the future.

In 2012, a new internal grants process was implemented by the grants office at Gundersen Health System. Prior to submission, staff must complete and submit a grant form to an internal review panel for review and approval. This new process is an added step that staff must take into consideration before they submit a letter of intent or proposal. Students learn about the process so they understand that Gundersen staff must follow a standard operating procedure for submissions.

The instructor teaches communication and ethical procedures every semester and often these procedures present challenges. Identifying group dynamics, strengths, and weaknesses becomes critical to a grant team’s success. The instructor monitors the effectiveness of the student teams and encourages them to use problem-solving skills when challenges arise.

This course offers real-life scenarios of working with challenging topics, tracking down viable funding sources, and finding ways to build capacity and collaborative relationships. Students focus on tenets of organizational development including determining needs, project goals, timelines and personnel needs. They acquire strong skill sets by learning to manage time constraints, by scheduling meetings with busy hospital staff and other students on their team, by bringing consensus to a project and timeline, and by juggling priorities. By the end of a semester, they learn that the keys to successful grantsmanship include perseverance, flexibility, and tenacity.

**Evaluation**

Throughout the semester, the proposal writer contacts Gundersen staff to discuss progress with their team and to identify any issues or challenges. (The proposal writer developed a short survey for staff to complete and began to use it in spring 2013.) Staff members and UW-L students also take the initiative to contact the proposal writer and the instructor to discuss issues and to ask for assistance in resolving them.

At the end of the semester, the students and Gundersen Health System staff meet for a final dissemination and presentation of materials. The proposal writer discusses the experience with the students and solicits their suggestions for improvement.

Students submit all proposal components and drafts of the professional binder prior to the end of the semester allowing for further
edits, necessary technical assistance and final grading by the instructor. Course evaluations are quantitative, using a survey completed in class. This provides valuable information for further course development and for working through any communication barriers. Students complete a peer evaluation at mid-semester and at the end of the course. This peer feedback provides students validation for group work and ideas for how to improve their skills. It also offers information for the instructor on how to better prepare writing teams for small group dynamics and project management.

After the semester is over, the instructor and the proposal writer meet to review students' evaluations and comments and feedback provided by Gundersen Health System staff. They share their own thoughts about the semester. Using all of this information, they make any needed revisions related to process and curriculum for the next semester. Students follow up if there are necessary requests from Gundersen Health System staff after the semester, and they receive notification if a proposal is funded.

Conclusion
Partnerships between healthcare organizations and university public health students are win-win collaborations. Grant development skills are valuable in the community and public health workforce and important in baccalaureate and masters programs (Lindley, Wilson, & Dunn, 2005). Professional preparation programs strongly benefit from creating relationships and partnerships with community-based organizations. Public health workers with strong grantsmanship skills are in high demand and provide communities with leadership and capacity-building skills, and the ability to explore grant funding for potential projects. The foundation for this partnership, grounded in collaborative approaches, ensures mutual benefits and positive outcomes. The grantseeking class learns the benefits of collaboration, how to conduct professional meetings, develop project management skills, and how specifically to increase their grantsmanship skills. The healthcare organization meets its mission by receiving expanded opportunities to pursue grant funding for projects designed to benefit the health of the individuals and the communities it serves.

References


**Biographical Information**

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Ms. Ward is a former grants and funding columnist for *eSchool News*, the author of the third and fourth editions of *Writing Grant Proposals that Win* and the author of *Effective Grants Management* published by Jones and Bartlett Learning. Two of her articles are included in *The Nonprofit Consulting Playbook* published by Charity Channel Press. She has presented workshops and at conferences throughout the United States and in Guam.

