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## An Orientation to Proposal Writing

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### *Chapter Topics*

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### **A Book for the Beginning Grant Writer**

There is nothing more exciting or gratifying than to participate in designing a program, writing a proposal that gets funded, and, ultimately, seeing that program come to life in the community! This book is written to help you, the beginning grant writer, understand the basics of grant writing and develop the necessary skills to write an acceptable, and hopefully successful, grant application. We avoid the use of technical jargon as much as possible and provide a step-by-step process to help you write a proposal for a nonprofit organization (including schools) seeking public funding through governmental or private funders. (For those of you writing research proposals, we recommend: *The Nuts and Bolts of Grant Writing* by Cynthia E. Carr [2015] and *Writing Successful Grant Proposals* by Robert J. Sternberg [2014].)

Grant writing is often the primary means by which a nonprofit funds its programs and services. Whether you are a person in a club or association, an employee in an agency asked to step up and write a grant, or a student taking a grant writing course, you will be challenged to enter into an open-minded, critical thinking process that will lead to a completed proposal. In this process you will be asked to

- identify and state issues clearly and succinctly,
- understand and apply research findings to program design,
- design effective program evaluation to measure the impact of the program,
- create and justify a budget for the project, and
- fit this within a predetermined number of pages and format.

Once you have learned how to write a state or federal proposal as outlined in this book you will be able to tackle just about any proposal that comes your way. Plus, you will find that these skills will help make you a more desirable employee in the nonprofit sector or lead to a career as a freelance grant writer taking on projects for a variety of agencies. (For more information on a career in grant writing, you might want to consult with national organizations including the Association of Fundraising Professionals [AFP], the Grant Writers' Association, the Grant Professionals Association, or the American Grant Writers' Association. These associations help establish professional ethics and resources for grant writers, provide training and certification, and, in some cases, help individuals find quality jobs.) In all, there are many things you can do with these skills, and, we believe they are well worth learning.

We begin this journey with background information on the history of philanthropy and on nonprofit agencies, and then move directly into the business of writing grant applications and identifying funding for your program.

### **A Brief History of Giving and Philanthropy**

The Latin word *philanthropy* is defined roughly as “love for mankind” (Dictionary.com, 2012). If you are working in the nonprofit sector, you are probably already aware that “love for mankind” can take many forms. Today, U.S. political orientations are on a continuum. One perspective encourages individuals to “pull themselves up by their own bootstraps” while the other seeks to provide a “hand up.” Throughout U.S. history you

will see the flow of giving surge and retreat based on the political party in power and their beliefs.

The history of giving in the United States has its roots in 16th-century Elizabethan Poor Laws of England that “were administered through parish overseers, who provided relief for the aged, sick, and infant poor, as well as work for the able-bodied in workhouses” (“Poor Law,” 2012). Under the Poor Laws, persons who were needy through no fault of their own—such as the elderly, the sick, widows with children, and orphans—were cared for, while those who were needy but viewed to have caused their need, or perceived as being able to address their need without assistance, were fairly ignored. The ignored population included older children/young adults, pregnant single mothers, and criminals.

The Puritans followed the Elizabethan Poor Law model in caring for needy members in the community and took up collections in the parishes to meet those needs. Throughout much of U.S. history, benevolent associations were created as a kind of community-based insurance plan where individuals joined the association and paid dues that were used to help a family with illness or the costs of burial. These associations were established along the lines of ethnicity, employment, or religious affiliation.

The first grants made by the U.S. government were land grants providing the opportunity for citizens to obtain property upon which to build a home and put down roots. Bounty Land Warrants were provided to soldiers in the Revolutionary War in lieu of financial compensation. The Morrill Act of 1862 provided 30,000 acres of land for each congressional district that resulted in the creation of 69 colleges such as Cornell University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

The late 1800s and early 1900s marked a period of explosive growth in strategies to meet community needs. In 1889, Jane Addams founded Hull House, a settlement house that accepted needy men, women, and children, and provided a range of services on site and advocacy for improved schools and services. Jane Addams and Hull House mark the beginning of social work as a profession in the United States. The following quote illustrates the struggle that even well-established nonprofit agencies can have in obtaining consistent funding. In 2012, Hull House is forced to close:

Jane Addams Hull House Association will be out of business Friday, leaving employees and clients scrambling to fill a void the 122-year-old organization will leave. Despite announcing last week plans to close in March, board Chairman Stephen Saunders said Wednesday that the organization will fold this

week because it can no longer afford to stay open. He also said Hull House plans to file Friday for bankruptcy. (Thayer, 2012)

In the early 1900s, the first foundations came into being: The Carnegie Foundation was founded in 1905 to promote education and is the foundation that developed and manages grants for higher education known as Pell Grants. Shortly thereafter, in response to a desire to do something good with his money, John D. Rockefeller, Sr., established the Rockefeller Foundation in 1913 with a mission to promote the well-being of humanity around the world. Just as these foundations were created out of the wealth of individuals, so it is today with individual, family, and corporate foundations created to give back to the community per the desire and specifications of the creator.

