Editors’ Note

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the 2021 edition of the *Journal of the Grant Professionals Association*. As the GPA’s primary research publication, the *Journal* serves as an outlet for studious examination of the profession, evaluation of best practices, and discussions for ways to grow and enhance the grants field. The *Journal* is devoted to the ongoing improvement of both grant professionals and the grants profession.

This year’s *Journal* includes four articles that reflect the diversity of work that grant professionals undertake on a daily basis and address topics ranging from capital campaign planning to the ethics of linguistic choices. We thank and appreciate the authors for their time, effort, and thoughtfulness in developing scholarly manuscripts that bring new research and insights to the forefront of our professional community.

As with recent editions, this year’s *Journal* also includes GPA *Strategy Papers* published in 2021. *Strategy Papers* stimulate discussion and innovative thinking about a single topic that enhances the knowledge, skills, and understanding of grant professionals in all stages of their careers. *Strategy Papers* are shorter than full-length *Journal* articles and offer practical, actionable solutions to current and emerging challenges that today’s grant professionals often encounter. Like *Journal* articles, *Strategy Papers* undergo a double-blind peer-review process.

For the 2022 *Journal* and *Strategy Papers*, we invite you to offer your valuable knowledge and experiences to these publications, either as an author or a peer reviewer. We seek articles that address new ideas in our field, contribute research-based analysis on a given topic, provide a case study or best practices, or examine any of the GPCI competencies and skills. We also seek peer reviewers to evaluate manuscripts submitted to these publications. Please contact us at journal@grantprofessionals.org if you are interested.

We would like to thank the authors, editorial board, and peer review managers for contributing extensive time and effort to this year’s *Journal*. We also deeply appreciate the time and effort of the peer reviewers in providing valuable insights for *Journal* articles and *Strategy Papers* alike; while anonymous, the peer review team members are critical to ensuring the strong professional caliber of GPA’s publications.

We welcome your comments on this edition of the *Journal*, and look forward to receiving your suggestions and article ideas for future issues.

Sean M. Kirby
Editor

Karen Norris
Associate Editor
About the *Journal of the Grant Professionals Association*

The *Journal of the Grant Professionals Association* 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. Papers submitted to the *Journal* are peer-reviewed by top professionals from around the country.

Proposals for articles may be submitted at any time to the *Journal*'s Editorial Board via email to journal@grantprofessionals.org. Proposals must be no more than 300 words and follow the guidelines published on the GPA website (www.grantprofessionals.org/journal). Both proposals and full articles must be submitted as email attachments in Microsoft Word format. Each full article must contain a short biography of each author (100 words) and an abstract (150 words). References, punctuation, grammar usage, and paragraph formatting must follow the *APA Style Manual for Publication* (6th Edition). Submissions are peer-reviewed anonymously. Once selected for publication, editors will work with authors to address reviewer comments and other necessary revisions. The Editorial Board reserves the right to delay or withhold publication of any article submitted.

All submissions accepted for publication (except reprints of articles) will remain the copyrighted property of the GPA. Written permission must be obtained from GPA to reprint any published article. Please email journal@grantprofessionals.org with any questions. Submission requirements, annual cut-off dates, and other information are posted on the GPA website.

Articles in this publication represent the opinions and views of the author(s) only.
Editorial Board

Sean M. Kirby  
*Editor and Co-Chair, Publications Committee*  
Grant Specialist  
Robert J. Miller and Associates  
Tonawanda, NY

Karen Norris  
*Associate Editor*  
Principal and Subject Matter Expert  
Kanoco Consulting  
Washington, DC

Johna Rodgers, GPC  
*Board Liaison*  
Principal Consultant  
Johna Rodgers Consulting, LLC  
Bowling Green, KY

Joan L. Whitman, PhD  
*Co-Chair, Publications Committee*  
Director of Grant Research and Evaluation  
Grant Associates LLC  
Brookfield, WI

Peer Review Team

Paris K. Wilson, MPA  
*Peer Review Manager*  
Compliance Manager  
Chicago International Charter School  
Chicago, IL

Associates

Liz DiSalvo  
*Staff Liaison*  
Marketing & Communications Manager  
Grant Professionals Association  
Overland Park, KS

Carole Katz  
*Copy Editor/Graphic Designer*  
Oxford, OH

Oswaldo “Ozzie” Perez  
*Acquisitions Manager*  
Coordinator, Grants and Funding  
Orange County Department of Education  
Costa Mesa, CA
GPA Mission

The Grant Professionals Association (GPA) is a nonprofit 501(c)(6) membership association. The mission of GPA is empowering grant professionals and those they serve through:

- **Advocacy**—Advocating for members, the grants profession, and those they serve
- **Community**—Creating powerful communities and connections
- **Professionalism**—Fostering excellence in professional practice

GPA does not discriminate in its provision of services due to race, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, ethnic group identification, sex, age, sexual orientation, and/or condition of physical or mental disability in accordance with all requirements of Federal and State Laws.
Validated Competencies and Skills
Grant Professionals Certification Institute (GPCI)

Below are the GPCI professional competencies and skills covered in the Journal. For more detail on each competency, please visit the GPCI website (www.grantcredential.org).

**GPCI Competency 01:** Knowledge of how to research, identify, and match funding resources to meet specific needs

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

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

**GPCI Competency 04:** Knowledge of how to craft, construct, and submit an effective grant application

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

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

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

**GPCI Competency 08:** Knowledge of methods and strategies that cultivate and maintain relationships between fund-seeking and recipient organizations and funders

**GPCI Competency 09:** Ability to write a convincing case for funding
Table of Contents

Journal of the Grant Professionals Association
Volume 19, Number 1

A Primer on the Role of Grants in Capital Campaigns
Deborah Steinkopf, MSW, MA ................................................................. 1

BIGGER than Burnout: Strategies for Winning the Silent Battle
Trish Bachman, GPC, Pat Duboise, GPC, Bethany Planton, GPC, and Johna Rodgers, GPC ................................................................. 15

Grants as the Bedrock: How Strong Grants Leadership Impacts the Nonprofit as a Whole
Laura Chynoweth, MA, CFRE and Katy Shoemaker, GPC .................. 26

Ethical Grant Language from a Historical Perspective
Melody Hernandez, Dana Patterson and Rhonda Poppen, GPC .......... 38

GPA Strategy Papers, Volume 8

Issue 1
Best in Show: Merit Awards as Part of a Grant Strategy
Maureen Stabile, GPC ........................................................................ 50

Issue 2
An Anthropological Approach to a Grant Professional’s Toolkit
Erica M. Dziedzic, PhD ...................................................................... 57

Issue 3
Strategic Pivot to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: Crafting a Competitive Grant Application
Brittany Alexander, GPC .................................................................. 64

Issue 4
A Call For Strengthened Self-Governance Among Consultants
Fielding Jezreel, MSW, GPC ................................................................. 69

Issue 5
How Geography Shapes the Grantmaking Landscape
Liz Kinne, GPC .................................................................................... 75
A Primer on the Role of Grants in Capital Campaigns

Deborah Steinkopf, MSW, MA
Steinkopf Strategies LLC, Portland, OR

GPCI Competency 01: Knowledge of how to research, identify, and match funding resources to meet specific needs

GPCI Competency 08: Knowledge of methods and strategies that cultivate and maintain relationships between fund-seeking and recipient organizations and funders

Abstract

A capital campaign is a significant undertaking for any nonprofit organization. Capital campaigns require thoughtful planning and dedication of organizational resources. They can also raise significant sums of money, bring in new supporters, increase organizational visibility and reputation, and build capacity and momentum for annual giving. There are several key factors to consider when incorporating a grant strategy as part of any capital campaign. This article provides an overview of campaign planning and then explores the role of foundation grants in capital campaigns and how to 1) determine the best grant strategy for a capital project; 2) determine which phase in a campaign should incorporate grantseeking; 3) identify and qualify capital grant prospects; 4) create a communications strategy to engage program officers early in the process; and 5) use the Case statement in grantseeking.

Introduction

A capital campaign is a focused effort to raise funding for a capital project within a determined time period. Most capital campaigns support larger projects, like construction of a new building, expansion of an existing building, or new land acquisitions. Large capital projects are
commonly associated with institutions in the health and higher education sectors, but many nonprofits, large and small, undertake capital projects. A capital campaign is a significant undertaking for any nonprofit. Capital campaigns require thoughtful planning and allocation of organizational resources. The resources required for a successful campaign—dedicated staff, robust donor database, volunteer talent, engaged and motivated board, and a significant commitment of time from the organization’s executive—can be challenging for small and mid-sized organizations to marshal. At the same time, capital campaigns are often transformational for an organization. Capital campaigns can raise significant sums of money, bring in new supporters, forge new partnerships, strengthen organizational culture, increase organizational visibility and reputation, and build capacity and momentum for annual giving.

Grant revenue can be an important source of support for a capital campaign and can be strategically leveraged as challenge and matching grants. For organizations considering a capital campaign, it is important to address the potential role of grant revenue during the planning process.

Launching a Campaign

Capital campaigns are significant undertakings for any organization and require careful planning. To determine an organization’s readiness to launch a campaign, it is important to assess specific capacities:

• Leadership commitment and a shared vision among board and key staff.

• Adequate staff with the skill sets to help with campaign planning, coordinate campaign activities, support campaign chair(s) and volunteers, analyze and segment the donor list and manage the donor database, coordinate donor cultivation and stewardship activities, and research grant prospects and prepare grant requests.

• Extent of need for consulting support to ensure campaign success. Some organizations try to run campaigns on their own, especially if they have ample staff capacity and significant volunteer talent. Some do a hybrid approach and bring in consultants to do the feasibility study. Some retain a consultant as campaign counsel for the entire process.

• Organized donor data and adequate technology systems to capture donor data, track donor contacts, and support effective stewardship.

• Gift acceptance policies that spell out what kinds of gifts the organization will and will not accept.
Important activities during the pre-campaign planning period include:

- Assessing organizational readiness;
- Identifying a campaign team;
- Ballparking a working goal for the campaign;
- Identifying prospects for lead gifts;
- Building the gift chart and determining the role of grants in reaching the campaign goal;
- Drafting the case statement, which is a public-facing document that helps convince donor prospects to support the campaign; and
- Engaging top prospects, including grant funders.

The pre-campaign planning period often includes a feasibility study that helps determine if the organization can meet the identified campaign goal by testing the plan and interviewing top donors. Organizations often bring on a capital campaign consultant to conduct the feasibility study. In many cases, the consultant serves as campaign counsel through the campaign planning and execution phases. Not only will a feasibility study help an organization determine a realistic campaign goal, it helps determine organizational readiness to take on the campaign and provides important data for building the gift chart. The gift chart provides the framework for identifying the number of gifts, at different gift levels—including grants—that are needed for a successful campaign. The gift chart is an essential campaign tool because it provides clarity about the campaign goal and can help determine how the organization will be successful in achieving it (Kihlstedt, 2016).

A feasibility study can also reveal who will take on leadership roles during the campaign. Completing the feasibility study may also help position the organization for success with capital grants since it will increase grant funders’ confidence in the project plan. It demonstrates that the organization has invested the time and resources to develop an achievable goal and understands the importance of stakeholder engagement in the plan’s success.

Smaller organizations with limited cash reserves may find the cost of retaining a capital campaign consultant to conduct the feasibility study prohibitive. This is actually a unique opportunity to approach a grant funder for a technical assistance grant to fund the cost of the study. Grant funders that explicitly do not make capital grants may be open to awarding a one-time technical assistance grant for the feasibility study and/or to pay for the costs of campaign counsel.
Phases of a Capital Campaign

Since a capital campaign can often span at least a couple of years, it is crucial to establish a general framework for how it will occur. This will ensure that all nonprofit team members are on the same page. Figure 1 lays out the four standard phases of a capital campaign.

Planning Phase

The feasibility study is usually followed by intensive campaign planning, which often includes identifying campaign chairs, forming a campaign committee, determining staff and consultant roles, refining the case statement, completing the gift chart (including grant projections), and designing a communications plan to get the ball rolling. During this planning period, organizations confirm the campaign goal, develop a project budget, and establish a timeline for campaign activities, starting with the Quiet Phase. For building projects, renderings of the new or renovated building may be procured from contract architects at this time. These renderings can be included in the case statement and presentations about the project. Renderings can also be included in capital grant requests. Since capital campaigns rely heavily on major gift donors, prospect screening is also often done during this time.