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Dr. Rees has taught community and public health foundation courses, grantseeking, and women’s health courses, trainings, and workshops in universities, hospitals, and school districts. She has taught internationally with other universities, researchers, and organizations identifying ways to better prepare health educators in the field. Community-based participatory research has guided her professional career working with a variety of partnerships to include school districts in New Mexico, Illinois, and Wisconsin; health departments, regional coalitions, and numerous nonprofit health organizations. She began teaching grantseeking for health educators in 2000 at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. She is a professional member of the Society of Public Health Education, Eta Sigma Gamma. Contact: krees@uwlax.edu.
Strategies for Avoiding Internal and External Grant Scams

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GPCI Competency 06: Knowledge of nationally recognized standards of ethical practice by grant developers

Abstract
In an effort to provide a framework for organizations to avoid fraudulent fund development behaviors, this article provides a list of strategies that nonprofits can use to avoid internal and external grant scams. Upon usage of these tactics, organizations will be better able to identify fraud and avoid fraudulent activity. Furthermore, leaders in the fund development field will better understand ethical practices associated with the Grant Professionals Certification Institute (GPCI). A list of nonprofit organizations that have succumbed to fraudulent activities is also provided.

Introduction
Fraudulent activity in the non-governmental and nonprofit community is problematic (Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability, 2010; Greenless, J., 2006; Patsuris, P., 2002, Ryan, M., 2008; Schrock, S., 2007; United States Government Accountability Office, 2010). According to the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners (ACFE), “the largest anti-fraud organization and premier provider of anti-fraud training and education,” (ACFE, 2013a, para. 1) fraud within nonprofit and religious institutions rose from 2.3 percent in 2010 to 3.9 percent in 2012 (ACFE, 2013a). The ACFE 2012 Report of the Nations provides an analysis of 1,388 worldwide fraud cases that occurred in all business sectors (ACFE, 2013b). The report makes public the investigation of these activities. Fraud is a major concern within the nonprofit industry, yet there are steps that can be taken to prevent its occurrence.

There are two types of fraud: internal and external. Internal fraud, also known as occupational fraud, is “the use of one’s occupation for personal enrichment through the deliberate misuse or misapplication of the organization’s resources or assets” (ACFE, 2013b, para. 5). According
to the National Procurement Fraud Task Force (n.d.), the most common internal fraud cases include expenditures on personal items and the inflation of labor costs. The individuals most likely to commit internal fraud are board members, managers and financial staff.

According to Dr. Donald Cressey, a former criminologist and fraud expert, external fraud is a dishonest act conducted outside of the organization (ACFE, 2013b). Such an act is an attempt to deprive the nonprofit organization of its funding. According to Wells (2007), external fraud is also a scam (p. 21). Examples of external fraud include purchase orders with values that were never incurred or solicitations for “free grant money” that never has to be repaid. Fraudulent grant solicitations frequently contain the word “free,” while applications on websites like grants.gov and foundationcenter.org do not contain such terminology. The Federal Trade Commission charges nonprofits to look for obvious grant scams. Phrases like “free grants” are clearly unnecessary as there is not a charge to apply for a grant.

Grants have clear guidelines. Fund development officers must ensure that organizations abide by the goals and objectives articulated in the grant proposal.

There are a number of rules in place to prevent fraudulent behaviors within the nonprofit sector (Hopkins, 2000). However, many leaders still succumb to behaviors that lead to deception.

**Fraud in Nonprofit Organizations**

According to Cressey (2010) there are three reasons that fraud occurs. These reasons include perceived financial pressure, rationalization and perceived opportunity (p.19). Many nonprofit leaders engage in such behaviors leading to fraudulent activity. Misuse of federal monies led to personal gain among the members of the Let’s Talk, Let’s Test Foundation. A federal grant given to the organization allowed leaders to provide AIDS testing to local communities. Instead, leaders spent the monies on unqualified items. This is not a stand-alone incident.

In 2012, a lack of financial oversight led to the indictment of the chief financial officer at a nonprofit organization in the Midwest. A lack of separation of duties led to the mismanagement of federal grant dollars meant solely for the educational well-being of students. The event led to the indictment of the school official and debarred the organization from applying for several federal grant opportunities permanently.

In 2011, the administrator of a leadership academy in the Northeast used federal dollars for self-serving purposes. The administrator wrote and cashed several unauthorized checks using monies initially donated for the well-being of youth.

“Accountability, responsibility, transparency, and cost-effectiveness” are terms that members of the nonprofit community must adhere
to if they anticipate the continuation of funds (Shontz, 2010, p. 55). Furthermore, grants given to organizations must be spent as articulated in the agreement made with the grantmaker. Otherwise the organization risks penalties of fraud.

