Solving the Mystery of Grantwriting: Clues for a Successful Proposal
Jennifer Peters, Executive Director, Texas Association of Partners in Education

The Usual Suspects

- Foundations: nonprofit organization, managed privately through a Board, established to aid charities through grantmaking; must donate 5% min. of assets each year
    - M.O. of a foundation: If you've seen one foundation…

- Corporate Giving: foundations, corporate contributions, employee matching grants, sponsorships, employee involvement
    - M.O. of corporations that give: What can YOU do for THEM

- Public Funding: Local, state, federal. Usually tied to regular grant cycles, very specific funding priorities tied to local, state, or federal rules & regulations, less flexibility for innovation, need time for more rigorous reporting (taxpayer funds)
    - M.O. of public funding: Follow the Rules

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Building Your Case

Critical: What is my library's mission?

What are my library's short-term and long-term goals?	What are my building needs?
What does my community need, specifically?	How much will it cost?
What does my library need, specifically?	When do I need the funds?
What projects am I looking to fund?	What funding do I already have in place?

Avoid:

- Chasing the money
- Mission Drift

Exercise: Take 5 minutes and write down everything you'd like for your library. What are the most critical needs above and beyond your usual day-to-day activities? Hint: "Everything" is not the answer!

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Gathering Evidence

- o Is my library or Friends group eligible to apply?
- o Does my project "fit" with the funder's goals/funding priorities?
- o What is the proposal deadline?
- o Do I understand the funding cycle?
- o Is the amount I'm seeking within the funder's giving range?
- o Am I clear on what parts of my budget the funder funds and what it doesn't fund?
- o Do I understand where to find all the application components?
- o Is there a word or character limit for the proposal?
- o Do I have all required attachments?
- o Did I get a go-ahead from the funder? Did I talk to the funder?

Exercise: Visit some foundation websites and look through the guidelines—Texas State Library and Archives Commission (https://www.tsl.state.tx.us/ld/funding/index.html), Tocker Foundation (http://tocker.org/guidelines-and-applications/), Texas Book Fest (http://www.texasbookfestival.org/Library_Grants.php). Look at the differences and similarities in the information they request.

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Executive Summary/Abstract/LOI

- o Brief introduction of the Project
- o 1 sentence – 1 page
- o Usually first thing read by the reviewers
- o Possibly only thing read by highers-up
- o "Snapshot" of proposal
- o Usually includes amount of ask

Avoid:

- o Cutting and pasting from actual proposal
- o Too much detail

Tip: Write this LAST!

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Organization Description/Mission

- o Boiler-plate who, what, why, when, and how
- o What successful programming have you done in the past?
- o Have you received any awards? Do you have any signification accomplishments? Don't be modest!
- o What are your ties to the community? What partnerships do you have in place?

Avoid:

- o Assuming that the grant reviewer is familiar with your community—they may be in another part of the state!
- o Not tying your organization description/mission to your Project
- o Describing yourself as so pitiful that funder will wonder if you have the capacity to support the Project

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Needs Assessment

- o Describe the **community** problem you are trying to address
- o Use the up-to-date qualitative and quantitative data *that is available* to support your description of the problem
- o Census, surveys, data from local sources, anecdotes, quotes—don't get bogged down in details
- o Other efforts in the community to address this problem (or not)
- o Be able to fully describe your target audience
- o Demographics, numbers, geography
- o Most importantly, why you?

Avoid:

- o Use of the words "many" or "some"
- o Not relating the need to the Project you are proposing
- o Making the issue seem hopeless

Tip:

- o Keep a file, paper or otherwise, when you run across statistics that help you build your case

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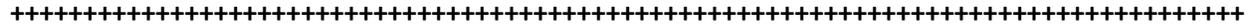
Project Plan

- o   This can be the hardest part!
- o   Describe precisely what you plan to do to address the community issue you have identified, AKA nuts and bolts
- o   Start at the very beginning and describe every activity through to the very end of the Project
- o   Who, what, where, when, why
- o   Describe how you will target and attract the target audience
- o   Be able to describe why you chose this methodology over others
- o   Is this approach is innovative, replicable, or new? How?
- o   Identify planned collaborations

Avoid:

- o   Assuming that the grant reviewers will make connections that aren't explicitly stated
- o   Not tying the plan to the community needs you identified
- o   Squeezing more than one Project into your proposal ("We need this, and, by the way, also that.")

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Project Impact

- o   What do you hope to accomplish? What benefit will this have on your target population?
- o   This is different than the nuts and bolts of the plan—this is what you expect to see as a result of putting the plan in place.
- o   AKA Goals and Objectives
    - o   Goals are broad statements of what you will accomplish. Objectives are operational, specific things that can be measured.
    - o   Be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timelines)

Avoid:

- o   Generalities on numbers served
- o   Losing the specifics in narrative—use bullet points, etc. for clarity
- o   Over-promising results—be realistic!