Quiet Phase

The Quiet Phase of a capital campaign is the period of time during which lead and major donors are approached to raise 50–70% of the campaign goal. The Quiet Phase of the campaign involves training key staff and volunteers to solicit gifts from the organization’s board of directors, lead donors, and donors who have been qualified as top prospects. Qualifying donor prospects is another activity that campaign counsel can assist with and usually involves analyzing and segmenting the organization’s donor list and using a wealth screening service to identify gift potential. Many grant funders require at least half of the campaign goal be met before submitting a grant application, making it unlikely that an organization will be submitting grant requests during the Quiet Phase. However, this time can be used for outreach and communications with grant funders about the project plan.

Public Phase

Once 50–70% or more of the project budget goal has been committed and the organization is confident in the plan to secure the remaining funds needed, it is time to plan the kick-off for the Public Phase of the campaign.
During the Public Phase, lead gifts and major gifts are announced and celebrated and a broader swath of supporters are invited to join the effort and help the organization reach its goal, including grant funders.

Follow-Up

Once the campaign goal is achieved and the capital project is completed, it’s important for an organization to include all supporters in celebrating the project’s success. This includes recognition displays, announcements, and final reports. Grant funders should be featured in all of these communications and any celebratory events.

The Role of Grants in Capital Campaigns

After the feasibility study has been completed and an organization begins campaign planning, it is important to keep a few things in mind when incorporating grant revenue into the gift chart. There are no industry standards or formulas for determining how much can be raised for a capital project from grant revenue because it depends on multiple factors. Most importantly, the nature of the capital project will determine whether certain funders will consider it. For example, a capital project to build a homeless shelter may be of interest to funders wanting to see fewer people sleeping outside. Similarly, a capital campaign to build affordable housing units may be of interest to funders who want to prevent homelessness. These same funders may not be interested in a capital project to add a wing to an art museum.

Table 1. Sample Gift Chart (goal of $3.5M)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># of Gifts</th>
<th>Gift level ($)</th>
<th>Total amount at this level ($)</th>
<th>Cumulative amount ($)</th>
<th>% of total goal</th>
<th>Prospect multiplier</th>
<th># Prospects needed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,000,000</td>
<td>1,000,000</td>
<td>1,000,000</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>x1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>500,000</td>
<td>500,000</td>
<td>1,500,000</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>x2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>250,000</td>
<td>500,000</td>
<td>2,000,000</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>x2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>100,000</td>
<td>500,000</td>
<td>2,500,000</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>x3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>350,000</td>
<td>2,850,000</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>x3</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>25,000</td>
<td>300,000</td>
<td>3,150,000</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>x3</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>100,000</td>
<td>3,250,000</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>x3</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>62,500</td>
<td>3,312,500</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>x3</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>35,000</td>
<td>3,347,500</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>x3</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many</td>
<td>&lt;1,000</td>
<td>152,500</td>
<td>3,500,000</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>many</td>
<td>many</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some capital projects are designed to build organizational capacity or increase operating efficiency, for example a new administrative office space. Capital projects that do not have a direct mission impact may be more challenging to attract grant support. When researching capital grant prospects, it is important to keep in mind what the funder’s grantmaking interests and priorities are, as well as their capacity and history in making capital grants.

Another important factor to consider when determining the grant strategy for a capital project is the relationship history with a particular grant funder. An applicant is significantly more likely to secure a capital grant from a foundation if there is a history of funding from that source for programming and delivery of mission. There may be exceptions to this, of course. For projects that will benefit a priority population—say people experiencing homelessness—the capital project may be a great way to introduce the organization’s work to a new funder who cares about this issue.

Keep in mind, many grant funders do not support capital projects. Developing a realistic list of capital grant prospects requires thorough research and vetting. This work can ideally happen during the Planning and Quiet Phases of the campaign, so the capital grants calendar is prepared in advance. If a funder indicates, either through their published guidelines or through conversations as part of outreach efforts, that they do not support capital projects, a good strategy is to inform them about operating and programmatic costs associated with the project (and ideally, built into the project budget and case statement), which they may be interested in supporting. For example, a funder may not be interested in the bricks and mortar costs of building a new science wing for a school, but they may be interested in supporting the costs of buying technology and lab equipment or science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) program supplies.

It takes substantially more time and effort to secure a capital grant than the process for securing a large gift from an individual. The effort, of course, depends on the specific application requirements of the funder. As in the case with program and operating grants, a capital grant request may be a one or two-step process and the decision-making timeline may be longer than the case with individual donor asks. Capital grant requests also differ from major donor asks with regard to the due diligence activities the grant funder undertakes to evaluate the merits of the request. For capital requests, grant funders may require more detailed project budgets and timelines than what is provided in the case statement. Therefore, staffing the grant strategy for a capital project will necessarily look different than staffing the donor cultivation strategy since an experienced grant writer may be necessary to satisfactorily meet the requirements of a grant application.

Grant funders also require more financial data as part of their due diligence, including multi-year financial data to evaluate an organization’s
financial position, and use any assessment about an organization’s financial vulnerability (e.g. debt burden, liabilities and assets) as part of their decision-making criteria. Some grant funders may request a pro forma budget forecast two or more years out from the anticipated date of project completion, which demonstrates the expected longer-term financial impacts of the project. This will require engaging finance managers/directors to serve on the internal team that develops budget projections to be used in grant applications as well as other campaign materials.

As noted previously, grant funders that support capital projects typically want to see 50% or more of the campaign’s budget committed before they will consider a grant application. Some grant funders require less, but grants generally are not the source for lead gifts. As such, most foundation grants are solicited and awarded during the end of the Quiet Phase of a campaign or during the Public Phase. These grant commitments can be counted toward the total campaign goal, but may be paid out over a multi-year period, depending upon the preference of the funder. The payout schedule needs to be factored into the cash flow needs for the project.

**Capital Grants as Leverage**

Grants can be a great source of revenue for closing the gap in meeting the campaign goal. Grants can also serve as an inspiration to other grant funders and individual donors (as well as an endorsement). Grant funds can be used strategically to build momentum and credibility and incentivize individual giving through challenge grants. Identifying a potential funder to approach regarding a challenge grant takes prospect research, careful planning to set a realistic goal, and a commitment to communicating with the funder regarding campaign progress during the challenge grant period.

If the capital project is heavily funded by government sources, for instance building an emergency shelter or affordable housing units, these public funders may require that the recipient organization match their funding with private grant funding and/or fundraising revenue. The opportunity to make a matching grant can be a significant motivator for a grant funder who’s invested in the organization’s work and interested in seeing the capital project get completed. As in the case with challenge grants, the grant funder is motivated by how the applicant can leverage their investment.

**A Word About Family Foundations**

Family foundations are an important vehicle for highly motivated donors to make larger gifts to the causes and charitable organizations they care about. Family foundations are the most common type of private foundation, and they present unique challenges to prospect researchers.
and grant seekers. Family foundations may or may not have published grantmaking guidelines and may or may not have formal grantmaking processes. Many do not. In fact, most family foundations do not accept unsolicited requests for support. To complicate matters, many family foundations do not have websites and are not included in searchable foundation databases. This makes it challenging to research a family foundation’s history in making capital grants. Regional foundation directories can be helpful here, such as the Oregon Foundation Databook published by C&D Publishing. Chances are the strategy for seeking support from a family foundation will be similar to approaching a major donor, which is based on relationship building and cultivation. Often, the case statement and project budget are the only materials a family foundation will require to consider a capital request.

**Successful Capital Grant Strategy**

**Start With Who You Know**

Grant support of capital projects is most likely to come from funders who have a history with the organization. A good place to start is looking at current and recent grant funders and adding them to a list of capital grant prospects to research more in-depth and qualify as a capital prospect. If the capital project involves building capacity to better serve priority populations, such as building affordable housing units for low income households, then it stands a better chance of receiving support from first-time funders. These funders can then be added to the prospect list.

The next step is researching the grantmaking history of each foundation on the capital grant prospect list. There are a variety of free and subscription-based foundation prospect research tools available. Members of Grant Professionals Association have access to GrantStation as a member benefit, which is a useful prospect research tool. The search function allows the researcher to narrow the search criteria to focus on funders that make capital grants in specific focus and geographic areas. For example, a recent search for grantmakers that support social service organizations in Oregon yielded a list of 136 prospective funders. When indicating “homelessness” under the social services category, the list of prospective funders was narrowed to 51. When adding “capital/building grants” to the search criteria, the list was narrowed further to 19 prospects. In any prospect research endeavor, the more specific your criteria, the more curated the prospect list.

Reviewing the websites of funders identified from these search engines provides more information about their grantmaking interest areas. Reviewing their 990s provides additional detail regarding grant levels and types of projects that they fund. For those foundations without public information, which is the case for most family foundations,
researching 990s provides invaluable information about a foundation’s interest and capacity in making larger grants. However, 990s may or may not list the larger grant as specifically supporting a capital project. Still, it is important to know what a grant prospect’s capacity is for a larger grant and their history of making those larger grants before adding them to the capital grant prospect list.

**Qualifying the Prospect**

An important aspect of building the gift chart for a capital campaign is “qualifying” the donor as a gift prospect. This involves vetting a prospect list using wealth screening or similar tools and determining each prospective donor’s capacity to give. During the qualifying process, it is also important to find out the prospective donor’s philanthropic interests and relationship history with the organization. This is generally followed up with outreach to begin a conversation and gauge a prospect’s interest in the campaign. Qualifying donors are then put in the donor cultivation portfolio.

The process for qualifying a grant prospect looks different. After funders have been researched and added to the list of grant prospects for the capital project, it is advisable to reach out to a program officer to inform the foundation about the project and the organization’s interest in being considered for a capital grant. The program officer can provide important information about how receptive the trustees will be to the request and what the best timing for the ask should be, based on their current grant review docket and expected grant payouts for the year. These conversations can yield important information and help the organization determine the best use of its paid and volunteer talent, as well as add projected grant funders and amounts to the gift chart. These conversations are also critical relationship-building tools since capital projects are complex and may require recalibration if fundraising goals are not met or if the project start date is delayed. The better the relationship with the grant funder from the outset, the better these difficult conversations will go.

**Timing**

The timing of grant requests for capital campaigns can be challenging. Foundation funders are very rarely a source of lead gifts for a capital project. As a general rule, foundations will award grants for a capital project only after 50% of funds have been secured or committed. Some foundations want to see a specific amount of funds committed—as low as 30% or as high as 70%—before they will consider a capital request from an applicant. Still others require grant seekers to break ground on the project before they will consider a grant request.

In addition to meeting the threshold for committed funds for the project, another important factor to keep in mind when considering
submitting a capital grant request is the funder’s timeline for review. Generally, grant funders take three to six months to review a grant request, especially if they have a two-step application process that starts with a Letter of Intent (LOI). The process for some funders can take as long as nine months. If the capital project needs the funds sooner to meet the timeline for breaking ground or for securing matching funds for government sources, this timeline may be a barrier.

**Building the Capital Grants Calendar**

Once a grant funder is qualified as a capital grant prospect, they can be added to the organization’s annual grants calendar or grants management tool. Some organizations opt to create a separate capital grants calendar to be able to track deadlines and awards separately and provide up-to-date reports to the campaign committee. Once the capital grants calendar is established, the development of grant materials will have to be assigned to an experienced grant professional who can translate the case statement and project budget to meet the specific requirements of each grant application.

**Communication & Cultivation**

Capital projects are complex with lots of moving parts. It is important to start communicating with funders and prospective funders early in the process. Phone calls, email updates, and in-person meetings all serve to inform program officers about the vision and plans for the project, engage them in important conversations about how their foundation can help, and provide important updates as the campaign unfolds. Early communication will help guide decisions about the best time to submit a grant proposal for the project and the right ask amount. Ongoing communication helps build momentum and demonstrates the organization’s commitment to accountability and transparency.

**Role of the Case Statement**

The case statement is an important document for donor cultivation in capital campaigns. The case outlines what the goals and objectives of the campaign are, and most importantly, the expected impact. A good case statement also has the ability to inspire donors to give. If the case statement is a good one, it includes impact statements that have been tested during the feasibility study, when major donor prospects were asked to give feedback about the goals and intended impact of the campaign. The case statement should include a project budget that summarizes where the organization expects to raise the needed funds and how much is needed to complete the project. The case statement is also a very useful tool for developing capital grant requests. Often, the grantwriter can lift language directly from the case statement for use in the grant application, which will typically require additional details on
project goals, activities, timelines, and measurable outcomes. Funders may also want to see a more detailed line item project budget, and in some cases, a pro forma budget to assess the longer-term impact of the project.

