The Art of Successful Grant Writing

or

How do I get them to pay for my project?

POGO 750-D01 (3 credit hours)

Summer 2019

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Schar School of Policy and Government
George Mason University

Course Information
Meets: Tuesdays and Thursdays, May 21-July 11, 4:30pm-7:10pm
Founders Hall 481, Arlington Campus (Note – Founders Hall will soon become Van Metre Hall)

Office Hours and Contact Information
Office Hours: T, Th 1-3pm plus 30 minutes before/after class on days of class meetings
Office: 513 Founders Hall
Email: jwilde2@gmu.edu
Phone: O: 703 993-3973; C: 703 565-2989

I will try to be in my office during the above times on days of class meetings. I strongly encourage you to make an appointment ahead of time to assure that I will be in my office. Also, if my door is open, please feel free to drop in anytime. I am easily available by email or phone.

Communication
You must have a functioning GMU email account in order to receive class notifications, correspondence, and to submit homework assignments. I typically respond to emails and phone messages within 24 hours.

Course Description
This is a practical, skills-based course that will provide students with the ability to work with a range of resources to identify sources of potential funding, develop proposal narratives, prepare budgets, and other essential aspects of writing proposals for funding. There are no prerequisite(s) for the course.

Course Objectives
1. To work with fbo.gov; grants.gov; and private funding databases
2. To read and understand the requirements of requests for proposals/funding announcements
3. To develop proposal narratives and budgets

Course Requirements/Evaluation
• Class attendance and participation 20%: Attendance at ALL class sessions is strongly recommended. Class participation takes into account a student’s presence in class and contributions to the course dialogue, including:
  o earnest discussion and demonstrated knowledge of assigned readings;
  o application of course concepts to relevant current events or the work circumstances and experience of individual students; and
  o courteous, professional, and respectful dialogue with other students.
• Homework exercises (25%)
• Final Project (55%, divided 25% for written work and 30% for the oral presentation)
The grades will be based on my professional judgment of the quality of your work. I take everything into consideration from substance to style. All written work is expected to be of the highest quality, including but not limited to being both grammatically correct and containing carefully considered analyses. Elements of central importance to sound analysis include accurate information, adequate depth and breadth, and relevance and clarity of the concepts considered. Elements of central importance to presentations include the above plus poise, delivery, dress, and visuals. For group exercises, all members of the group will receive the same grade. However, I reserve the right to assign an individual grade to any member of the group who does not participate, is disruptive, or otherwise impairs the group’s ability to function effectively.

All assignments should be sent to me electronically as Word documents prior to the beginning of the class in which they are due. No work will be accepted after that time unless prior arrangements have been made.

Note: Written work **must be double-spaced with 12-point type (Times or Times New Roman font) and 1-inch margins all around.** Assignments must not exceed the page limit or word limit specified. Any information beyond the limit will not be read and may affect your grade for the assignment. If you are providing hard-copy of an assignment, and it is more than one page long, do not use both sides of a single sheet of paper; multi-paged papers must be stapled in the upper left-hand corner—no binders or paper-clips.

**Citations & References**
You are responsible for knowing how to properly cite referenced material. To be on the safe side, if you use more than five consecutive words of another author or speaker, put them in quotation marks and cite them. If you are citing five lines or more from another’s work, those lines should be single-spaced and indented, with correct citation.

There are two major style guides used in the social sciences—*The Chicago Manual of Style* and the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. Both are available in print editions as well as on-line. A very useful resource is the Son of Citation Machine at [http://citationmachine.net/](http://citationmachine.net/).