**Organizations Committed to Fraud Prevention**

A number of organizations help to shed light on deceitful behaviors. Nonprofits that engage in fraudulent grant-related activities risk the embarrassment of listing by System for Award Management (SAM) as a debarred organization. SAM is a federally-operated site that combines a number of other sites and sources used by grant professionals (System for Award Management, 2013). The Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency is another national committee that detects and prevents fraud. The Council reports directly to the Federal Inspector General (CIGIE, 2013).

The Better Business Bureau operates the BBB Wise Giving Alliance Standards for Charity Accountability. The standards reflect governance and oversight, measurement, finance and transparency (Better Business Bureau, 2013). Organizations that adopt these standards must commit to providing full and honest disclosure of their use of grant funds to grantors as well as to the general public. Christian faith-based organizations can also adopt similar rules known as the Seven Standards of Responsible Stewardship. These standards are specifically for evangelical organizations in order to ensure that their financial activities are sound and ethical.

While there are organizations committed to fraud prevention, there are also strategies that a nonprofit can adopt to ensure that fraud prevention exists throughout the agency.

**Preventing Fraud Internally and Externally**

Nonprofit organizations must be accountable to their grantors at all times (Ebrahim and Weisban, 2007). Grantees must meet the guidelines set forth by the contract established between the agency and the grantor. It is imperative to heighten awareness of the need to implement stronger internal control systems. Internal control systems are processes used by development leaders to continually review and monitor financial actions and decisions. A careful review of financial documents eliminates the potential distribution of falsified information to the general public and prevents the unethical practice of misappropriation. Listed here are the steps that nonprofits use to prevent fraud:

- Creating honest and accurate disclosure statements and reports made available annually such as Form 990 (Fremont-Smith, 2004).
• Implementing separation of duties ensures that one individual is not responsible for more than one financially related activity. For example, the chief financial officer (CFO) should report to a committee that, in turn, reviews all documents for accuracy and then makes additional reports. The CFO should not be responsible for all areas of finance alone.

• Reporting the problem to board members (Panepento, 2008).

Adhering to the Grant Professionals Association’s Code of Ethics

Maintaining clear and honest financial records is critical. This documentation is necessary for federal reporting. All nonprofit organizations must make their agency’s annual tax return available for public inspection and copying. These annual income returns include Form 990, Form 990-EZ, Form 990-PF, Form 990-BL, Form 1065 and Form 990-T. All supporting documents must be available to the general public for at least three years. Form 990 discloses an organization’s financial health. Most importantly, it proves financial accountability to the general public. Since Form 990 is a public record, donors have the right to review its accuracy. Inaccurate financial reporting jeopardizes relationships with donors and defrauds the organization. Not only does fraud decrease the level of giving, it potentially affects the donor’s tax return. When organizations fail to submit their 990 forms to the Internal Revenue Service with accurate data, although donors can declare a donation, a discrepancy in reporting could occur. An audit coordinated by the Internal Revenue Service would then take place.

The Association of Fundraising Professionals’ guiding document, A Donor’s Bill Of Rights, clearly articulates how organizations provide financial information to donors. The third clause of the document states that donors have the right “To have access to the organization’s most recent financial statements” (AFP, 2013). Grant professionals must, therefore, ensure that they properly disclose financial information to their donors and to the general public.

The tenth principle of this document states that a donor has the right “To feel free to ask questions when making a donation and to receive prompt, truthful and forthright answers” (AFP, 2013). This principle means that organizations must be transparent and honest regarding the disclosure of financial information. Adherence to the principle ensures that accounting records are available and accurate at all times in the event that a stakeholder requests them. These guidelines allow grantees to remain transparent, while continuously maintaining the trust of their stakeholders. When nonprofit organizations maintain accurate financial records and make them available to stakeholders at any time, it establishes positive rapport with current and potential donors.
Corporate Governance

Corporate governance is a business-wide system that requires financial documents to be reviewed by a number of individuals. This structure, as a result, makes all financial documentation transparent.