Other Things To Consider

Opportunity Costs
It is important to be prepared for the potential impact of winning capital grants on the organization’s annual goals for program and operating grant revenue. Capital grant awards can be significantly larger than program or operating grants. A nonprofit may find that a funder who typically made an annual $25,000–$50,000 program or operating grant to the organization is open to considering a $250,000 request (or higher) for the capital project. In outreach and communications with the funder, it is important to ask whether the capital grant will supersede the annual program or operating grant or if the funder will consider making a capital grant in addition to their regular annual grant. Gathering this information in advance of submitting a grant request will be critical in meeting the organization’s annual grant revenue goals for program and operations in addition to raising the funds needed for the capital project. An invested grant funder will likely consider both requests, but if the grantseeker does not communicate and clarify expectations in advance, the organization may not be prepared for the impact on the operating budget if it prioritizes capital grant requests over project and operating requests. Additionally, the grantseeker will need clarification regarding what the application process looks like, i.e., submitting separate applications for each request or combining the application as a request for both capital and program support.

Hidden Costs
The Nonprofit Finance Fund recommends that organizations evaluate the implications of one-time capital expenditures and ongoing operating and capital revenue needs necessary to sustain the program in the new or reconstructed space (Portalatin, 2018). For example, operating programs out of a newly purchased building might require additional staff to manage growing enrollment in the program. Along with expanded programs in a new space, an organization will need to consider non-persennel expenses such as program supplies, a new phone system, technology upgrades, etc. These additional and ongoing expenses can be addressed in the grant strategy for the campaign, but need to be identified and planned for in advance. These budget line items may be fundable by a grant funder that will not pay for bricks and mortar expenses.
Contingency Planning

One last detail to keep in mind is the possibility of unforeseen consequences or liabilities if the organization is unable to meet its capital campaign goals. Large capital projects present unique challenges and risks. Organizations that are new to capital projects sometimes fail to accurately assess the risks. For example, failure to adequately build in contingency costs to the project budget may cause delays in completing the project, or worse, cause the organization to abandon the project altogether. These scenarios can undermine a funder's confidence in the organization's ability to manage complex projects. Failure to build in contingency costs can also impact the long-term financial health of the organization, which can undermine funder confidence.

Communication Efforts

Ongoing engagement of funding partners is key for capital projects, especially when adjustments are necessary to the project scope or timeline. This communication looks different than communication with major donors who support the project. Private foundations differ from other donors in that their core business is evaluating organizations and projects and distributing grants (Allen, 2019). As a general rule, grant funders are accustomed to conducting due diligence when reviewing any grant request and monitoring progress on anticipated grant outcomes. Capital projects are no different, but the stakes may be higher. Grant funders may expect, and in some cases require, more detailed and timely information about the progress of a capital campaign, including in-depth financial reporting, and how an organization is mitigating challenges and/or changes to the original project scope and timeline. An organization that incorporates grants into its capital campaign strategy has to be prepared to meet these reporting requirements.

Be Prepared to Explain the Effects on the Organization’s Bottom Line

During a capital campaign cycle, which can extend over multiple fiscal years, nonprofits can show a year or two of what look like large surpluses because capital is raised upfront and can be mistakenly commingled with regular revenues. The Federal Accounting Standards Board does not require a separation of revenue and capital in audited financial statements (Portalatin, 2018). A grant applicant needs to be prepared to explain what portions of its operating surplus are restricted capital gifts.

Naming Opportunities

Capital campaigns often offer naming opportunities to donors at a certain level. It is recommended that the organization's board review and approve a policy about what kind of names the organization wants to solicit and what gift levels come with a naming opportunity. The
eligibility of grant funders for a naming opportunity should be spelled out in the policy. Foundations are not necessarily more motivated to support a capital project because of a naming opportunity. However, if an applicant organization plans to offer a naming opportunity to a grant funder, it is important to think about how this advances their grantmaking priorities. For example, a funder that invests in STEM initiatives may be more interested in a naming opportunity associated with a new school building's science lab than, say, the auditorium.

Conclusion
Capital campaigns are a significant undertaking for any nonprofit organization, and require thorough planning. Not all capital campaigns may be of interest to grant funders. However, if an organization has a strong history of procuring and managing grants, and the capital project advances the philanthropic mission of one or more grant funders, a grant strategy should be included in campaign planning. When an organization incorporates grant prospects in the gift chart, it is important to ensure adequate staffing for the grants development and management process, which looks different than the process for cultivating major donors to support a capital campaign. If executed effectively, the capital campaign can deepen the partnership with a grant funder(s) as well as build an organization's mission, impact, and reputation.

References


Biographical Information
Deborah Steinkopf, MSW, MA is a nonprofit consultant currently living and practicing in Portland, OR. Ms. Steinkopf has 30+ years of experience as a nonprofit professional, primarily in human services. She has worked for organizations providing HIV/AIDS care,
domestic violence services, emergency shelter, homeless outreach, housing assistance, public health education, older adult care, and immigrant services. Ms. Steinkopf has been an Executive Director, Deputy Director, Director of Development and Communications, and a consultant. Her consulting practice includes executive coaching, grant strategy, fund development planning, board training, organizational assessments, and stakeholder engagement projects. Ms. Steinkopf has provided consulting support to 30 nonprofits in Oregon since 2016. In the last three years, she supported eight capital campaigns and has secured over $6 million in capital grants for a Portland high school that is exclusively organized to serve youth from under-resourced communities. As a collaborative partner, Ms. Steinkopf helps build organizational capacity, scale programs, assemble effective staff teams, and secure public and private funds to support the work. She is a member of GPA, Nonprofit Association of Oregon, and Willamette Valley Professionals Association, and occasionally is a guest lecturer on government funding for Portland State University’s Certificate in Fundraising Program. She can be reached at deborah@steinkopfstrategies.com.
BIGGER than Burnout: Strategies for Winning the Silent Battle

Trish Bachman, GPC
The Write Stuff Delaware, Lewes, DE

Pat Duboise, GPC
Mercy Care Foundation, Atlanta, GA

Bethany Planton, GPC
bmpconsulting, Louisville, KY

Johna Rodgers, GPC
Johna Rodgers Consulting, LLC, Bowling Green, KY

GPCI Competency 01: Knowledge of how to research, identify, and match funding resources to meet specific needs

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

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

Abstract

A landmark study conducted in 2019 demonstrated that burnout is prevalent in the grants profession. However, given that fewer than 50% of the survey respondents could recognize burnout in themselves and others, the research team has come together once again, armed with strategies to share with grant professionals struggling with the conditions that contribute to burnout. These strategies fall into three distinct categories: personal (I-Care), group (We-Care), and workplace (They-Care). By choosing to implement these proven techniques, readers will build resiliency in themselves and create a community of care for others.
Introduction
Overwhelmed. Irritable. Restless. Sleepless. Tense. These are the tell-tale symptoms of workplace burnout affecting three of every four grant professionals (Bachman, 2020).

Burnout is prevalent in our society. One only needs to look at the headlines to see that it affects countless people each day in many professions. Leading burnout researchers Christina Maslach and Michael P. Leiter (2016) define burnout as the three dimensions of exhaustion, cynicism, and professional inefficacy. Likewise, the World Health Organization (2018) describes burnout as specific to the workplace, “Burnout is a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. It is characterized by three dimensions:

- feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion;
- increased mental distance from one’s job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one’s job; and
- reduced professional efficacy.”

In 2019, a team of grant professionals came together to determine if burnout is real and relevant in the grants profession. What the team learned through groundbreaking research is that burnout is, in fact, prevalent among grant professionals and is a leading cause of staff turnover, affecting every sector of the industry. “Burnout in the Grants Profession: An Initial Analysis” (Bachman, 2020), published in the Journal of the Grant Professionals Association, documents the findings to an audience who, quite frankly, was not surprised.

Nonprofit and grant professionals lined up to participate in workshops and webinars on the topic. During 2020, the research team learned how relevant the findings were. The team heard stories about how stress in the industry manifests itself, from the root causes to the resulting consequences. Often echoing the sentiments of one survey respondent, “…one way grant writing as a profession leads to burnout is because it’s never OVER…it’s never ENOUGH” (Bachman, 2019).

Grant professionals are finally feeling seen. In addition, the research normalizes the feelings of stress and anxiety, offering hope there is a solution on the horizon.

Bigger Than Burnout represents the first step—empower grant professionals to self-prioritize techniques to improve their lives and working conditions for themselves and others. The goal is simple: push beyond identifying the signs and symptoms of burnout to reveal real solutions and provide specific tools and strategies to mitigate burnout by breaking down silos and addressing three areas of concern. These areas include personal (I-Care), group (We-Care), and workplace (They-Care) opportunities and challenges.
First Things First: I-Care

I-Care is a deliberate system of consistent steps to prioritize physical, mental, and emotional health. I-Care looks and is different for everyone. According to the 2019 survey (Bachman, 2019), more than eight of ten grant professionals experience exhaustion related to work. When work is all-consuming, prioritizing health through the gifts of self, time, and outside interests is critical.

The Gift of Choosing Self

The foundation of choosing oneself is what Kanter and Sherman outline in *The Happy, Healthy Nonprofit* (2017) as the Wellness Triad of sleeping, nutrition, and exercise. Countless studies show the benefits of sleep, nutrition, and exercise on the human body. These three components of the Wellness Triad are fundamental to the well-being of all grant professionals and are the foundation of I-Care.

Another way of choosing self is to complete the stress cycle (Nagoski, 2019). Everyone experiences stress. It is the body’s psychological response to stressors, and there is no way to avoid it. Therefore, mitigating stress is what matters. Each time one experiences stress, the body creates a stress cycle, moving oxygen and fuel into one’s muscles. The stress cycle must be completed to avoid a build-up of stress in the body, potentially leading to physical problems. After the stress is over, one must tell the body that it is safe. One can complete the stress cycle in many ways, such as physical activity, breathing, positive social interaction, laughter, affection, crying, and creative expression (Nagoski, 2019).

For example, in the grants profession, information for grant proposals is not always shared in a timely fashion. This is a common, repetitive dynamic that impacts every part of the grant proposal development. As a grant professional, one must learn strategies to get the information as well as strategies to address the stress this creates. Simply walking away might not be enough to complete the stress cycle; grant professionals may need to create their own strategies or habits for processing the physical and emotional responses.

Choosing self also points to being intentional and proactive. Setting personal and work-related goals can provide direction and motivation. Grant professionals can also be intentional about setting boundaries around work time. It might be hard at first to make a point of only working in the hours set aside for work. Use auto-reply as a reminder not to check email, phone, and other team communication outside set work hours. Take the personal time allotted and the times when the office is closed.

As Gretchen Rubin (2006) states, “What you do every day matters more than what you do once in a while.”
The Gift of Time

Grant professionals often complain about a lack of time. Time cannot be added to or subtracted from, or even managed. But one can use time more intentionally.

Grant calendars are a staple in the profession. Grant professionals use them to track the deadlines related to grant applications, reporting, and other factors related to their work. The grant calendar can also include when members of the grant team are out of the office. If it’s on the calendar, it gets done. This will signal to the grant team to work ahead to meet deadlines that fall when someone is out of the office. In addition, it is a signal to the management of the workload the grant team can handle.

On days with a large task like a site visit, grant application/report submission, etc., schedule a significant break afterward or transition to a series of small tasks to give one’s brain time to rest.

Incorporate breaks into the workday. Eat meals away from the desk. Schedule walking meetings. Try the Pomodoro Technique (2021) of timed work with frequent breaks.

The Gift of Outside Interests

Grant professionals only have one life and must work toward work-life integration. Having other interests in addition to grant development supports this strategy. Those outside interests give grant professionals things to look forward to that are not related to work and result in a better quality of life (work-life integration). Volunteer. Find a hobby. Start a side hustle. Find whatever is meaningful and do it.

Strategies for promoting personal wellness are summarized in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. I-Care Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>I-Care: First Things First</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Wellness Triad: sleep, nutrition, exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Completing the stress cycle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Setting both personal and work-related goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Giving oneself the gift of time; using time intentionally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Incorporate breaks in the workday; walking meetings; lunch away from the desk; Pomodoro technique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Develop outside interests; find things outside of work that makes life meaningful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Rejecting silos: We-Care**

Long before the COVID-19 pandemic, grant professionals worked alone, often with limited input or contact from colleagues and leadership. Surveys conducted by GPA from 2018 to 2020 suggest more than 40% are the organization’s only grant professional (GPA, 2020; GPA, 2019; GPA, 2018). To be fair, many prefer a more solitary approach to the work. But working alone sets grant professionals apart in ways that contribute to burnout. No one in the immediate work circle speaks the language or understands the daily work. In business-speak, grant professionals are outliers.