**Disability Accommodations**
If you have a learning or physical difference that may affect your academic work, you will need to furnish appropriate documentation to the Office of Disability Services. If you qualify for accommodation, the ODS staff will give you a form detailing appropriate accommodations for your instructor. In addition to providing your professors with the appropriate form, please take the initiative to discuss accommodation with them at the beginning of the semester and as needed during the term. Because of the range of learning differences, faculty members need to learn from you the most effective ways to assist you. If you have contacted the Office of Disability Services and are waiting to hear from a counselor, please tell me. The Disability Resource Center (DRC) can be reached at 993-2474. Additional information can be obtained at [http://ods.gmu.edu](http://ods.gmu.edu). *All academic accommodations must be arranged through the DRC.*

**Policy on Electronic Devices**
Cell phones, pagers, and other communicative devices are not to be used during this class. Please keep them stowed away and out of sight. Laptops or tablets (e.g., iPads) are encouraged for the purpose of taking notes and following the URLs we use during class. Engaging in activities not related to the course (e.g., gaming, email, chat) will result in a deduction in your participation grade. Please be respectful of your peers and your instructor(s) and do not engage in activities that are unrelated to class.
Required Readings
There are no required texts for this course. Students are encouraged to consider purchasing *The Foundation Center's Guide to Proposal Writing* (6th Edition) by Jane C. Geever. It is available as a Kindle Edition for $9.99 or as a hardcover for approximately $40. There does not appear to be a Nook Books edition. There will be additional reading assignments, typically in the form of requests for proposals, grant submission guidelines, and/or proposal writing guides.

Class Schedule, Topics and Assignments
Prior to the first class, students are expected to have downloaded and read the course syllabus. **There is a reading assignment for the first week**, as listed below (see “Assignments”). All reading assignments/homework assignments/projects must be completed for the day listed (e.g., the Week 1 reading assignment is due at our first class meeting). All students are expected to bring a laptop or tablet, with Wi-Fi capability, to every class.

**Week 1: May 21**  
**Overview and Identifying Sources of Funding**  
Review of reading assignment. Understanding/using the Catalog of Federal Domestics Assistance, Grants.gov, Federal Business Opportunities, the Foundation Center, and other sources that identify potential funding opportunities.

**May 23**  
**Exploring Grant Opportunities**  
Be sure to bring a laptop or tablet. We will be looking at the sources that were identified in first class.

**Week 2: May 28**  
**Reading and Understanding Funding Announcements**  
How to read announcements for funding from the federal government, including but not limited to grants, cooperative agreements, and contracts; state and local agencies; foundations; and non-governmental organizations.

**May 30**  
**Elements of a Proposal: The Project (Technical Proposals), Part 1**  
Typical elements of a proposal, specifically those for federal grants and contracts as well as foundations and other non-governmental organizations.

**Week 3: June 4**  
**Elements of a Proposal: The Project (Technical Proposals), Part 2**  
A continuation and completion of topics from the previous class.

**June 6**  
**Elements of a Proposal: Budgets (Business Proposals)**  
How to prepare various types of budgets and other business elements of a proposal, including forms, assurances, and other requirements.

**Week 4: June 11**  
**Exploring Your Proposal, Part 1**  
A lab session during which each team will work on their project.

**June 13**  
**Elements of a Proposal: Tricks of the Trade**  
How to give your proposal a competitive advantage. Topics will include aesthetics, readability, packaging, etc.

**Week 5: June 18**  
**Exploring Your Proposal, Part 2**  
A lab session during which you will work on your proposal.
June 20  **Evaluating Proposals and the Politics of Proposals**  
How various agencies/organizations evaluate proposals. What to do if your proposal is not funded.

**Week 6: June 25**  **Exploring Your Proposal, Part 3**  
A lab session during which you will work on your presentation.

**June 27**  **Creating an Effective Presentation and In-Class Discussion**  
Key elements for creating a presentation that is visually appealing, provides enough information, and will help you with your project. An in-class discussion and Q&A regarding your project.

**Week 7: July 2**  **Guest Lecture, TBD**  
What else do you need to know about preparing an application for funding? This session will be based on what you’d like to hear about.

**July 4**  **Holiday – No class**

**Week 8: July 9**  **Finalizing your Presentation**  
Final Q&A for the semester, plus time to work on and finalize the presentation for Thursday OR, depending on the size of the class, we may have 1 presentation in this class.

**July 11**  **Final Project Presentations**  
The final class will involve team projects and is designed to demonstrate competence in either developing a proposal outline or evaluating a proposal.