Despite the work of decades of reform, leaders within the nonprofit field continue to misappropriate funds. It is, therefore, imperative for nonprofit organizations to implement systems that prevent fraudulent behaviors. “Corporate governance provides a structure that, at least in theory, works for the benefit of everyone concerned by ensuring that the enterprise adheres to accepted ethical standards and best practices as well as to formal laws” (Rouse, 2008, para. 1). In the nonprofit sector, corporate governance is nonprofit corporate governance. However, it still encourages multiple members of the organization to be heavily involved in the review of financial information while ensuring its accuracy.

“The roots of corporate governance can be traced back to at least Berle and Means (1932) who argued that effective control over publicly traded corporations was not being exercised by the legal owners of equity, the shareholders, but by hired, professional managers” (Bushman, 2003, p. 68). For decades a lack of integrity due to a limitation of corporate governance has affected corporations, nonprofits and faith-based communities.

There are principles and practices developed in an effort to ensure the integrity of fund development practices. As Dropkin (2005) states, “employees should be monitored and managers must meet with them routinely in order to audit their actions while ensuring compliance with rules” (para. 1). Therefore, critical steps are taken in order to ensure that leaders create accurate financial documents before the information is placed into the annual report or Form 990. Arvanitidou (2011) suggests that corporate control tactics are the best means for companies to prevent fraud (para. 1).

“An absence of reliable and accessible information in the economy impedes the flow of human and financial capital toward sectors that are expected to have high returns and away from sectors with poor prospects” (Bushman, 2003, p. 67). Project managers must abide by the rules set forth in a donor’s contract, while ensuring that funds are spent according to applicable guidelines.

The Association of Certified Fraud Examiners (ACFE) offers a likely solution to decreasing fraud in organizations. Its Fraud Prevention Check Up Tool survey provides organizations with a resource to identify fraud early and to eliminate risk before serious problems arise (ACFE, 2013a). The tool has seven questions that focus on the strategies that an organization can use to prevent fraud. Responses to the questions can be rated on a scale between 0 (not yet implemented) to 10 (implemented, evaluated and fully working). The questions in the survey address:
1. Fraud risk oversight: degree of fraud risk oversight at the organization's governance level

2. Fraud risk ownership: senior-level management of fraud risk

3. Fraud risk assessment: regular process for identifying significant fraud risk

4. Fraud risk tolerance and risk management policy:
   a. Board identification and approval of types of fraud risk
   b. Board approval of risk management policy including risk owners, risk exclusions, and transference or management of retained risks

5. Process-level anti-fraud controls / reengineering:
   a. Plan to reduce or reengineer significant fraud risks
   b. Implemented measures at the process level designed to prevent, deter, and detect each of the identified significant fraud risks

6. Environment-level anti-fraud controls: workplace environment that promotes ethical behavior, deters wrongdoing, and encourages all employees to communicate any known or suspected wrongdoing to the appropriate person, including training for new employees

7. Proactive fraud detection: established process to detect, investigate, and resolve potentially significant fraud (ACFE, 2013a)

The important information to take from the check-up is the identification of particular areas for improvement in a company's fraud prevention processes. The precise numerical score is less important and helps to communicate an overall impression (ACFE, 2013a, p. 11). A nonprofit organization interested in implementing the strategy should hire a certified fraud examiner who knows the methods used to coordinate the evaluation with ease.

**Conclusion**

Organizations must maintain accurate records if they anticipate seeking operating funds. With stronger internal control systems in place, organizations have the opportunity to maintain their reputations in the nonprofit community.