Fortunately, being the lone grant professional does not mean being alone or working alone. Strategies to work around the silo mindset are practical, inexpensive, and accessible.

**Finding the “We” in We-Care**

Professional associations are ready-made for identifying like-minded people. By choosing an association aligned with individual interests and skills, the grant professional will find community as well. The authors suggest GPA, of course, but also the National Grant Management Association (NGMA; federal grant management); the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP; all areas of fundraising); and the chapters of all three.

**Being Intentional in the Search for “We”**

The old saying is true that to have a friend, one must be a friend. Simple strategies include a monthly coffee klatsch, weekly walk, or quarterly post-work happy hour. Friend gatherings may not answer burning questions about the character count but will increase the social connections that defend against burnout. There is also no reason to exclude professional associates; the Grant Pro Book Club, for example, is a group of 10 professionals who meet online monthly to discuss mostly fiction books. Mentoring or being mentored is yet another intentional way to interact around like areas or even across organizational types (e.g., a city manager supporting a nonprofit executive). Mentoring, in particular, can be organized around what boxer Muhammad Ali called pebbles in the shoes (Swensen, 2020)—the frustrations that become mountainous challenges. The conversations are endless.

**Professionally Developing the “We” to Help Others**

Nearly half of grant professionals responding to the survey (Bachman, 2019) reportedly could not recognize burnout in others. This is a clarion call for each grant professional individually and the grants profession collectively. Ongoing learning is needed to identify and address burnout. As yet another intentional strategy, the authors suggest association chapters receive support from the respective national offices, including
explicit, chapter-level training, webinars to share with members, and inclusion of burnout as a specific training topic for chapter leaders. Associations can and should work with chapters to develop mentorship opportunities.

**Educating Up (and Right and Left)**

Grant professionals work in silos often because organizations condone and even promote aloneness, building or enabling silos. For example, employers may expect grant professionals to do work solely without additional input from leadership or program staff. Organizational leaders and colleagues may not understand what grant development entails and may not want to know. Grant professionals must find ways to open the silo door and step into the work circle to demonstrate worth and model healthy workplace habits. Shifting from the silo to the seen can include:

- Discussing an article on healthy work environments during a staff meeting
- Co-leading a feedback session with colleagues on a recent grant submission
- Introducing new best practices in grants learned in a chapter meeting
- Establishing healthy habits and boundaries for all to see (e.g., no email on weekends or vacation; leaving the desk for lunch; walking down the hall to ask a question rather than emailing; walking around the block post-meeting)
- Persistence in talking with colleagues and leaders during grant development
- Learning new processes to gather information quickly from colleagues

These approaches for reducing burnout within a group of employees and/or a community of like-minded professionals are listed in Table 2.

**In This Together: They-Care**

“Workplace cultures vary, but employers are legally bound to offer some form of protection for people who might be suffering from burnout,” said Steven Azizi, an employment lawyer based in Los Angeles who specializes in representing workers in claims against their employers (Zuckerman, 2021).

It is both unfair and unreasonable to place responsibility for fixing burnout solely on the sufferer. Workplaces and organizations create conditions that lead to burnout, such as poor leadership, unclear or unrealistic expectations, poor communication, and inadequate employee recognition. As such, these same places have a responsibility to support their employees by modifying, mitigating, or eliminating those
conditions. A 2019 study on burnout in the grants profession further reiterated the role of the workplace in contributing to burnout: nearly 75% of survey respondents rated workplace factors as “stressful” to “very stressful” while only 49.6% said the same for factors outside of work (Bachman, 2019).

Here are a few strategies for creating an “anti-burnout” environment for grant professionals in the workplace:

**Facilitate Open and Transparent Communication**
Not only should employers listen to employees but should ensure employees’ voices are heard and valued. One way to do this is by simple follow-up, whether implementing a change in procedure based on an employee’s suggestion or informing the employee why the procedure change is not feasible. Another option is an anti-retaliation policy which mandates employees’ freedom to speak openly without fear of retaliation.

**Offer Grant Professionals Flexible Work Schedules**
This could mean allowing an employee to work from home a set number of days per week or allowing the employee to modify daily schedules (i.e., working from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. or 10 a.m.-6 p.m.). In offering flexibility, it is essential to acknowledge that one size does not fit all. Employers should recognize employees as individuals with different needs, situations, and personalities.

**Help Grant Professionals Escape Silos by Emphasizing Inclusion and Collaboration**
It is important to include grant professionals in relevant meetings where information is shared, and decisions are made. Doing so can significantly inform the work and make the grant process less burdensome.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>We-Care: Eliminating Silos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Finding your “peeps”, i.e., association membership(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Social interaction: Make/Keep friends, book clubs, coffee klatches, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Professionally developing leaders and members of chapters to be aware of burnout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Mentoring, being mentored in and outside of the profession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Educating others (up, left, right) by modeling our work, working with co-workers, leading meetings, and more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Establish healthy habits and boundaries at work—talking walks, eating lunch away from the desk, no email on weekends, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Develop a Culture of Meaningful Appreciation

Grant professionals should not be the unsung heroes. Instead, colleagues should know who grant professionals are and what they are contributing to the organization. One particular caveat for the grant professional: grants are approved and denied for many reasons that may have nothing to do with the grant professional. For this reason, it is crucial to recognize the effort, not just the outcome. Ensuring the organization knows about and celebrates International Grant Professionals Day (Grant Professionals Association, 2021) is a great way to help make this happen.

Embrace Diversity and Inclusion in Meaningful Ways

Workplaces should acknowledge the value of employees of color and those from marginalized communities. Employers should recognize the richness that comes from celebrating differences while also being aware and respectful of the difficulties these employees may face (i.e., microaggressions, racial trauma, social climate).

Reinforce Clear and Realistic Goals, Expectations, and Timelines

Leadership must recognize that employees can be committed to the mission without sacrificing themselves—a high capacity for martyrdom should not be a job qualification. Employers should both honor and encourage employee boundaries. Whether it is not answering emails on the weekend or establishing “no-meeting Mondays,” workplaces should support employees in developing the resiliency tools that best suit them.

Provide the Resources to Help Grant Professionals Succeed

Association memberships, training conferences, and mentoring/mentee opportunities are just a few examples of valuable professional development tools and best considered during the annual budgeting process. This type of investment can go a long way toward keeping the grant professional energized and engaged.

Is the goal of creating an “anti-burnout” work environment to keep grant professionals from ever experiencing any sort of stress in the workplace? Absolutely not! The very nature of the work—dealing with deadlines, meetings, guidelines, formats, personalities, unanswered requests for information, and so much more—all combine to make grant professionals tough, resilient, and tenacious. But when stress becomes chronic and leads to burnout, ultimately everyone suffers—the employee, colleagues, organization, and stakeholders. Thus, the detrimental impact of burnout is certainly worth instituting measures to mitigate or prevent it altogether.

In discussing workplaces and organizations and the impact on burnout, it is also worth taking a moment to consider funders and grantmaking organizations. Grantmakers should also consider how grantmaking policies and procedures might impact grant professionals.
For example, setting a grant deadline on a holiday, scheduling a site visit early Monday morning, or requesting a grant report with an extremely short turnaround time can cause undue—and often unnecessary—stress and aggravation.

Ways to combat burnout at the organizational level are summarized below in Table 3.

### Table 3. They-Care Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>They-Care: The Anti-Burnout Environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Recognize workplace conditions that lead to burnout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Create open and transparent communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Provide flexibility in work schedules and locales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Help grant professionals step outside of their silos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Develop a culture of meaningful appreciation that is not linked to the amount of funding received</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Embrace diversity in meaningful ways</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Set clear, realistic goals, expectations, timelines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Eliminate martyrdom as a job qualification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Establish habits and policies regarding no-email weekends, no-meeting Mondays, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Provide key resources to grant professionals to support their work (e.g., information, reports, data, financial info, access to decision-makers)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusion**

The conditions that lead to burnout are prevalent in the grants profession, *but it does not have to be that way.*

Current accepted systems and practices, both personal and professional, perpetuate burnout. A toxic culture values unrealistic expectations such as working after hours, responding immediately to email, and forgoing vacation because of a never-ending workstream. The toll is too significant, and it has to stop.

Each person holds the power to prioritize wellness by prioritizing mental and physical health, setting and guarding boundaries, creating margin, educating up (and right and left), and eliminating silos. Similarly, employers can create new systems in the workplace that foster wellbeing by focusing on diversity, appreciation, realistic expectations, transparent communication, flexibility, and a manageable workload. It will not happen overnight, but it will happen.

It has to start somewhere. Let it start here.
References


**Biographical Information**

**Trish Bachman, GPC** is the owner and lead consultant for The Write Stuff Delaware LLC, a grant consulting firm located in Lewes, DE. She received the Certified Grant Writer (CGW) credential from American Grant Writers Association in 2014 and received the Grant Professional Certified credential from the Grant Professionals Association in 2017. Today, she serves on the GPA PG&D core committee, is a founding member and president of the GPA Delmarva Chapter, and a GPA Approved Trainer.

**Patricia Duboise, GPC** has more than 25 years of grant experience. Since 2003, she has worked with Mercy Care Foundation, where she is responsible for securing and managing grants for Mercy Care, a federally qualified health center. As Director of Grants, she manages a portfolio of more than $8 million in government, foundation, and corporate grants. She is an active member of the Grant Professionals Association (GPA) and the Georgia Grant Professionals Association (GGPA).

**Bethany Planton, GPC** is the Founder and CEO of bmpconsulting, a grant consulting firm located in Louisville, KY. Since being an AmeriCorps VISTA in 2011, she has worked with more than 35 organizations to secure over $6 million in grant funds. Bethany is a Grant Professional Certified, Social Media Strategist, Scrum Master, Scrum Product Owner, GPA Approved Trainer, and co-author of “Burnout in the Grants Profession: An Initial Analysis,” published in the *Journal of the GPA*, Volume 18.

**Johna Rodgers, GPC** helps solve problems. Over 20+ years, she has brought $195 million in grants to employers and clients. A longtime member of GPA, she serves as the national Vice President and is a GPA Approved Trainer. She is an original GPC, receiving certification in 2008. For the past six years, she has worked as a consultant. Johna is co-author of “Burnout in the Grants Profession: An Initial Analysis,” published in the *Journal of the GPA*. 
Grants as the Bedrock: How Strong Grants Leadership Impacts the Nonprofit as a Whole

Laura Chynoweth, MA, CFRE
Granted Fundraising Consultants, Salt Lake City, UT

Katy Shoemaker, GPC
Providence St. Joseph Health, Salt Lake City, UT

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

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

Abstract
Grant professionals know grants are a vital revenue stream for nonprofit organizations. However, other professionals—both inside and outside nonprofit and governmental organizations—have long regarded grant funding as a supplementary source of income. This article focuses on shifting the narrative around grant proposal submission as an auxiliary development task to acknowledging grant funding and subsequent management practices as a strategic part of sustaining an organization’s operations and meeting revenue goals. Through sharing professional examples and tangible tools, the authors will explore how establishing a strong focus on grants creates a clear path for an organization’s overall long-term success. This includes an overview of grants leadership types within organizations and a discussion on using the grants process to analyze the current state of an organization’s development efforts; identify its mission, vision, values, and goals; and survey its resources.
Introduction
Modern grantmaking originated at the end of the 19th century, after the Civil War. At this time individuals started organizing and strategizing their efforts to obtain financial support for charitable causes, using businesses of the day as templates. The first pools of grant funding comprised large donations of several individuals and prominent families—including Sage, Carnegie, Rockefeller, and Ford—who made their wealth in the booming industries of the late 19th and early 20th centuries (i.e., steel, oil, railroad, telegraph, and automobile industries) (Philanthropy New York, 2008). Grants were awarded sporadically according to the desires of these wealthy elite instead of charities’ appeals or needs.

World War I catalyzed yet another shift in American philanthropy, this time toward grassroots fundraising and the democratization of giving, as exemplified by the more than $400 million in gifts and membership dues received by the Red Cross in connection with the war. During this time, the community foundation movement began to take shape, which allowed individuals of modest wealth to pool their money and provide grants in support of local philanthropic programs.