**Assignments**

As a skills-based professional development course, there will not be traditional academic assignments. However, there will be both in-class and out-of-class assignments that will be designed to demonstrate competence in the basic skills necessary to identify funding opportunities and organize a proposal. To the extent possible, each assignment will be customized to meet the interests of individual students; that is, you will be able to take any assignment and do it in a way that most benefits you and your anticipated career path. *Assignments are due on the date listed.*

May 21  Read the article by Daniel, West, Daniel, & Flowers (2006) that is appended to this syllabus; be prepared to discuss.

May 28  Using at least two of the sources identified in Week 1 (from the list provided at that time) identify 2 grants and 2 contracts (either currently open or open within the last 2 years) that you would be interested in writing for. **Submit:** the URL for each opportunity you’ve chosen, and, in no more than 50 words each, why you are interested in this topic. **Bring to class:** one full copy of each of these funding opportunities. *You should begin thinking about what you might be interested in writing for – whether it is an opportunity you identified, or one someone else identified.*

May 30  Review each of your selected grant/contract opportunities. Are all 4 viable for you/your organization (do you meet the requirements described in the
announcement?)? Based on your understanding of the requirements within the announcement, determine the 1 opportunity for which you are most interested/best qualified to write. Submit: the URL and name of the one you have chosen and no more than 100 words on why this is the best for you. We will be selecting teams of 3-4 individuals during this class period. Each team will work together to create a written proposal, and then will present that proposal during the last class.

June 6

Develop a list of the key elements for the technical proposal your team has chosen to write – this should be based on the requirements described within the RFP (this should be the same for everyone on your team); identify who is primarily responsible for each of these elements; each person will list 4-5 bullet points of information for the element(s) for which s/he is responsible. Submit: One assignment for the entire team.

June 13

Submit: a template for the budget you would create for your project. Do not include dollar amounts, just the categories your proposal would require.

June 18 (not required)

If you want me to review your draft project, submit by this date.

June 27

Submit: each team will submit its full written proposal, following the rules and guidelines of the funding agency – just as if you were really submitting this for funding. (Note: if your funding agency is a foundation, I will work with you on what to submit as many foundations require very little detail.)

July 9

Submit: One team member - a 2 page summary of the proposal to me and classmates. Each team member - team member contribution forms.

July 11

Presentations: these will be in random order. Dress as you would if this were an actual funding opportunity. Prepare: a presentation with each team member presenting some portion of the information, use slides (Powerpoint or any similar software with which you are familiar). Focus: once I have reviewed your written proposals, I will provide each team with information on the focus area(s) of their presentation. Be sure to treat this as though it were a professional presentation. More information will come during the semester. Submit: Critiques of other teams’ presentations.

Academic Integrity

The integrity of the University community is affected by the individual choices made by each of us. GMU has an Honor Code with clear guidelines regarding academic integrity. Three fundamental and rather simple principles to follow at all times are that: (1) all work submitted be your own; (2) when using the work or ideas of others, including fellow students, give full credit through accurate citations; and (3) if you are uncertain about the ground rules on a particular assignment, ask for clarification. No grade is important enough to justify academic misconduct. Plagiarism means using the exact words, opinions, or factual information from another person without giving the person credit. Writers give credit through accepted documentation styles, such as parenthetical citation, footnotes, or endnotes. Paraphrased material must also be cited, using MLA or APA format. A simple listing of books or articles is not sufficient. Plagiarism is the equivalent of intellectual robbery and cannot be tolerated in the academic setting. If you have any doubts about what constitutes plagiarism, please see me.
As in many classes, one of projects in this class will be completed within a group. With collaborative work, names of all the participants should appear on the work. Collaborative projects may be divided up so that individual group members complete portions of the whole, provided that group members take sufficient steps to ensure that the pieces conceptually fit together in the end product. Other assignments will be undertaken independently. In the latter case, you may discuss your ideas with others and conference with peers on drafts of the work; however, it is not appropriate to give your paper to someone else to revise. You are responsible for making certain that there is no question that the work you hand in is your own. If only your name appears on an assignment, your professor has the right to expect that you have done the work yourself, fully and independently.