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Timeline

- o   A different summary of the Project, based on when events will occur
- o   Describe all activities and map out against a monthly timeline
- o   Timeline must cover entire funding period, may include activities pre and post-award
- o   Remember that this is your best guess as to what will happen; most granters understand that this is simply an estimate of how things will occur

Avoid:

- o   "We expect to complete the Project during the period of the grant."
- o   Lack of specificity on description of Project activities, due to the assumption that the reviewer has fully grasped the Project Plan. Don't ever think, "I already covered this; they'll remember this from 2 pages ago."
- o   Not building in enough time to ramp up Project activities, if new

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Staffing

- o   Who will be responsible for the project? Why are they qualified to manage it?
    - o   Include name, full title, qualifications, experience
- o   What piece of staff time will be funded by this proposal?
- o   Will you be hiring new staff for this Project?
- o   What are the job duties of staff persons working on this Project?
- o   What is the time commitment for each staff person on this Project?

Avoid:

- o   Lack of specificity
- o   Assumptions that you've covered this elsewhere

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Budget

- o Ask for what you need
- o Be aware of what can and cannot be funded—ie., double-check those guidelines and ask if you have questions!
- o Total Project Budget vs. Ask
- o Go through entire list of planned activities and list expenses
- o Remember this is a **cost projection**
- o Use a spreadsheet—so you can remember what you've done
- o Be able to justify how you arrived at an estimated cost (AKA "justification")
- o Level of detail required can vary enormously
- o Review funding guidelines on allowable costs, if applicable

Avoid:

- o Inflation of costs; underestimation of costs
- o Putting in expenses that don't seem directly related to the Project

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Project Evaluation

- o How are you going to document whether or not your Project has been successful? How are you going to measure the success of the Project?
- o Management tool, not necessarily scientific review
- o What was the impact of this Project?
- o Derived from Project goals and objectives
- o Build into Plan how you will evaluate *from the beginning*
    - o Outputs (numbers attending Project activities)
    - o Outcomes (Changes in attitude, knowledge, beliefs, etc.)

Sample Outcomes

1. Students gain an understanding of basic navigation and how to locate a web page.
2. Library patrons become aware of the resources available on online databases.
3. Students show increased critical thinking skills.
4. ESOL learners gain ability to read directions and instructions in English.
5. Students demonstrate an appreciation of regional authors.
6. Participants understand the value of voting in local, state and national elections.
7. Program attendees recognize and are sensitive to cultural differences in the clinical setting.
8. Pre-school children recognize that the value of books for learning and for fun.

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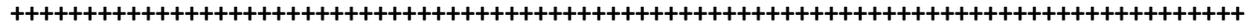
Sustainability

- o   Answers the question: what's going to happen to this Project when these funds go away?
- o   Is the Project viable long-term?
- o   Are you developing other funding streams to support this Project long-term?
- o   If leveraging funding to support a Project cost that exceeds your ask, be prepared to delineate all potential funding sources.
- o   If you plan to integrate into your regular operations, how will you justify this? Why do you need the grant funds then?
- o   Who is supporting this program locally?

Avoid:

- o   "We plan to approach several foundations during the Project year to gain second-year funding." Who? Why? When?
- o   Assuming once funded, always funded.

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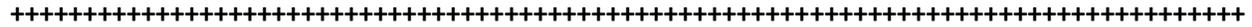
Even More Clues and Tips

- o   Follow instructions precisely
- o   Complete everything they ask for
- o   Include every attachment they ask for
- o   Sell your organization
- o   Use active verbs
- o   Be clear, concise, and stick to word limitations—less is more
- o   Avoid library jargon and acronyms
- o   Mirror the funder's language
- o   Does the proposal hold together from start to finish?
- o   Does it have an internal logic?
- o   Do you need authorization from your governing agency before you submit?
- o   Double and triple-check the final draft for typos, misspellings, incorrect budgets, etc.
- o   Ask a colleague or friend read the final draft
- o   Plan to submit BEFORE the deadline

Other Ways to Gain Experience

- o   Volunteer to review grants in your community or profession
- o   Ask for samples

Additional Resources

- Gerding, Stephanie K., and Pamela H. MacKeller. Grants for Libraries: A How-to-Do-It Manual. New York: Neal-Schuman, 2006.
- Geever, Jane C. Guide to Proposal Writing. The Foundation Center, 2004.
- Foundation Center. http://foundationcenter.org/getstarted/learnabout/proposalwriting.html. Free online guides and tutorials to proposal writing.
- Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education. Grant Writing Resources. http://www.okhighered.org/grant-opps/writing.shtml.

Sample Grants

- http://www.proposalwriter.com/grantsamples.html
- http://grantspace.org/Tools/Sample-Documents
- http://www.npguides.org/guide/sample_proposals.htm