Once controlled by the wealthy elite, grant funding is now awarded strategically by community-focused organizations and foundations. This trend is expected to grow as the number of philanthropic organizations who adopt the principles of the community-centric fundraising movement increases (Pahlka and Giridharadas, 2018; Community-Centric Fundraising, 2021).

However, despite the “bottom-up” approach of current grantmaking in the U.S., the outdated “top-down” way of thinking about grant awards persists among professionals within and outside nonprofit organizations nationwide. It is especially interesting that major gifts are frequently viewed as a more stable income stream than grants, when no evidence to support this position exists. In fact, at many university-sponsored projects offices, grants are built into the budget as revenue, and grant application processes are not viewed as traditional fundraising tasks; instead, they are viewed rather like sales tasks. The power that even small grants have to support the growth of a nonprofit’s positive impact on their community and the world demands that we respect the important role this revenue stream plays in a nonprofit's operations.

Why It Matters
It is imperative that professionals within and outside nonprofit organizations stop viewing grant funding as “bonus” funding. This belief has many detrimental effects on fundraising efforts and on nonprofit operations as a whole. First, treating grants as supplementary income disempowers nonprofits. When nonprofits view the distribution of grants as nonstrategic and random, they have little motivation to try to
obtain such funding, if they apply at all, which means decision-making power remains firmly with large grantmakers. This funding model is not at all aligned with the grassroots model of grantmaking that is, in reality, growing. This “top-down” view of grants also negatively impacts nonprofit sustainability.

When nonprofits have determined that grants are merely supplementary to other funding sources, grant-related tasks—often the preparation of application materials and creation of new programs in reaction to a particular grant opportunity announcement—are delegated to staff regardless of whether they have development experience. These staff members may fill other crucial roles in the organization and may not have been hired with that fundraising expectation in their roles. The grant application process requires a significant amount of staff time, even in the grantseeking phase alone. According to the 2020 State of Grant Seeking Report, 61% of respondents reported that “one to two people were directly involved in the grant seeking process for the largest individual award, while 29% of respondents reported that three to five people were directly involved” (GrantStation, 2020). It is no secret that staff members who “wear many hats” experience burnout, putting the nonprofit at risk for staff turnover. The same report revealed that lack of time and/or staffing continued to be the greatest challenge to grantseeking among respondents.

Additionally, viewing grants as one-off bonuses perpetuates a scarcity mindset among nonprofits. This fuels what Vu Le, Nonprofit AF author and speaker and former Executive Director of Rainier Valley Corps, calls the “Nonprofit Hunger Games,” in which nonprofit organizations aim to out-compete their fellow nonprofits rather than collaborating to obtain funding and better serve their communities (Le, 2015). Nonprofits in this mindset are much more likely than those with an abundance mindset to accept grants from funders with non-aligned values (Walker, 2021).

**Using Grants as the Bedrock**

The grants process is a natural starting point for all other nonprofit operations. Contrary to popular belief, grants are vital to long-term success as a revenue stream and provide the framework for a strategic operations plan. The grant application process often forces the grant professional to engage in reverse engineering for a specific program or programs. The result is a substantial foundation that can inform other organizational processes and decisions, as well as help others in your organization think beyond the grant proposal.

**The Process**

Focusing on grants and the grantseeking process before pursuing other funding sources helps nonprofits align resources with organization goals,
implement programs that show measurable success, and set realistic revenue targets. Here we discuss the steps for putting grants first:

- **Foundational Layer: Building Out Your Grants Team**
- **Supporting Layer: Financial Influence**
- **Concepts and Tools for Grants Leadership**

**Foundational Layer: Building Out Your Grants Team**

When utilizing grants as the bedrock in planning efforts, zooming out to look at the bigger picture or scope is vital. Whether applying this technique to a specific application or adjusting these processes to help an organization along in its planning (programmatic or non-programmatic), it is important to assemble a “dream team” to support grant-related processes. To ensure the appropriate and most effective mix of individuals are involved consistently to support success, consider the following questions:

- **Who are the key decision-makers, influencers, and individuals with authority/power?**

Developing, maintaining, and engaging consistent executive sponsorship (a key leader/influencer on the team) in this process is pivotal for success (Project Management Institute, n.d.). Whether their role is higher level, such as acting as the final reviewer of documents and/or as the initial direction/brainstorming support, or deeper in the small, detailed tasks, it helps to ensure you have an executive sponsor on your project so it does not get held up by a higher authority and has leadership buy-in. Examples of this could be your CEO/Executive Director or, if you are working on a project with state systems or outside partnerships, having a legislator, mayor, or partnership leader present. The level of involvement will vary greatly depending on project scope, but having significant support from key administrators is critical to project acceptance.

- **Who needs to be informed?**

Loop in those who need to know about the deliverables, namely those who will be delivering the program being funded and therefore measuring deliverables. As the grant professional, you will need to follow up with these programming professionals to obtain those details for grant reports. Identifying the “who else” component early in the grants process keeps key project contacts being left out or not involved in a proposal.

- **Who is vital to programmatic or strategic success? Who will be impacted by the promises/outcomes/statements in this grant application?**

Including a constituent representative in the grants process will provide nonprofits a crucial and clear sense of the potential impact a grant will
have on them. Examples of this are programmatic staff or even a patient advocate (for organizations in the health space) or a teacher or principal (for an educational organization). The need for representation extends to program partners invested in delivering the program. Even if your initial draft of a project team is large in terms of who is involved, it allows for the space for feedback from this team to determine who are the “must-haves” versus the “nice-to-haves” in project design.

**Supporting Layer: Financial Influence**

All too often, the finance or accounting department at an organization does not participate in grant discussions and/or strategic conversations about a nonprofit’s direction. Having consistent buy-in and involvement at a high level from these departments helps nonprofits ensure that their grant budget is feasible. Their involvement will also help guard against unanticipated budgetary or financial challenges, such as needing to secure matching funds for a project. Examples of staff who should be involved include your organization’s controller, senior accountant, or finance representative.

**Concepts and Tools for Grants Leadership**

When thinking about using grant processes in this foundational way, there are many existing concepts and tools to help structure your project, program, and grant planning. Using several grant-related tools and processes will not only help you complete and submit grant applications, but will also help the organization in the long-run with planning efforts and consistently delivering effective services, as well as aligning programs to future funding opportunities. There are several tools available to facilitate the grants process holistically, including managing people, timelines, and expectations. Many of these resources can be used in a virtual or in-person environment to understand strategies for effective program and project design and development; organizational development as it pertains to grantseeking; post-award grant management practices sufficient to inform effective grant design and development; and practices and services that raise the level of professionalism of grant developers. The following sections will examine concepts and tools that you can immediately implement in your work. These include:

- Clear Expectations and Roles/Areas of Responsibility (AORS)
- Program, Project, and Strategic Planning/Logic Model
- Assessing opportunities for ‘readiness’/grant readiness questionnaire
- Revenue predictions and budget forecasting/funding source to organization budget example.
Tool 1: Areas of Responsibility Readiness Questionnaire

The “Areas of Responsibility” (AOR) Readiness Questionnaire helps assess your current team, capacity, expectations, and purpose. This structured document provides clear roles, responsibilities, and deliverables related to the grant or project. In other words, it explains the who, what, where, and how of your project design. The authors have found this tool is most helpful after building the grants team, which may include the project manager (usually the grant professional), content developers, relationship managers, data managers, etc. Completing the AOR Readiness Questionnaire helps individuals see what this project will require (e.g., time commitment) of all team members from both individual and holistic perspectives. After the grant professional completes the first pass of the areas of responsibility document, they should share the AOR questionnaire in a grant project kick-off meeting to facilitate team-wide collaboration and editing. This process creates a shared accountability and group expectation for performance and gives the team a concrete document to reference in cases where project accountability or project role is in question. This structure can make difficult conversations around performance a little easier for everyone. Use the example below (Table 1) to structure your own AOR for whatever project you have, whether it be a specific grant application or a program design.

Table 1. Sample Areas of Responsibility Readiness Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role 1–2 words</th>
<th>Examples: Proposal Point Person, Partner Liaison, Editing Support.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who</td>
<td>Team member name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>List by name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What</td>
<td>Primary function/responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Manage the application process, edit/draft narrative, submit application.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deliverables</td>
<td>Specific duties or tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Assign tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Check in with team members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Edit content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Assist in budget completion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Submit application</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How</td>
<td>Flow of proposal development involves responsible decision-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>making and keeping everyone informed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Responsible for overall project management in ASANA and Google docs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Responsible for final proposal product and submission</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tool 2: Logic Model

A logic model is a systematic and visual way to represent your understanding of logical connections among the resources you have to operate your program, activities planned, and the changes or results you hope to achieve. Logic models are an effective tool for visual learners and enable people to map out the holistic development of a program from start to finish (Savaya & Waysman, 2005). One example is the “cookie recipe method,” in which a team creates a shared understanding of a project (i.e., making cookies) by walking through the steps to completing the different components (e.g., assumptions, inputs, etc.) of a sample logic model. The authors have facilitated this activity in the past by printing out a chocolate chip cookie recipe and then separating all the ingredients and steps. The team, presented with these various components, must then place them in the different sections in a logic model. Examples of inputs would include the different ingredients, utensils, time needed, etc. It is important in this activity example to discuss as a group why different components were placed in different areas of the model. This process fosters a group understanding of how the team views logic models and will assist in developing the actual logic model for the program.

Nonprofit teams can also conduct a brainstorming meeting, facilitated by the grant professional, to fill in the logic model. Allow the team to collaborate out loud and write ideas down on a white board for a specific project/program, using you, the grant professional, as the guide and sounding board. This tool is great for programmatic design, allows teams to think differently about the way their program operates, and helps them identify any gaps in their logic or programmatic plan. See the blank template provided in Figure 1.

Tool 3: Readiness Assessment

The Readiness Assessment will help you and your project team evaluate whether your organization has the readiness and capacity to plan, develop, and implement a proposed project and/or grant. Unfortunately, many grant applications are submitted haphazardly for programs that do not yet exist or lack sound organizational infrastructure. Therefore, completing a grant readiness checklist or questionnaire before beginning a project or application is a worthwhile investment of time and energy. The authors use this readiness assessment on a monthly and even bi-weekly basis with their organizational teams and grantseeking clients. Their organizations have many grant prospects in their pipelines and facilitate this assessment in real time with their teams to vet grant opportunities. This process ensures that everyone is aligned with the same strategic goal and that any gaps in the collective logic or thinking around the grant opportunity or project can be addressed as a group. Concerns that typically arise from using the readiness assessment include:
Grants as the Bedrock: How Strong Grants Leadership Impacts the Nonprofit as a Whole

Does our internal team have capacity to apply for AND manage this grant should it be awarded?

Does what we are applying for align with current bodies of work and existing budgeted expenses?

Do we have the relationship with the funder and/or the community partners necessary to complete this body of work?

Does it align with our strategic plan/priorities?

Can we complete the project activities (according to the RFP) within the grant timeline?

This assessment is broken into three steps:

1) Can you provide detailed information about your project/program? You and your program team are the subject matter experts for your project or program. To complete any grant application, you will likely need the following information about a potential program or project:

- How does this project fit into your organization’s strategic plan?
• Problem Statement/Statement of Need: a clear, concise, well-supported statement of the problem to be overcome using the project/program supported by grant funding. Any background of the information provided should be both factual and directly related to the problem addressed by the project/program to be funded.

• Project Objectives: These should be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) and should describe project/program activities. These can include the number of workshops offered, the number of people served during each workshop, etc. It is good practice to include 3–5 objectives that directly lead to SMART outcomes (see below).

• Project Evaluation: How will you show that your project has succeeded? How will you evaluate progress towards project goals? These should be specific and directly related to the objectives and outcomes.

• Outcomes: These should also be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) and should describe changes in your program participants that relate to the need your project/program addresses. These are harder to measure than objectives and can include changes in knowledge level, attitudes, and behaviors. It is a good rule to list 3–5 anticipated outcomes.

2) Do you understand you will be responsible for tracking data for your project/program, as well as measuring your project’s/program’s progress toward the objectives and outcomes you set? It is the responsibility of the project/program team to track all data. In leading the grant application process, it is your responsibility to make sure all program team members are aware of their responsibilities, including by what method and how frequently they are to measure progress toward the objectives and outcomes you have proposed.

3) Do you have the following documentation, frequently requested on grant applications, gathered and saved in a central location?