University Honor Code
Mason shares in the tradition of an honor system that has existed in Virginia since 1842. The code is an integral part of university life. On the application for admission, students sign a statement agreeing to conform to and uphold the Honor Code. Students are responsible, therefore, for understanding the code’s provisions. In the spirit of the code, a student’s word is a declaration of good faith acceptable as truth in all academic matters. Cheating and attempted cheating, plagiarism, lying, and stealing of academic work and related materials constitute Honor Code violations. To maintain an academic community according to these standards, students and faculty members must report all alleged violations to the Honor Committee. Any student who has knowledge of, but does not report, a violation may be accused of lying under the Honor Code. (See http://oai.gmu.edu for more information)

The complete Honor Code is as follows.
To promote a stronger sense of mutual responsibility, respect, trust, and fairness among all members of the George Mason University community and with the desire for greater academic and personal achievement, we, the student members of the university community, have set forth this honor code: Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work.

Below are some definitions of Cheating. However, please know that the definitions are also interpreted by the professor(s), meaning that this list is not exhaustive.

- Using or possessing any unauthorized material/assistance in any academic work
- Submitting a paper submitted for another class
- Using cell phones, calculators, notes during an exam
- Obtaining help or information from a friend/classmate without permission
- Accessing sources/information during an on-line exam/quiz
- Giving help or information/work to a friend/classmate
- Having someone use your iClicker
- Signing-in for another classmate or friend
- Purchasing or attempting to purchase an essay/assignment/code/answers
- Using your previous course work and/or old exams
- Sharing work even after the semester is over

Below are some definitions of Plagiarism. However, please know that the definitions are also interpreted by the professor(s), meaning that this list is not exhaustive.

- Cutting and pasting from other sources
- Improper and/or lack of proper citations
- Using someone’s ideas, thoughts and/or words without citing
• Using poor paraphrasing
• Submitting someone else’s work as your own
• Copying word for word without citing
• Submitting the wrong document

Below are some definitions of **Lying**. However, please know that the definitions are also interpreted by the professor(s), meaning that this list is not exhaustive.
• Making up sources, data, information and etc.
• Giving a false excuse for missing class or a test
• Telling a professor or TA false information
• Impersonating someone else

Below are some definitions of **Stealing**. However, please know that the definitions are also interpreted by the professor(s), meaning that this list is not exhaustive.
• Removing an exam from the classroom
• Taking pictures of the exam and/or academic work
• Taking someone’s work without their knowledge

**Statement on Plagiarism**
The profession of scholarship and the intellectual life of a university as well as the field of public policy inquiry depend fundamentally on a foundation of trust. Thus any act of plagiarism strikes at the heart of the meaning of the university. It constitutes a serious breach of professional ethics and is unacceptable.

Plagiarism is the use of another’s words or ideas presented as one’s own. It includes, among other things, the use of specific words, ideas, or frameworks that are the product of another’s work. Honesty and thoroughness in citing sources is essential to professional accountability and personal responsibility. Appropriate citation is necessary so that arguments, evidence, and claims can be critically examined.

Plagiarism is wrong because of the injustice it does to the person whose ideas are stolen. But it is also wrong because it constitutes lying to one’s professional colleagues. From a prudential perspective, it is shortsighted, self-defeating, and can ruin a professional career.

The faculty takes plagiarism seriously and has adopted a zero tolerance policy. Any plagiarized assignment will receive an automatic grade of “F.” This may lead to failure for the course, resulting in dismissal from the University. This dismissal will be noted on the student’s transcript. For foreign students who are on a university-sponsored visa (e.g. F-1, J-1 or J-2), dismissal also results in the revocation of their visa.

To help enforce the policy on plagiarism, all written work submitted in partial fulfillment of course or degree requirements must be available in electronic form so that it can be compared with electronic databases, as well as submitted to commercial services to which the School subscribes. Faculty may at any time submit student’s work without prior permission from the student. Individual instructors may require that written work be submitted in electronic as well as printed form.