Donors will invest in nonprofits and faith-based organizations when they demonstrate that they are good stewards of monies. Strong internal control systems ensure that leaders complete financial activity with integrity. High levels of good governance lead to greater transparency so that stakeholders remain aware of the state of their investments.
References


Biographical Information

Janell N. Harvey, DBA, is an Associate Professor at DeVry University. Her research deals specifically with fund development and consumer behavior within the faith-based community. She is a 501(c)3 consultant and has helped to establish more than a dozen faith-based organizations throughout the Midwest. Dr. Harvey is a published author and a member of the Marketing Educators Association, Religious Research Association and the Grant Professionals Association. She can be reached at drjanellharvey@gmail.com.
Moving from Outputs to Outcomes in the Public Health Sector: A Case Study

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Abstract
This case study describes an outcome-based framework that can help grant professionals demonstrate the kind of measurable results that justify current and continued financial support from sponsors or donors. Specifically, this case highlights the efforts of a federally-supported primary health care association to measure the effectiveness of their technical assistance training programs and services. Strategic goals for implementing an outcome-based service approach included increasing the capacity and sustainability of Community Health Centers to provide high-quality primary and preventive health care to patients who might not otherwise have access to it, especially given the increasing number of uninsured. Evaluation results showed a positive link between the organization’s implementation of an outcome-based service model and intended process, program, and service results. Implications for grant management practice are also provided.

Introduction
In the face of diminishing time, money, and resources, much of the future of a grant- or donor-funded association depends upon the effective use of outcome criteria when making strategic decisions about program and service priorities. Credible outcome data also provide a decision-making focus for funders and donors, who must determine whether to continue...
or discontinue community, state, or federal funding allocations to grant programs. These decisions are typically based upon a project’s ability to show evidence-based progress towards stated goals, objectives, and desired outcomes for the individuals or causes they serve. After all, who is going to invest in a program that cannot show its value?

While many grant professionals may hesitate to pursue a thorough evaluation effort due to concerns about the perceived complexity, cost or time involved, it is important to note that results information—including status reports and progress measures—represents a great opportunity to tell the story of a grant project’s work. In many ways, one might consider outcome data as a form of organized storytelling. To that end, evaluation data offer compelling stories about how grant projects build partnerships, expand resources, and shape economies by helping individuals, families, and communities survive and thrive.

**Case Study Background and Organizational Context**

The Community Health Care Association of the Dakotas (CHAD) is the bi-state primary care association for federally-supported health clinics in North and South Dakota. CHAD’s membership includes 11 health clinics, four in North Dakota and seven in South Dakota. As the primary care association for two rural, frontier states with widely disbursed populations, CHAD serves a community health clinic (CHC) network through consultation, technical assistance, training, resource development, financial management and human resource advocacy for the purpose of increasing capacity and sustainability of CHCs.

**Opportunity**

An expansion of health clinics in the Dakotas created a demand for CHAD to provide its members with more diversified, compliance-oriented training and technical assistance. In light of increased demands for utility and efficiency and a political climate characterized by ongoing resource constraints, the board of directors established strategic priorities around determining the return on investment (ROI) for “Partnership and Collaboration Activities.” To address those needs, CHAD commissioned an evaluation consultant to assist in developing an outcome-based approach to measure the efficiency and effectiveness of CHAD’s partnership and collaboration activities.

**Developing an Outcome-Based Service Model**

An important first step in implementing any outcome-based service strategy is to help stakeholders think through various levels of program outcomes, including levels of impact where ultimate outcomes may not be seen for many years (Bamberger, Rugh, & Mabry, 2006). This is an
important process throughout multiple stages of grant management. Specifically, it is important at the front-end stage, when developing an effective evaluation section for a grant application. It is important during post-award grant management, when monitoring activities, resources, and progress. It is also important during grant review and renewal periods, when reporting about a grant project’s success in achieving intended outcomes.

One common method for charting progress toward interim and long-term outcomes is through the development of a logic model. A logic model is a systematic, visual way to present the relationships among program resources, program activities, and desired changes or results.

In the CHAD effort, the logic model approach had several benefits. First, it helped staff stay focused on outcomes versus outputs; it showed a visual connection between interim and long-term outcomes; it graphically linked CHAD activities, services, and processes to desired outcomes; and it kept underlying assumptions at the forefront. Finally, the participatory process of developing the logic model (Figure 1) provided a focal point for discussion that facilitated clear thinking around gaps and opportunities, as well as a sense of shared ownership among stakeholders.