• IRS 501(c)3 determination letter
• Annual operating budget for your organization and program budget for each program your organization puts on
• Letters of support
• 990s, any audited financial statements and audit reports you have
• Electronic signatures from organization leadership.

Tool 4: Budget Forecasting
Budget forecasting ensures all expenses and revenue tie directly to your organization’s established annual budget. While many nonprofit staff
members have a dream project or program they have been longing to develop and deliver, the grant professional must be sure that grants pursued are linked to organizational expenses. In this way, we can align existing costs to both budgeted costs and the organization’s mission before creating a new program that will incur new costs. The authors use budget forecast tools to assess the amount of funding the organization currently has, what operational costs are being covered, and what revenue is expected to cover any remaining expenses. Conceptually, this is simply part of grant planning. The authors utilize a funding source-to-organization budget document that aligns the organization’s operating budget with all its funding sources, down to the detail level of what each funding source covers. The authors have provided a template (https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1n4IoxURWY7zWU8NqVrpji3YGt66hjnIh/edit#gid=2046960989) that can be adjusted to fit your own organization’s budget and funding sources. This document allows grantmakers to see where their grant money was allocated, and it mitigates the risk of double-dipping with different funding sources and expense items. Building out this tool and presenting it to a project team can create a better understanding of grant budgeting and open the door for questions and rich discussion.

Conclusion
Having endured a global pandemic, which exacerbated existing problems in the nonprofit sector, and bearing witness to the ongoing rise of the movements for social justice and, more industry-specific, community-centric fundraising, professionals inside and outside nonprofits must change the way they think about grant funding. Using the tools discussed herein to focus on pursuing grants will not only pave the way for other program planning, budgeting, and strategy decisions for nonprofits, but will also foster a culture of sustainability.

References


**Biographical Information**

Laura Chynoweth, MA, CFRE, backed by a decade of experience in nonprofit development and 13 years in communications, founded Granted Fundraising Consultants in 2014. She obtained her CFRE certification in November 2019 and has served as Communications Chair for the Association of Fundraising Professionals Utah Chapter’s board of directors for the past four years. She is also on the board of directors for the Pacific Whale Foundation and a member of the Grant Professionals Association. As a highly experienced grantwriter and content strategist, Laura has successfully contributed her expertise to nonprofits and philanthropic organizations nationwide. She can be reached at laura@grantedfundraising.com.
Katy Shoemaker, GPC has been in the grants profession for more than seven years. She has successfully raised more than $35M in her career for a variety of nonprofit organizations in the health, social services, arts and culture, poverty, education, and animal welfare sectors. During her career, she has managed up—providing coaching, mentoring, and expertise to internal leadership staff, Board of Directors, and alongside programmatic staff in project management, strategic planning, revenue forecasting, and assessing programmatic sustainability. She is the current President of the Utah Chapter of the Grant Professionals Association and travels throughout the state of Utah and nationally, presenting on grantwriting and management topics to fellow nonprofit professionals. She can be reached at katelynshoemaker7@gmail.com.
Ethical Grant Language from a Historical Perspective

Melody Hernandez
Melody B. Hernandez Consulting, San Francisco, CA

Dana Patterson
Kidango, Inc., Fremont, CA

Rhonda Poppen, GPC
GRANTdog, San Francisco, CA

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

GPCI Competency 04: Knowledge of how to craft, construct, and submit an effective grant application

GPCI Competency 08: Knowledge of methods and strategies that cultivate and maintain relationships between fund-seeking and recipient organizations and funders

Abstract
The way organizations refer to populations served has changed throughout time. In the early days of American philanthropy (1700s–1800s), charities requested funds using phrases like “[women] too young to have acquired habits of fixed depravity…anxious to be restored to the paths of innocence and usefulness” (Pickett, 1969, pp. 50–66). This reflects the perception prevalent at the time that one’s circumstances were the sole result of one’s character. During the Progressive Era (early 1900s), philanthropists streamlined giving and developed ways to disburse accumulated wealth through “wise distribution.” The prevailing perception among affluent society was that the less affluent communities needed to be taken care of in a paternalistic way with “greater intelligence and vision than the donors themselves could hope to possess” (Bremner, 1988).
Over the last few decades, the grant profession formed and has slowly moved away from language that reinforces systemic inequities and the paternal/child roles. There is a trend toward using language that is more respectful of the communities being served—language that does not place the blame for generations of systemic racism, inequitable distribution of wealth, and lack of opportunity on those who are most negatively affected by these challenges.

**Introduction**

Like most languages, English is constantly evolving. Written and spoken language looks different than it did several centuries ago when Europeans first began to settle in the Americas. This paper will explore the way American English has evolved as it relates to charitable purposes, philanthropy, and grant proposals with a focus on the words and phrases used to describe diversity, inequities, and populations served.

Grant professionals are acutely aware of the importance of word choice. However, many writers may inadvertently use language deeply steeped in colonization and historical perceptions that there are “worthy” and “unworthy” groups and individuals (Quincy, 1821, p. 7). The historical context of the evolving language used can create a framework to explore words, phrases, and perspectives currently being used within the grant field.

**Colonial and Early America (1600s–1800s)**

American social welfare was deeply rooted in the English Poor Law. Codified in 1601, the English Poor Law relied on poorhouses and workhouses for those who did not have the means to pay for their basic needs. Community leaders required able-bodied individuals to work and would at times incarcerate those who did not find or maintain employment. Those who were unable to work due to age, injury, or medical conditions were referred to as the “impotent poor” and were either sent to almshouses, poor houses, or expected to live with family members. The system had an underlying assumption that there were “deserving poor” and “undeserving poor” (Quincy, 1821, p. 7). The churches were embedded into this system with each parish electing an overseer expected to know to which category each person belonged and then deal with them accordingly. Some court-appointed descriptors, pulled from the English Poor Law, were used to describe populations. “Charity was afforded only to those at the very margins of society—the ‘dependent, defective and delinquent’” (Mortell, 2013, p.7).

When English immigrants came to what would become America, they brought with them these same perspectives. Charity was delivered through the churches, and laws were designed to punish people who did...
not have equitable access to resources. This approach lasted throughout the formalization of the nation (Quincy, 1821, p. 7).

In the 1800s, the country encountered prosperity, a civil war, and a depression. Societies tend to redirect blame away from the individual when external forces such as war, famine, economic depression, and natural disasters impact large population segments. At the time, national turmoil led to a spike in the number of organizations focused on meeting community needs, including orphans, widows, animals, the sick, and the poor.

These organizations did not rely solely on churches for financial support. Instead, they began to send early funding proposals to government agencies (in addition to requests for donations from wealthy individuals and families). As an example, the New York Society for the Prevention of Pauperism was founded in 1817. While the term “pauper” is now associated with someone poor, historically, this word meant anyone who received charity or government aid. This organization formed the House of Refuge, and they requested funds from the state using phrases like “[women] too young to have acquired habits of fixed depravity...anxious to be restored to the paths of innocence and usefulness” (Pickett, 1969, pp. 50–66). This quote was used to request funds for a program that focused primarily on teenage girls who had been sex-trafficked or who lived in poverty and may have been taken advantage of by men as the girls worked to meet their basic needs. At the time, referring to these girls as “too young to have acquired habits of fixed depravity” (Pickett, 1969) was a groundbreaking and sympathetic approach. Community members previously considered girls who were pregnant outside of marriage as morally depraved, paying no mind to potential causes such as rape or self-sustainability. Writers of the House of Refuge funding request stated that the girls were “anxious to be restored to the paths of innocence and usefulness” (Picket, 1969), implying that certain people are worth saving and that funders should invest in those worthy of support.

While the approach to acquire funding had changed and some charities provided support for individuals that met their criteria, the greater societal perception was still that one’s circumstances were the sole result of one’s character. Much of the language used by early American charities reflected the commonly held view that people were responsible for their present situations.

During this stage of our nation, slavery was still legal and laws in many areas put slave owners in charge of the needs of the Black people they enslaved. Some communities had poor houses, or workhouses for Black people. When the Charleston, South Carolina Workhouse opened in 1738, it was described as a place for:

All rogues, vagabonds, lewd and idle persons and beggars, stubborn and obstinate apprentices and servants, and children, common drunkards, common night walkers, pilferers, wanton, and lascivious persons, common scolds, and brawlers, tradesmen, and laborers neglecting their
callings, and leading idle and dissolute lives and who do not provide for the support of their families,... stubborn, obstinate or incorrigible negroes or slaves. (Byrd, 2009, pp. 35–52)

Racism—the since-denounced 19th-century theory that divides humankind into distinct races and ascribes superiority to certain races—was common at this time. Under this theory, humankind was broken into “Caucasian,” “Negroid,” and “Mongoloid,” and these categorizations were regularly used throughout society, including funders and organizations to define populations served.

Charities were often segregated by race and funded through churches, individuals, and/or local governments. A formal grant process was not yet in effect.

The Progressive Era (early 1900s)
A boom in the first few decades of the 20th century resulted in a highly unequal distribution of wealth with the top 1% of families earning over 20% of total income (Alvaredo et al., 2013, pp. 3–20). During the Progressive Era (early 1900s), philanthropists like the Rockefellers and Carnegies streamlined giving and developed ways to disburse the massive amount of accumulated wealth through what Andrew Carnegie called “wise distribution.” The prevailing perception among affluent society was that the less affluent communities needed paternalistic care with “greater intelligence and vision than the donors themselves could hope to possess” (Bremner, 1988). Common language used during this era was requesting support for employed girls, help for the unprivileged, or aged colored women, differentiating certain segments of the population as worthy of support while implying others were not (The Community Fund, 1927).

During the 20th century, philanthropists frequently received letters requesting financial support for a wide variety of causes. Soon they were receiving so many per day that they began to streamline the process by focusing on certain causes and enlisting the aid of others in how to choose which organizations and initiatives to support.

Taxation increased during this period as well. This, coupled with philanthropists’ streamlining giving, resulted in more formalized grant processes. Organizations and giving practices continued to be divided along racial lines.

Civil Rights Movement (late 1900s)
The Civil Rights Movement and its leaders brought increased attention to the social inequities that existed along the lines of race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and more. The focus of many community-based organizations, funders, and resultant grant proposals began to shift away from individual blame.
Language changed on many fronts. For example, society shifted away from using “Negro” to using “African American” or “Black,” and homosexuality became increasingly more accepted by society as newly formed organizations focused on meeting community needs. The community’s perception of single mothers and pregnant unwed mothers began to shift from that of blame to that of support, as this new approach took on a name: Political Correctness (PC).

People have used the term political correctness since the 1930s, with usage steadily increasing between the 1970s and the 1990s. The term then began to fall out of favor, with some arguing that it was too difficult to keep up with changing phraseology and expressing concerns that if one used the wrong word, they would become a social pariah. At the same time, others began to notice that even while using the correct PC language, it did not change the intent or address the underlying issues of systemic racism, social inequities, and other issues. PC became a point of contention and grant professionals faced the ongoing challenge of using current descriptors. The approach was often to take out one word in a sentence and replace it with another word. For example,

*Teachers at ABC Organization help poor, retarded colored children learn a skill so they can become a useful member of society.*

may have become,

*Teachers at ABC Organization help impoverished, learning-disabled African American children learn a skill so they can become a useful member of society.*

Many grant professionals at this time intended to build readers’ sympathy toward the populations for which they were requesting funds. This began to shift to empathy, as Erica Czaja (2013) described her approach to researching the distribution of grant funds in the 1960s, “Central to this research is the distinction between empathy, which involves feeling the emotions of another, and sympathy, which refers to feeling pity or sorry for another. I advance two theories in which I propose that the emotional states of empathy and sympathy motivate different kinds of political opinions and outcomes: a theory of empathy and equality and a theory of sympathy and charity.”

**A New Millennium (2000s)**

The grant profession, through constructive discussion over the last few decades, is evolving away from language that reinforces systemic inequities and the paternal/child roles. There is a trend toward asset-based language that is more respectful of the communities being served—language that does not place the blame for generations of systemic racism, inequitable distribution of wealth, and lack of opportunity on those who are most negatively affected by these challenges. This approach contextualizes issues as opposed to reducing populations to their
demographics or labels that neatly fit into character count limitations.

The asset-based approach leads with a focus on the individual and is commonly known as person-first language. “Black students” became “students from black communities.” “Disabled people” became “people with disabilities.”