This policy on plagiarism is supplementary to the George Mason University Honor Code; it is not intended to replace it or substitute for it.
Grant Writing as a Funding Source and Collaborative Endeavor

Bonnie V. Daniel, Joan K. West, George E. Daniel, Patty Flowers

Grant writing provides not only financial rewards but also insights into the living mission of an institution, and points toward collaborative opportunities within and among various units across a campus. In the future, more and more grant funded programs will be a necessary part of our work in student affairs. This manuscript offers basic tools for understanding best practices of grant writing and the principles that should guide student affairs personnel in grant writing endeavors.

Financial constraints throughout academe create heightened attention on external sources of funds. While typically associated with faculty and research, grant writing represents a substantive way in which student affairs personnel can demonstrate their abilities as educators. In terms of professional development, student affairs staff members can benefit from collaboration in writing grants, managing the grants, and in conducting research associated with the project. Their insights to the cocurricular lives of students are a salient perspective that other segments of a campus can benefit from as the dialogue unfolds regarding a grant proposal.

The nature of requests for proposals (RFPs) has changed in ways that encourage student affairs to participate actively. For example, many agencies now approach programmatic project ideas from a collaborative viewpoint of the campus, as opposed to non-collaborative, isolated projects. In addition, the evaluation and research components now required in many RFPs necessitate a perspective on the students’ holistic experiences, rather than data such as grade point average or retention rates. The agencies are equally concerned with questions of “how” and “why,” as they are with questions of “what” and “how much.” Even if student affairs professionals do not take the lead on a grant project, their collaboration with other campus components will become more vital to ensure that co-curricular concerns are addressed. Currently, a dearth of literature exists regarding the involvement of student affairs professionals involved in grant writing endeavors.

Guiding Principles

Begin with an Idea

To receive funding, a proposal must demonstrate fit between the institutional strategic plan, the goals of the sponsor, and the objectives of the project. The

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strongest proposals demonstrate a rigorous alignment with guidelines of the sponsor. Even an idea with a great deal of merit and research will not be funded if the program goals do not align with those of the sponsor. A writing team should critically examine sponsors that possibly align with a project idea and institution. Many sponsors will post past awardees, including institution, name of project, and contact information.

Identify Sponsors

Funding sources for grants include federal (e.g., U.S. Department of Education at www.ed.gov) and state agencies (e.g., State Department of Human Services), private foundations (e.g., John and Catherine T. McArthur Foundation at www.macfdn.org, Coca-Cola® at www2.coca-cola.com/foundation), and professional organizations (e.g., SACSA at www.sacsa.org). Campuses may also be members of national search agencies that will research sponsors for a particular idea or niche. When the proposal is ready to be submitted, the team may choose to submit it to one agency or to more than one. If the proposal is accepted by more than one agency, the campus must choose one and decline the other.

Write with a Team

Once a project has been generally defined and possible sponsors have been identified, a writing team should be established that is representative of the project stakeholders. The team leader may be pre-determined or designated by the group. For an effective writing team, the project requires personnel familiar with the institutions or departments involved and who also have authority to commit resources on behalf of their units. Once the team is assembled, the members must read through the RFP carefully to identify the requisite components of the proposal. RFP guidelines may include operational definitions and will range from specifics such as font and page length to required partners and eligible/ineligible activities.

At this stage of the process, it is imperative that communication foster collaboration throughout the organizational flowchart to ensure all parties involved are accountable and informed. The team itself should include effective writers who are able to write according to the parameters outlined in the RFP and who can complete the assignments parceled to them in a timely manner. The leader facilitates the writing process by maintaining focus on the requirements of the RFP. A list of generally accepted standards for effective grant writing would include the following:

1. Develop a thorough outline before writing that includes each section (in order) that is specified in the RFP.
2. Include as much information as possible in the first draft to ensure completeness.
3. Write with language that engages the readers’ interest.
4. Employ the same language that is contained in the sponsor’s RFP. Explain any technical terms. As much as possible, write in active voice.

5. Make it very obvious early in the proposal that your project matches the interest of the funding agency. Staffs of both government and private funding sources say that the lack of a clear fit with their priorities is the single most common reason for rejecting applications.