Figure 1. Logic Model
An Outcome-Based Framework

To examine the impact of CHAD’s suite of services across multiple levels of outcomes, Phillips’ return-on-investment (ROI) process methodology (Phillips, Phillips, Stone, & Burkett, 2006) provided the results-based framework. As shown in Table 1, the ROI process expands upon Kirkpatrick’s (2006) four-level framework for categorizing evaluation data to incorporate a fifth level of evaluation, which serves to capture the financial impact or ROI of programs.

Table 1. Evaluation Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Levels</th>
<th>Measurement Focus</th>
<th>Typical Measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 1 Reaction and Planned Action</td>
<td>Measures satisfaction with the program and captures planned actions</td>
<td>Relevance, importance, usefulness, intent to use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2 Learning</td>
<td>Measures changes in knowledge, skills, and attitudes</td>
<td>Skills, knowledge, competencies, confidence in use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3 Application</td>
<td>Measures changes in on-the-job behavior, use of learning content and material in the work or home environment</td>
<td>Extent of use, task completion, frequency of use, actions completed, success with actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4 Impact and Consequences</td>
<td>Measures consequence of use expressed as business impact</td>
<td>Productivity, quality, time, cost, efficiency, customer satisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 5 Return on Investment</td>
<td>Compares monetary benefits of the program to program costs</td>
<td>Benefit/cost ratio (BCR), ROI (%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this framework, the first type of data—participants’ reaction or satisfaction—is measured on almost all programs, usually with questionnaires and surveys. Learning measurement tells whether participants have gained new skills and absorbed required knowledge. Measuring application shows providers how well and how often participants are applying desired behaviors back at the work or home site, post-training. Impact measures describes the intended and unintended consequences of participants' applied skills or behaviors upon the workplace, home, or community. Overall, these four measures answer the following questions:
• Did they like it?
• Did they learn it?
• Did they use it?
• What difference did it make?

Finally, the ROI level of evaluation converts defined impact measures to monetary benefits and then compares cost benefits to program costs. ROI is usually expressed as a percentage as follows:

\[
\text{ROI} \% = \frac{\text{Net Program Benefits (Benefits − Costs)}}{\text{Program Costs}} \times 100
\]

For purposes of this project, the evaluation levels above were categorized in terms of immediate (level 1–2 measures), intermediate (level 3–5 measures), and ultimate (sustainability) measures of intended effects or outcomes (per Figure 1).

The ROI process also includes a sixth measure, intangible benefits, which are those measures not converted to monetary value. Intangible benefits may include such areas as increased self-confidence, improved job satisfaction, or increased morale. Each level of evaluation provides important, stand-alone data. Reported together, the five-level ROI framework gives data that tell the complete story of a program’s success or failure. Based upon proven techniques and systematic, scientific methods refined over 20 years, the process provides a step-by-step system for evaluation and planning, data collection, data analysis, and reporting. It has a proven track record of success within a range of health care, community service, organization development, technology or change management contexts. It is also widely used by public and private sector organizations in 52 countries around the world.

**Evaluation Planning**

A successful evaluation strategy includes a plan for defining the who, what, why, when, and how of data collection, data analysis, and reporting. Grant professionals can adapt the following planning elements to assist with any grant measurement effort.

**Scope**

In this case, evaluation planning included working with stakeholders to select an appropriate pilot project for introducing an outcome-based service approach. A mission-critical training initiative, known as OC3, was then chosen as the pilot. This compliance-oriented curriculum focused on regulations from the Uniform Data System (UDS) and was a
priority area for clients who used CHAD’s suite of technical assistance (TA) services. Specifically, the UDS is an annual reporting system used by all federally-funded health centers to report data on utilization, patient demographics, insurance status, managed care, prenatal care and birth outcomes, diagnoses, and financing. UDS assists with program management, policy development, and overall accounting for the programs. The pilot project represented a series of user-group training modules in such areas as: Documentation and Record Retention; Cost-Based Charge Scheduling; Clinical Quality; Performance Review; and Risk Management.

Target Group

Target groups for the pilot project included a range of CHC members, including chief financial officers, directors of finance, office managers, nursing managers, human resource managers, and executive directors. Criteria for selecting pilot project participants included those who:

• could successfully represent multiple service providers and diverse community perspectives within the health center member network;

• had utilized the CHAD’s technical assistance services on at least four occasions within the last 12 months;

• were perceived as active leaders in network task forces, meetings; and events

• were perceived as influential change agents within their respective health centers.