Currently, there is a shift in perspective instead of a shift in PC language or sentence structure. The grant profession is moving away from replacing one or two words to make proposals more PC. Instead, the entire approach is changing. As an example, in previous years a grantwriter may have described an organization’s work in these terms:

*Teachers at ABC Organization help impoverished, learning-disabled African American children learn a skill so they can become a useful member of society.*

The same description of work may now become:

*For generations, communities of color have had unequal access to educational opportunities: from segregated schools, to redlining policies that have resulted in de facto segregation, to disparities in per-student budgets within neighboring school districts. ABC Organization works to address this by offering academic enrichment opportunities and culturally responsive tutoring that takes into consideration each student’s unique learning styles and adapts materials accordingly.*

The second example sets the context in place and the focus moves away from blaming or labeling the people who have been most affected by generations of inequitable distributions of wealth and opportunity. This approach is difficult to fit within overly restrictive character/word count limitations and some funders have been working to incorporate this new approach into their application process. However, some funders’ requirements continue to make this a challenge.

Additionally, some funders are mindful that some community-based organizations’ constituents already have access to resources and want to ensure that organizations are using their dollars for those who have the least access to opportunity. Therefore, they may ask for detailed demographics (race, income level, etc.) and may even have questions directly focused on these demographics.

Within the industry, language that reinforces the “othering” of specific subgroups or populations still lingers. According to the Canadian Human Rights Museum, “Othering involves zeroing in on a difference and using that difference to dismantle a sense of similarity or connectedness between people. Othering sets the stage for discrimination or persecution by reducing empathy and preventing genuine dialogue” (Curle, n.d.). It is an “us vs. them” mentality.

Some examples of language that can contribute to othering includes the following:
Table 1. Examples of Language that is Becoming Less Appropriate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Why it is Potentially Problematic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At-risk</td>
<td>Referring to a community or individual as “at-risk” begs the question, At risk of what? and perhaps more importantly, Why? Many organizations that use this expression in proposals would never look their clients in the eye and say, “You are an at-risk youth.” Using this term to describe an individual or a group omits the inequitable factors that contribute to the situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>This word is all too often used to describe Black communities and is rarely used for affluent White communities who live in the same large city setting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target population</td>
<td>Considering the rates of gun violence experienced by many communities, this expression has fallen out of favor for many.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community served</td>
<td>This expression reinforces the power dynamic wherein the organization is the savior and the participants are passive recipients while most programs usually require dedication and active participation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex-Felon; Formerly Incarcerated; Justice Involved</td>
<td>Instead of reducing people to their status within the criminal justice system—a system that is rife with explicit and implicit bias—many prefer to use the narrative behind individual challenges of those who have been a part of the system. Rarely are affluent Euro-Americans referred to using these words, even when they have experienced incarceration and/or have had involvement within the criminal justice system. This allows some groups to move past the experience while other community members do not have that same courtesy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>There was a theory in the 1700s that the human species had its origins in the Caucasus Mountains as being where Noah’s ark found its resting place after the flood. This word is directly tied to theories of racism put forward by Christoph Meiners and Johann Friedrich Blumenbach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blight</td>
<td>“The term ‘blight’ for example, which transposed the language of disease onto places, with devastating consequences for the people of color living within them. The designation of an area as ‘blighted’ was used to justify numerous racial injustices throughout the 20th century, including urban renewal, eminent domain, and the displacement of thousands of Black families. Some in power...continue to use it—often in combination with terms such as ‘high-crime,’ ‘inner cities,’ and other racially coded language as a way to rationalize over-policing in Black neighborhoods, provoke anti-immigrant sentiment, and advocate for policies favoring wealthy investors over long-time residents” (Love &amp; Vey, 2020, para 5).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This partial list of words and phrases may have use in some grant applications; however, context is key. In the wrong context, these words and phrases are othering, degrading and suggest that those who have suffered due to generations of societal inequity are less worthy of support than other individuals. For instance, writers may use *at-risk* to describe students from low-income backgrounds who face obstacles to academic success. The term is not often an expression used to describe individuals from affluent communities or communities of privilege when they face obstacles to academic success. If a child from a household with financial resources struggles academically or socially, it is unlikely that they would be described as “at-risk.” Instead, the conversation focuses on how to provide the supports they need to be successful.

The term *at risk* is more appropriately used when describing the circumstances an individual or group is encountering, not as a descriptor of the individual or group. Some examples of more appropriate use include:

- **We are at risk of losing the Ojibwe language as fewer and fewer community members who are native speakers remain.**

- **Latinx communities are increasingly at risk of facing deportation as federal laws become more strictly enforced.**

- **Black patients are at a higher risk of sickle cell anemia than White, Latinx, or Asian patients.**

These examples differentiate from using *at-risk* in the adjective + noun sentence structure such as “at-risk youth” or “at-risk communities.” When using “at-risk” in this “adjective + noun” structure, the term defines the community and makes it seem as though something is inherently “wrong” with them. Using “at-risk” as a descriptor for challenges, rather than people, not only removes blame from the individual or community, but also creates the perception that someone can and should act to address the specific issue.

Writers became increasingly aware that—in the effort to raise funds or awareness—language could reduce people to a sympathy case in a way that can be considered exploitative. People should not have to put their lives and pain on display to have access to jobs, mental services, necessities, or opportunities.

Many organizations craft their outward-facing materials on assets of constituents, clients, or potential program participants while their grant language often focuses on deficits. An education program may speak about programming on their website or flyers using phrases like, *You can achieve your dreams!* while proposals use language such as, *These at-risk kids will likely not graduate without your support.* Communication in all charitable contribution appeals can respectfully represent communities to successfully raise funds.
Conclusion
Attitudes and language used to describe diversity, inequity, and populations for charity, philanthropy, and grant proposals have changed over time. However, those who accumulate wealth and hold positions of power, from Colonial America to modern-day foundations, consistently dictate who is deserving of funding and who is not. This reality is reflected in the words, phrases, and characteristics used to describe individuals and communities in charitable contribution appeals.

During colonial times and Early America, the public generally viewed that one’s character was the sole result of one’s circumstances. The language used by early charities mirrored these attitudes and described individuals without access to resources as “dependent, defective and delinquent” (Mortell, 2013, p.7), creating systems that punished the “unworthy poor” (Quincy, 1821, p. 7). After a select few amassed wealth in the late 1880s and early 1900s, they participated in philanthropy through “wise distribution,” viewing themselves as solely qualified, intelligent, and trustworthy enough to determine who merited financial support. The Progressive Era’s request letters from individuals and nonprofits during this time reflect this paternalistic and sympathetic view. As social movements and attitudes advanced in the 20th century and through the Civil Rights Era, the language shifted from sympathy to empathy. This progression also resulted in the rise of PC language in the 1970s, which mostly fell out of favor in the 1990s. In the new millennium, linguistic trends in grants and philanthropy have shifted both towards and away from person-first language. Most recently, there is an increasing emphasis on distancing blame from individuals and describing the greater context of structures and systems that prevent individuals and marginalized communities from thriving.

From a historical perspective, nonprofit and grant professionals can critically reflect on the words chosen to describe individuals and communities. In today’s landscape, grant professionals are a direct link between communities and funders. Since they are uniquely situated within this power structure, they hold a great responsibility to conscientiously represent communities and individuals with honesty and dignity. By embodying the profession’s highest standards, grant professionals can and should welcome discomfort and change while actively pursuing equitable and inclusive linguistic strategies.

References


Love, H., & Vey, J.S. (2020, July 13). Recognizing that words have the power to harm, we commit to using more just language to describe places. Brookings. https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2020/07/13/recognizing-that-words-have-the-power-to-harm-we-commit-to-using-more-just-language-to-describe-places/


Quincy, J. (1821). Report of the committee to whom was referred the consideration of the pauper laws of this commonwealth. Russel and Gardner.

Biographical Information

Melody B. Hernandez (she/they) is a San Francisco based nonprofit grant consultant who believes in working from within communities to directly address systemic issues. Her grant career started as an educator working on Ojibwe reservations in northern Minnesota and provided her first hand knowledge of the effects that intergenerational inequalities can have on a community. Over the years, she began to see grant work as a way to make broader change in the world. Melody primarily works with small to mid-sized nonprofits as they build relationships with new funders and/or for new programs. She has a BA in American Indian Studies from the University of Minnesota Duluth, and can be reached at melodybhernandez@gmail.com.

Dana Patterson (she/her) has spent her career supporting nonprofits at the programmatic and development level. As a grants professional, she works with nonprofits at all stages (from <$100K–$60 million+ operating budgets). She is a Director of Development at Kidango and started her grants consultancy in 2017. Dana firmly believes that each award she’s helped secure, ranging from $500–$10,000,000+, is significant to the unique organization. Dana also serves as the treasurer for the GPA Greater Bay Area Chapter. As a member of the Young Professionals Cohort, Dana supports Planned Parenthood in innovative ways to engage new and existing donors. Dana is a proud Hayward native in the Bay Area and completed her BA in Global Studies and minor in Labor Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. She was one of nine students in her graduating class to receive the highest academic honor granted by the College of Letters & Sciences.

Related to grants and recognizing inequitable systems in philanthropy, Dana hopes to help create a cooperatively owned grants consultancy. Dana can be reached at grants.dana@gmail.com and is always happy to have a conversation about best practices, word counts, or anything else.
Rhonda Poppen, GPC (she/her) is an independent grant consultant [GRANTdog] who offers competitive grant insight to organizations from San Francisco, California to Appalachian regions of Tennessee. She drives positive individual impact through education, hunger relief, workforce development, cancer “thrivership,” and homeless grant initiatives. Rhonda began her nonprofit journey as a North Carolina-based YMCA board member during a challenging recession. She soon became grant writer and, later, Development Director for the Y. Based in San Francisco since 2014, she draws from volunteer leadership experience, gained as recent SF Rotary Club President with 150 members strong, to appreciate and better understand the City’s rich diversity and vibrant culture. Rhonda holds a BBA in Marketing from the University of Texas at Arlington, and can be reached at rhonda@GRANTdog.com.
Best in Show: Merit Awards as Part of a Grant Strategy

Maureen Stabile, GPC
Township High School District 214, Arlington Heights, IL

Abstract
Merit awards can raise an organization’s credibility, steward funders, recognize volunteers and staff, and forge community relationships. All these factors enhance an organization’s sustainability and may increase its likelihood of winning grant funds.

Introduction
Grant professionals sometimes use their writing skills on projects other than grant applications, such as nominations for honorary achievement prizes. When approached judiciously, merit award opportunities can be something more than a side project: they can enrich an organization’s grant strategy and position it for long-term success.

Some clarification of vocabulary is in order. In this strategy paper, the term “award” does not refer to “grant awards,” which are commonly understood as sums of money that a government or other institution gives to an individual or organization for a particular purpose (Collins Dictionary, 2021). Instead, this paper focuses on honorary awards that are given by community organizations, businesses, or other entities in order to recognize achievement or excellence. Such awards may not even include money, but often do involve the conferring of a trophy or the bestowing of a title such as “Outstanding Program/Volunteer/Campaign of the Year.” This strategy paper considers the value of merit awards as one aspect of a larger development plan. The following strategies are based on testimonials collected from the field and the author’s work experience.

Kinds of Awards
The awards landscape offers a variety of options for prospective nominators.
Monetary vs. Honorary

The prospect of material gain is just one factor to consider when weighing an award opportunity. For instance, Nonprofit New York bestows its Nonprofit Excellence Awards, which include cash prizes and scholarships to the Columbia Business School. Most merit awards, however, bring no profit other than prestige. One well-known example is the series of philanthropy awards given by the Association of Fundraising Professionals.

Individual vs. Organizational

In contrast to grant applications, the direct beneficiary of an award nomination might be a person, such as a donor, community partner, or volunteer, rather than an organization. The Association of National Advertisers (ANA) Nonprofit Federation, for example, gives achievement awards both to nonprofit leaders and to outstanding charities such as No Kid Hungry and the AARP Foundation.

National vs. Local

While high-profile awards hold a powerful allure, they tend to go to large organizations with national reach. Such awards are also highly competitive. The Atlantic/Allstate Renewal Awards program, for example, gives $40,000 cash prizes to just five outstanding nonprofits per year out of approximately ten thousand applicants. Nominators will enjoy better luck in competitions sponsored by a local entity such as a city or a chamber of commerce. Smaller awards are not only easier to win, but may also have more meaning to stakeholders. A solid history of small wins can also prepare an organization for larger award opportunities.