6. Answer essential questions regarding what the project will accomplish, how, and what evidence will demonstrate that the goals have been accomplished.

7. Follow a logical and linear presentation of the project idea. Organize goals, objectives, activities, and outcomes so that each activity has a measurable outcome and is linked to a specific objective that is linked to a specific goal. A good proposal will have only one or two overarching goals.

8. Present an evaluation design that generates the data needed to show that the project has been successful. The evaluation is essential to both the budget and the timeline. Weak evaluation sections also provide the basis for many rejected proposals.

9. Pay close attention to instructions. Things such as page limitations, font size, margins, spacing, submission methods, deadlines, numbers of copies, limitations on numbers of or pages of appendices, etc. are very important. Failure to follow formatting directions can result in a proposal being rejected before it is even read. (Corporation for Public Broadcasting, 2005; Hall & Howlett, 2003; National Endowment for the Humanities, 2005; National Science Foundation, 2005; U.S. Department of Education, 2005).

Campus Resources

On campuses with an Office of Sponsored Programs/Research, appropriate personnel may assist in both pre- and post-award activities such as identifying funding sources, providing technical assistance, assembling a writing team, and facilitating grant management. On campuses without such an office, the basic functions of grant seeking may be folded into another office such as Development, Business Affairs, or Institutional Effectiveness or Research.

On many campuses the Office of Institutional Effectiveness/Research, or one serving a similar function, collects data that may be relevant to a justification statement or other areas where intended impact is discussed. Many RFPs require a needs assessment for the proposed project that necessitates quantitative data. The data required may be longitudinal institutional, demographic (i.e., state and federal census data), economic, community, or educational (i.e., K-12).

Other Resources

Increasingly, sponsors require that applicants include partners to increase the impact of the project. Some RFPs stipulate that a partner must be external to the
campus (e.g., community agency, local school system), while others require or permit cross-disciplinary collaborations. For example, a campus proposes to institute a new model for responding to alcohol abuse by female students, and the RFP requires internal and/or external partners. The student affairs personnel might partner with faculty in counseling, health and human performance, sociology, or members of the counseling center staff, the women’s center, student health center, and/or members of the local law enforcement agencies. Once resources are identified, the team is ready to write.

**Write the Proposal**

All grant proposals basically follow a similar format, regardless of sponsor. The components may be entitled differently, but typically they consist of a summary, abstract, table of contents, introduction of the organization, the problem statement or needs assessment, goals/objectives, management plan, evaluation plan, and budget and budget narrative. Sponsors provide a grant writing guide that is useful for writing teams to review (e.g., http://philanthropy.com; www.cdpublications.com; http://www.fipse.aed.org; http://www.fdncenter.org/marketplace). The RFP provides the outline the writing team must follow.

Writing a proposal should begin with the end in mind. Once the core issue or problem has been identified, the writing team should develop the budget. Because the RFP specifies how funds may and may not be spent, determining how money will be allocated leads the team to focus on objectives, timeline, personnel, and evaluation. The budget should provide sufficient detail to communicate effective planning, ethical and appropriate use of funds, and allocation of resources. The budget allocation provides foundation for determining program goals and objectives aligned with the RFP’s eligible and ineligible activities.

An RFP establishes the priorities from which goals are derived. Usually, goals of a sponsor are specific. Project objectives must support sponsor goals. Writing effective objectives ensures communication of what the project will do, by when, by whom, and to what extent. In other words, the objectives must follow the acronym SMART: sensible, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-bound. Table 1 provides an example of how two campus proposals would address some of the sponsor goals.