All those invited agreed to participate. Participants were assured that they would receive evaluation results and that individual responses would be part of an aggregate evaluation report to the executive board.

Outcome Mapping

Respective stakeholders and specialists mapped and defined OC3 training objectives across multiple outcome levels such as: overall satisfaction (level 1); learning (level 2); on-the-job application or behavior (level 3); and impact (level 4). With the five-level evaluation framework (Table 1) as a guide, project members developed a data collection plan that spelled out each of these expected outcomes and their success indicators. The plan also communicated what outcome and activity data would be collected; how it would be collected; when it would be collected; and who was responsible for collecting it. This process helped ensure shared ownership for results and provided clear direction to all stakeholders about the schedule, scope and resource requirements of the evaluation project (Heisinger, 2011).
Data Gathering

In this case, data collection methods included administering a quantitative impact questionnaire (adapted from similar evaluation research); facilitating semi-structured, qualitative interview sessions with stakeholders; and review of related historical data.

Data Analysis

The ROI process prescribes specific data analysis procedures, including methods for isolating the effect of the project under review. Data gathered in this step pinpoint the amount of improvement directly related to a project or program, resulting in increased accuracy and credibility of results. The isolation step is essential to data analysis, because many factors (time, money, resource support) will influence outcome data. Most funding sources want to know how much of any reported improvement is actually due to the grant project.

While there are many proven approaches for isolating the effect of a change project or training program (Phillips & Stone, 2002), this case study asked participants to estimate the value of improvement measures connected with the OC3 initiative. The effectiveness of this approach rests on the assumption that participants are credible and capable sources for estimating how their use of learned skills or knowledge effected improvements to their work or work unit. For added credibility, if no improvement data were available from a specific source or person, the assumption was that little or no improvement occurred. Sample questions used to gather participants’ estimates in the post-training, included:

- **What specific actions did you apply based upon what you have learned?**

- **What specific business measures (i.e. cost control, operational performance, quality of service) have been positively influenced by your actions?**

- **Please estimate the monetary benefits of these changes to your agency or work unit over a one month period.**

- **What level of confidence, expressed as a percentage, do you place on the above estimate? (100% = Certainty and 0% = No Confidence)**

- **What other factors, besides participation in the OC3 training, may have contributed to the benefits noted above?**

Evaluation Results

A proven, evidence-based evaluation framework provides a clear roadmap for grant managers to use when outlining desired results to prospective
funders during a grant award application, as well as when reporting success with desired results to actual donors during a program review. The following shows how the evaluation framework, presented here, was used by CHAD to track and report pilot program results.

**Reaction, Planned Action (Level 1)**

All participants reported high satisfaction with the program and its relevance, and 100 percent stated that they would recommend the OC3 training to others. All described planned actions they would take as a result of participation.

**Learning (Level 2)**

Learning results were measured using a five-point scale with 1 being “No Success” and 5 being “Completely Successful.” Key learning gains included enhanced knowledge about how to collect data about agency outcomes; organize data about agency outcomes; focus on data relevant to client outcomes; and access partner networks.

**Application (Level 3)**

Post-training, the most frequently used behaviors, skills, and materials included financial management tools; document control and medical record management tools; human resource materials for performance appraisals; and risk management resources. The most frequently reported barrier to implementing OC3 training knowledge or skills was “lack of time.”

**Impact (Level 4)**

Participants provided impact results by reporting about the consequences of their actions upon specific work measures; perceived cost benefits of applied behaviors upon defined work measures; and intangible benefits of applied knowledge/skills. For example, the impact questionnaire captured this data by asking in Q8: “Please indicate the extent to which utilization of skills, material, or resources gained from participation in the CHAD Training(s) has influenced the following areas of business effectiveness within your department or your workplace.” These areas included:

- Cost control, cost conversions
- Operational performance
- Quality of services
- Customer satisfaction
- Performance management
- Ability to meet program requirements
- Risk management
• Ability to meet grant requirements
• Ability to improve state-wide visibility of the Community Health Centers

The areas of agency effectiveness reported to be significantly to very significantly, influenced by OC3 training participation included risk management; ability to meet grant requirements; customer satisfaction; and ability to meet health center requirements. Cost control and operational performance areas were also said to be positively influenced by participants’ use of new skills on the job.