In 1913, the United States government began collecting income taxes and grants were made by the federal government to address critical needs and disasters. The country was well into the Great Depression in 1933 under Republican President Herbert Hoover. Hoover believed that the depression would eventually be resolved through legislation that supported businesses and, ultimately, when business was good, employees would receive the benefit in increased wages (this is called “trickle-down” economics). In March 1933, a Democratic president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) was elected to office. FDR believed that the country needed more direct governmental intervention directed to the individual to end the Depression. Through two terms in office, he created a New Deal with numerous programs including the Social Security Administration (SSA), the Works Progress Administration (WPA), the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, the Securities and Exchange Commission, and the National Labor Relations Board. These social programs provided jobs for the unemployed, put food on the family table, and spurred the development of a robust infrastructure of roads, bridges, dams, and other public works.

The next burst of social programs came in the 1960s under Democratic President Lyndon B. Johnson’s “Great Society” when there was a flurry of social programs, including those to address racial injustice and the “War on Poverty.” The most recent surge in social programs was the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) signed by President Barack Obama to provide financial stimulus to the states hit hardest by the Great Recession. ARRA’s primary purpose is to support social programs and to create jobs with \$831 billion committed between 2009 and 2019.

As you can see, particular social issues come in and out of style and face reductions or increases in funding based on the politics of the day. There is true variability in the world of giving. The types of programs

funded by Congress are subject to realignment and changes in the focus of politics.

## Differences Between Grants and Contracts

In order to make some initial terms clear, the process of writing a proposal for funding has come to be known as *grant writing* and the individual(s) responsible for the writing of the proposal is a *grant writer*. The entity providing the money is called the *funder*. While it is commonly said that one writes a proposal to obtain a *grant*, it may be that the end result is actually a *contract*. Be that as it may, we will continue to follow the generally accepted convention and continue to use the word *grant* freely throughout this book.

Contracts for services, or *fee-for-service contracts* as they are often called, require the agency to provide services on behalf of a funder and the agency is reimbursed for services delivered. For example, a community dental clinic has successfully won a contract with the county to provide dental care to low-income children. The multi-page document (the contract) signed by the agency and the county will spell out the details of the services to be delivered. In this example, the contract states that the clinic is contracted to provide 100 units of amalgam filling at \$30 per unit, 10 units of crown at \$400 per unit, and 100 units of cleaning at \$40 per unit. The clinic bills the county in arrears (after the delivery of services) of service provided. If the clinic does not need five of the 10 units of crowns in the contract, they will most likely need to make a modification of the contract or risk losing this amount from the contract. In general, a contract requires a great deal of management to insure that all services are delivered appropriately, services are billed and reimbursed appropriately, and timely changes are made to the contract to insure full use of the funds. (More on this topic in Chapter 10 under Other Budgeting Issues.)

On the other hand, we could imagine that this same clinic has also received a grant from the CSM Foundation, a corporate funder in the community. The terms of the corporate grant are that the agency will provide dental care to 100 low-income children. The grant does not quantify the type of care the children will receive, just that the funds will be used to serve 100 children. The agency will often receive the full amount of the grant at the beginning of the fiscal year and will report its progress to the foundation making sure to note the number of low-income children served.

It is generally true that grants are more flexible in terms of what they will fund and require less detailed accounting of services than contracts. For

example, a federal funder such as the Department of Health Services will not reimburse a luncheon for clients, while a private foundation like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation might easily approve the request to celebrate a milestone in the program and request a brief report on the luncheon event.

The process of seeking funding for the nonprofit agency opens the door to a rich and fascinating funding world that may include tapping into the altruistic drives of individual donors, following the vagaries of politics to understand and tap into governmental funding, and seeking to develop partnerships to access the wealth and influence of private foundations. The proposal carries the expression of community need to the funder, and, if successful, results in a contract for services, a grant-in-aid, or, simply, a grant.

## Request for Proposals (RFP)

There are grants and contracts available to fund educational, environmental, cultural, psychological, health and social programs, and services. Funding that comes through the government is known as *public* funding while funding that comes through a foundation or corporation is known as *private* funding. Public funds are available through federal, state, county, and city governments. Private funding is available through foundations that are created to raise and distribute funds called *community foundations* or those created by corporations to distribute some of their profits into the community, or simply those created by individuals to distribute their wealth through a family foundation.

In most cases, the funder announces that they have funds available to give by issuing a Request for Proposals (RFP). In some instances, you may see a Request for Applications (RFA), a Notice of Funding Announcements (NOFA), a Request for Quotes (RFQ), or other variations on that theme. The funder will often announce the availability of funds on their website, in newsletters, and through the mail. The RFP provides information as to the

- type of funding that is available,
- the target population,
- topics to be addressed and desired outcomes,
- eligibility to apply for the funding,
- the amount of funding allocated,
- the source of funding and funder's goals,
- the format of the submitted proposal (spacing, typeface, and font, etc.),
- a listing of all documents that should be attached in an appendix,
- a description of the review process and scoring procedure,

- the due date for receipt of the proposal, and
- links to any forms needed to prepare the proposal.

The first thing you should do with an RFP is *read it carefully*. Take time to make certain that the organization is eligible to apply for the funds, that the target population in the RFP matches the target population you want to serve, and that the timeline is acceptable and doable. Get out your highlighter and mark the important information. The grant writer is responsible to know the details of the RFP down to the nitty-gritty of font size and spacing. Read and reread this document. (If you have not seen an RFP we recommend that you look online at Grants.gov or go to a specific federal agency to view a complete RFP package.)

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