Grant writing can be a time-consuming process that spans an entire year, or it can occur within a week. Different sponsors allow various intervals between the posting of RFPs to the due date for proposals. To meet guidelines, writing teams must factor time to collect all necessary data, letters of support, and other pieces of documentation specified by the RFP and the processes unique to campus administrative offices.
Table 1

Example of Aligning Agency Goals with Campus Goals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Campus A Goals</th>
<th>Match</th>
<th>Campus B Goals</th>
<th>Match</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Will fund innovative projects that addresses alcohol abuse by college students.</td>
<td>Replicate the same educational approach to alcohol abuse used by three schools across the state.</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Design a new program targeted to reduce alcohol abuse by college women.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program must demonstrate anticipated impact.</td>
<td>Data provided includes impact of similar program implemented at other campuses.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>While the program will be new, proposal includes logical presentation of data from campus, as well as research on similar projects.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Develop Evaluation Plan

The evaluation plan of an RFP necessitates that the program demonstrate whether it has met the program goals and objectives and whether or not the program has been effective. While the specifics of what each sponsor may require for evaluation differ, a careful examination shows some common threads. Most sponsors require an evaluation plan that, at a minimum, evaluates and modifies methods over the course of the program (i.e., formative evaluation), and states criteria for success (i.e., summative evaluation).

The following steps offer a template to follow in designing an effective evaluation plan:

1. What to evaluate.
   - Determine the main purpose(s) of and the audience for the evaluation.
   - Identify what questions to ask.
   - Set performance targets, if appropriate.
   - Decide from whom evaluation data must be collected and make sure you have access to them and their information.

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2. What information is needed and how to collect it.
   - Identify the specific information needed to answer the evaluation questions of the different audiences.
   - Select general methodological approaches.
   - Clarify from which populations and sources the information will be gathered.
   - Select data collection techniques and determine what clearances and permissions will be needed.
   - Establish data collection timelines.

3. How to analyze and report the data.
   - Select appropriate methodologies for analysis and synthesis.
   - Determine what reports to produce for which audiences and decision makers.
   - Determine what reports to provide to funding source and when.
   - Lay out data analysis and reporting timelines.

4. What resources are needed?
   - Determine who will play what roles in performing the evaluation.
   - Identify how much evaluation activities will cost and include this amount in the appropriate places in the proposal budget.
   - Identify external evaluator, if applicable.

Increasingly, sponsors require a research component in the evaluation plan. The writing team may be required to submit a literature review, hypothesis(es), and overview of research design. In reviewing the literature, the writing team should carefully explain the current state of knowledge regarding the topic. The literature review should lead the reader in understanding why the proposal is unique, important, significant, and worth supporting.

In developing a research design, the writing team must again refer to the RFP to ensure that the design complies with the parameters of the sponsor. Some evaluation requirements may require qualitative and quantitative data collection, while some leave that decision to the applicant. Others ask for documentation that the campus has some experience in conducting the type of research being proposed by the project.

With the increasing demands for accountability at all levels, sponsors are looking more critically at the quality of evaluation plans in applications; however, the best reason for doing a careful job of planning evaluation during the proposal stage is that the evaluation is a critical part of competent management. It provides the roadmap to the destination. The proposal writing team may elect to utilize a checklist like the one developed by Hall and Howlett (2003) for judging the adequacy of their evaluation plan.

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Some grants, in their evaluation component, include data collection utilizing human subjects (e.g., students or parents). If this is the case, the writing team members must receive authorization from the campus Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research, prior to collecting these data. This process insures that high ethical standards are followed in collecting data from human subjects. Likewise, the sponsors require this authorization as part of the negotiation for the funding and may require a docket number be included as a part of the grant application. Sponsors have the prerogative to send auditors to campus and investigate whether or not compliance has been followed.

Align Proposed Expenditures to Program Objectives

Developing a budget for a grant necessitates a careful review of the RFP to discern what costs are allowed by the sponsor, and what expectations the sponsor has concerning matching resources (e.g., funds or facilities) from the institution or third parties. The grant writing team must insure that the budget they develop follows campus fiscal policies and procedures. The Office of Sponsored Research and Office of Business Affairs can assist grant writers in developing appropriate budgets. In addition to the actual budget figures, the grant must also include a budget narrative that explains all proposed expenditures.

Submitting a Grant Proposal

The grant writing team does not have the authority to submit a grant proposal to a sponsor on behalf of their institution. Before a grant proposal leaves campus, it must have the signature of the authorized official who can commit the campus to contracts. Individual campus policies may also require signatures from the Offices of Sponsored Programs and Business Affairs. There are a number of grant application forms that must accompany the grant proposal itself (e.g., the Application cover page, Assurances, and a required budget form). Communication throughout the organization flowchart during the writing process expedites this critical component of the submission process.