Isolation and data conversion
As previously stated, participants estimated the direct influence of the OC3 training initiative upon improvement measures and also gave feedback about other contributing factors to improvement. After all influencing factors were determined, improvement data were converted to monetary value and then adjusted to account for both potential error and the effect of other influences. To be conservative, the adjusted values were only totaled for participants who supplied data.

The resulting improvement value most relevant to stakeholders was an estimated “Cost Benefit for Prevention of Non-compliance Incident” of $3,087.96 per incident (i.e., a cost-avoidance benefit directly attributable to training). In other words, participants indicated that applied skills and knowledge from the OC3 training had a direct and positive influence upon their health center’s ability to avoid non-compliance incidents during review periods, thus saving time, labor, and other associated costs related to ineffective grant or audit management.

Level 5. ROI
At the outset of this initiative, stakeholders set ROI targets at a break-even point (which was met and exceeded). Impact measures were of more interest to stakeholders than the final ROI calculation. As stated by the Deputy Director, “We’re not doing this to make a profit, we’re doing this because it’s the right thing to do to serve our members.”

Intangible Benefits
Intangible benefits are those benefits linked directly to a project but not converted to monetary value. In this case, participants and their managers were well-pleased with the following intangible benefits:

• increased knowledge of Health Center operational and business issues
• better understanding of medical records release issues
• increased ability to analyze front desk cash control procedures
improved ability to complete a Health Care Plan with achievable, measurable goals.

Additional areas of intangible benefits included participants’ reports of improved Personal Effectiveness (question 7) in such areas as prioritizing work; analyzing improvement opportunities; and implementing improvement processes to enhance operational performance.

General Summary of Case Study Results
This case study illustrates how an outcome-based framework was used as a continuous improvement tool for measuring the efficiency and effectiveness of federally-funded community partnership and collaboration services across multiple levels of impact. Findings suggest that the project successfully met its impact objectives and that the outcome-based approach could be replicated by the agency for other initiatives. For example, stakeholders noted that significant improvements were made in such areas as service delivery; ability to meet grant requirements; quality of patient satisfaction; and ability to meet health center operational requirements. Stakeholders were particularly impressed with results showing that 100 percent of participants perceived the evaluation pilot to be a good investment. In addition, the collaborative evaluation planning and implementation process did much to enhance member perceptions about the proactivity and responsiveness of CHAD’s partnership and member services.

Conclusions and Implications for Grant Management Practice
Grant projects face increased demands for improved capacity, reduced costs, and credible evidence of results to justify continued investments by funders or donors. Effective utilization of an outcome-based framework can help meet these challenges and cultivate collaborative relationships with funders, who—in a competitive funding climate—are more likely to support those programs or services that provide the most value returned for resources invested. In addition, grant professionals who focus on outcome-based approaches are better able to help organizations avoid lost audit or evaluation costs that result from inefficient grant management or audit preparation.

However, it bears noting that there are common barriers and implications associated with moving from outputs to outcomes including fear of accountability, fear of evaluation and measurement, and fear of consequences about how performance data will be used, among others (Callahan & Kloby, 2009; Preskill & Russ-Eft, 2005). Given these issues, it is best to view the move from outputs to outcomes as a fluid, dynamic change process that must be nurtured and sustained beyond the life cycle of one project or one initiative (Ledford, 2011; Row, 2011).
To that end, outcome-based strategies are most effective when grant managers act as change agents and implement these approaches in incremental, transitional stages of continuous improvement. In closing, building competencies in organizational development is an important part of building an organization’s capacity to seek grants and show its worth through effective evaluation practices (Kusek & Rist, 2004). After all, an outcome-based evaluation process will not be of any long-term value unless it is compatible and well-integrated with the organizational environment where it functions; otherwise, it risks becoming another passing fad or ill-reputed “flavor-of-the-month.”

References


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