In the past, proposals were submitted in hard copy to the sponsors. The RFP would specify the number of copies required and the method(s) of delivery. Increasingly, sponsors require electronic submission of proposals. While team members may regard this as a simplification of the process, time must be factored in to allow for delays caused by server activity on due date (the campus’ as well as the sponsor’s). Additionally, sponsors vary in their electronic submission formats. Many formats require the division of the proposal into sections and have file size limitations.

Post-award Issues

Despite the merit of the idea and the hard work of the writing team, not all proposals are funded. If the proposal is rejected, the team may or may not receive reviewer comments. Although most sponsors automatically send reviewers’ comments along with the notice of declination, others allow teams to request this
feedback. Private foundations seldom provide this information. The reviewers' comments can be helpful in determining how the proposal might be reworked and resubmitted in the next cycle or to another sponsor.

If a proposal is funded, a sponsor may negotiate the budget. As a result, in developing a budget, the writing team must consider those elements that are critical to the success of the program objectives and those which enhance the program, but could be reduced or eliminated if necessary. As part of the budget negotiation process, the institution has the prerogative to negotiate a reduction in the scope of work should the agency reduce the requested budget amount.

Although a grant contract is awarded to the institution, the project director and personnel are expected to manage the grant through both the campus’s policies, and the sponsor’s guidelines. The management is best facilitated if the grant writing team did a comprehensive and thorough job in communication, developing the budget, developing the management and timeline, and the evaluation component.

Benefits of Grant Writing

**Professional development**

Numerous benefits result from grant writing. Not only do grants typically produce financial incentives, but they also provide rich opportunities for professional development in the way of research and presentations. The research associated with writing a proposal (e.g., literature review, needs assessment) introduces student affairs professionals to current trends, innovative programs, and alternative solutions to common problems. The results of the evaluation component provide data and findings that advance the field or prompt areas meritorious of further research.

**Collaboration**

The process of grant writing is typically collaborative and requires that participants write with staff within their unit or across several units. Writing grants brings together representatives from the campus community to address common problems or issues and provides a clearer vision of the mission and goals of the individual departments and units within the institution itself. These shared experiences also foster interpersonal relationships that are vital to campus communication between people and offices. This collaboration highlights the interconnectedness that exists among campus entities (e.g., athletics, alumni and development, faculty, and student affairs) and enables student affairs staff to apply a problem-based approach to finding creative solutions.

**Strategic planning**

While planning is a routine component of student affairs work, grant writing creates possibilities to interface with other campus units to achieve campus goals more effectively. RFPs typically require the writing team to focus on institutional
strengths and weaknesses to define the need for the project, describe the outcomes of the project, and understand the anticipated impact on the campus. For example, if a team wrote a proposal addressing the “Strengthening Institutions Program” (U.S. Department of Education, Title III), the members determine strengths and weaknesses of three, specified areas of the campus: fiscal stability, academic programs, and institutional management. Identifying the weaknesses assists in articulating the problems that are associated with each of those three areas. From the problems, the team can then develop the project goals and objectives, which should support the institution’s strategic plan. The scope of this particular program necessitates comprehensive communication across and between campus divisions. Projects of this magnitude typically require one to two years to write with consistent communication from the writing team with key administrative leaders, numerous meetings and re-writes, and a profound commitment to the strengthening of the institution by all parties.

Conclusion

The following websites provide additional examples of how projects might affect various departments within student affairs and other campus divisions: (a) Funding for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education Grant Database at http://www.fipse.aed.org/index.cfm, or (b) Office of Postsecondary Education TRIO programs at http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/trio/index.html. The range of projects highlights how grants can provide the impetus for significant change in campus culture.

With increasing costs of higher education and pressures to do more with less, grant writing represents an investment of time and effort that provides more than financial reward for student affairs personnel. Grant writing offers avenues for professional development, fosters campus-wide collaboration, enhances strategic planning efforts, and positions student affairs professionals in a non-traditional role within the learning community.

References