General vs. Specific

In addition to comprehensive “outstanding nonprofit” awards, nominators may want to consider niche prizes—which also may offer a better chance of winning. There are awards particular to specific disciplines such as media (the Webby Awards), marketing (PR News Digital Awards) and finance (the CBIS Foundation's Nonprofit CFO of the Year Award). Awards are also given in sectors such as the arts (Americans for the Arts’ National Arts Awards), medicine (Modern Healthcare magazine’s Innovators award), the environment (the National Association of Environmental Professionals’ National Environmental Excellence Awards), senior services (the National Council on Aging’s Trailblazers in Aging Awards), education (the National Science Foundation’s Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching), and many more. For all the examples cited here, nonprofit organizations are eligible.
Committee Selection vs. Popular Vote

In the age of social media, it is common to bestow awards by way of a public vote rather than the deliberation of a qualified committee. Author Vu Le likens these divisive contests to the dystopian “Hunger Games” franchise, arguing that competing with other nonprofits for clicks or votes is a “demeaning” waste of time (Le, 2018, p.1). Grant professionals should consider such warnings seriously before undertaking any popularity-based award opportunities.

Benefit of Merit Awards

Since most merit awards do not come with money, what is to be gained by applying?

Build Credibility

Awards validate the quality of one's work. Awards announce to constituents, peers, funders, and the general public that an organization aims high and succeeds. Organizations can build awareness of their accomplishments by:

- Sending a press release to mass media.
- Plugging the win on social media, annual report, and website.
- Showing an award plaque in a public area, like a lobby or a display window.
- Mentioning the award in an email signature and in a LinkedIn or Twitter profile.
- Including the award in the organizational overview section of grant proposals.

Merit awards can position an organization to win grants, provided they cite the award thoughtfully as evidence for the caliber of their programs and personnel. In an interview with the author, one Chicago-area grantmaker said, “If all proposals were equal, the award could help one stand out if it has relevance to the proposed activities and comes from a respected source. An award could signal a history of performing excellent work or leadership in a field.” Well-publicized awards also build an organization’s name recognition with grantmakers and can be the extra factor that nudges a proposal over the finish line.

A real-life situation that illustrates these principles comes from an ecological nonprofit in the central USA. (Case studies cited here will remain anonymous.) The organization’s president told their grant professional and a marketing staffer to apply for a prestigious national award. The pair were given ample time in their workdays to prepare a
competitive proposal. The small regional entity ended up tying for top honors with a big-city nonprofit. Said the grant professional, “It was a tremendous coup for our organization and has become a concrete signal to our local leaders and donors that we are in a different league now. The cost was tremendous in terms of time and labor, but it was absolutely worth it. It is a symbol of our organization’s transformation.”

**Steward Funders**

Awards are a powerful way to recognize grantmakers and major donors. Many readers are no doubt familiar with the Grantmaker of the Year awards, bestowed at the Grant Professionals Association (GPA) annual conference. The grant officer who nominated one recent winner said that she was motivated by the desire to deepen her organization’s relationship with that funder and gain recognition for their joint accomplishments on a national level. The grantmaker was flattered and featured the news on their website. As a result, the nominator says, the grantmaker is more accommodating to her organization and takes her input more seriously than before.

**Recognize Volunteers**

Awards can also steward those who give time and talent. Consider nominating board members, rank-and-file volunteers, and corporate groups for public service awards from a local volunteer center, United Way, municipal government, or professional association.

**Build Relationships**

Award-related site visits, ceremonies, or media coverage might lead an organization to the next funder, program collaborator, or political ally. About a decade ago, an independent governmental body in California nominated one of their business partners for a prominent environmental award. The business owners received a monetary prize and were invited to a White House conference on conservation. This positive attention helped the nominating agency win additional grant funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

In an inventive twist, the California agency also created an award to recognize people in the community who supported their work. The agency recruited state government personnel to sit on the award panel and persuaded a utility company to give out the awards at their annual barbecue party, which many state and federal officials attended. “It not only raised awareness in the community for the work we were doing, it raised our visibility with those who were providing grant funding for our work, and we often referred to the Partners Award in our education and outreach strategy in grant applications,” said the grant professional involved, adding: “I can say without a doubt we received grant funding because of it, and it didn’t really cost us anything but time.”
Tips for Successful Merit Award Applications

What can an organization do to increase the chances of winning an achievement award?

Mission and Motivation
Consider the awarding entity’s reason for giving the award and then write toward that purpose, just as one would with a grant opportunity. If the award represents a niche field (for example, achievements in social media), then its purpose is to recognize technical excellence. An award from a professional organization (like the GPA) highlights the value of expertise and credentials. Civic organizations, business associations, and government agencies want to call attention to the positive aspects of living, working, and investing in their area. Trade publications and newspapers seek captivating stories that people will want to read. In an application, focus on those points where the awarding organization’s interests align with yours.

Process
The means by which award contests are decided can be obscure. If the application does not outline a scoring process, there might not be one. Some award decisions are made by informal consensus. If, however, an award rubric is provided, focus on the most valuable questions, just as one would with a grant. Try to find out who sits on the award committee. If the decision-makers are experts in your field, provide data and vocabulary that are meaningful to them. If the committee is made up of non-specialists, then compelling case studies or testimonials may persuade them.

Ask First
Confer with a representative of the awarding organization about what they want to see in applications. Also consider approaching past winners for their advice. Finally, ask the nominee whether they want to be considered for the award and would be available to accept it.

Cost-Benefit Analysis
Is applying for merit awards worth it? Here are some factors to consider.

- How long and complicated is the application?
- What is the opportunity cost; that is, what could your organization be doing instead?
- Does the award come with money or other material benefits?
- How prominent and prestigious is the award?
What is the likelihood of winning? Are there many applicants? Are you a good fit?

Are there associated costs, such as membership dues or banquet tickets?

Is the winner obliged to attend other events or make media appearances?

Might a monetary award impose tax obligations on individuals or for-profit businesses? If you have any doubts, consult a tax professional.

What if an award application does not result in a win?

A second-place finish or honorable mention can still be impressive and can be worth mentioning on a list of achievements.

Consider repurposing the award application (or parts of it) into a grant proposal.

Try again the next year. As with grants, persistence pays off.

A final case study illustrates the concept of return on investment. The grant professional at a human-services organization on the West Coast nominated their new branch office for an achievement award from the local Chamber of Commerce. The application process took about three hours. When the agency was chosen as a finalist, staff spent another three hours creating a video for the awards luncheon. The organization won in the nonprofit category. The resulting benefits were both tangible and intangible. The organization received significant positive media coverage. In the two years following the award, the agency also won a new city contract, two Community Development Block grants, and a new donation from a local business. The agency’s grant professional attributed these positive consequences to the ripple effect of the Chamber award.

Opportunities

Where can one find award opportunities? Here are some ideas.

Organizations

- Chambers of Commerce
- Service clubs
- Nonprofit networks (the National Council of Nonprofits has a state-by-state list)
- United Ways
- Volunteer Centers
• Colleges and universities, especially those with nonprofit management programs
• Units of government, including state service commissions
• Professional associations or networking groups
• Foundations

**Media**

• Local newspapers
• Industry newsletters
• Business and nonprofit publications (e.g. the *Chronicle of Philanthropy*)
• Social media, especially channels run by funders or industry leaders in your sector.

**Conclusion**

Merit awards confer prestige which can enhance an organization’s credibility and increase its chances of receiving grant funds. New award-seekers can start with a small, low-stakes opportunity, and then use that experience to determine how merit award competitions can best complement their long-term grant strategy.

**References**


**Biographical Information**

Maureen Stabile, GPC has worked in nonprofit development since 2004 on behalf of social service organizations and a public school district. Maureen has BA and MA degrees in literature and a graduate certificate in nonprofit management. She currently serves as President of the GPA Chicago Area chapter. She can be reached at maureenstabile@gmail.com.
An Anthropological Approach to a Grant Professional’s Toolkit

Erica M. Dziedzic, PhD
Grant Professional and Anthropologist, East Lansing, MI

Abstract
Grant professionals strive to capture the mission and voice of an organization in order to write successful grant proposals. Anthropologists are trained to embed themselves in communities using a skill set that helps them to understand cultural practices. This paper discusses three anthropological strategies that are useful when gathering organizational information, grantseeking, and crafting grant proposal narratives: open-ended questioning, participant observation, and mixed methods data collection that involves collecting qualitative and quantitative data. The focus of these strategies is to tease apart how nonprofit professionals talk about their work versus how they accomplish their work—akin to observing an organization’s mission in practice. Collecting information in this way provides the grant professional with knowledge pertaining to how a nonprofit is organized and program development, which in turn informs more effective grant seeking and proposal writing. Strategies are also considered for information gathering in a COVID-19 social-distancing world.

Introduction
As an anthropologist—specifically, an archaeologist—the author uses grant funding to go on dirt-filled adventures exploring humanity’s ancient past. Transitioning from archaeological project-based proposals to writing grant proposals as an employee for nonprofit organizations requires a great shift in how information is gathered and how proposals are prepared. At the heart of this professional challenge is the question: how do grant professionals capture the mission and voice of an organization in order to write compelling grant proposals? To address this issue, the author put on her anthropologist hat.
This strategy paper describes an anthropological approach to grantwriting using components from the ethnographic method, which is common to social science fields. The following techniques are adapted for collecting information, grant seeking, and proposal writing for nonprofit organizations: open-ended questioning, participant observation, and mixed methods data collection that involves collecting qualitative and quantitative data. Practical examples from the author’s experience describe each methodological component. Finally, as an ongoing learning experience, the author discusses limitations of this approach and adaptations for a post-COVID-19 world.

**The Anthropologist as Grant Professional**

There are many ways in which anthropology informs grantwriting. Anthropology is the study of human cultures throughout space and time via language, behavior, material culture, and human biology. A simple definition of culture is the shared understandings among a group of people or a community that influences how we think and guides our behavior (Muckle & Tubelle de González, 2016). The anthropological perspective is holistic and interconnected. Anthropologists consider how various cultural systems (e.g., social, economic, ideological) and components (e.g., communication, food, housing) guide human behavior and beliefs (Muckle & Tubelle de González, 2016). Anthropology is interdisciplinary by nature. Anthropologists incorporate various theoretical standpoints from other social science disciplines and rely on multiple methods of analysis, both quantitative and qualitative, in order to understand and describe why people do what they do or believe what they believe relative to a specific time and place. Both of these characteristics—interconnectedness and interdisciplinarity—exemplify the work of grant professionals as they search for appropriate grant opportunities and craft proposal narratives that a) reflect the capacity of the people doing the work; and b) present multi-faceted solutions to complex human-centered problems. *But what does an anthropological approach to grant writing look like?*

Using practical techniques from the ethnographic method to collect organizational information and to inform proposal writing is effective. This method, common among social scientists, employs observation, analysis of documents, and interviews to understand the worldview of a community or group of people and how their worldview informs their actions (Muckle & Tubelle de González, 2016; Weller, 2000). The immersive techniques of ethnography allow for a rich, “thick description” of social actions—in-depth observations using the human senses and a process of careful questioning between the anthropologist and informants with the ultimate goal of eliciting the meaning of actions within a cultural context (Geertz, 1973). Ethnography entails, but is not limited to: taking detailed notes during informal and formal
conversations with informants (not just what is said, but how it is said); observing the environment and its surrounding colors, smells, and sounds; and noting who the actors are, their roles in the community, and what they do. Ethnography is particularly suited for business settings because data come from direct observations as they happen and, therefore, can offer critical information in addition to surveys and focus groups (Ladner, 2014).

The Method

Anthropology contributes to the grantwriting profession in many ways. The scope of this paper discusses anthropology’s value mainly in relation to collecting organizational information, grantseeking, and proposal narrative writing. Grant professionals strive to preserve the voices of the staff members and the community they serve in grant proposals. Intentionally using an anthropological lens while collecting organizational information distinguishes between what people say and what people do and situates how programs are developed in the context of an organization’s culture. This differentiation is characterized as observing ideal vs. real behavior, meaning what people say about their actions and beliefs vs. how people actually behave (Muckle & Tubelle de González, 2016). In order to capture a rich and full understanding of an organization, observation of staff at work and analysis of internal documents illustrates how staff talk about their work (i.e., ideal behavior) and how staff accomplish their work (i.e., their actions or real behavior). The following are examples of these ethnographic techniques at work.

Open-ended questions

Anthropologists who are new to a community and in an exploratory stage usually begin by gathering descriptions with unstructured interviews or collecting narrative histories (Spradley, 1979; Weller, 2000). In the setting of a nonprofit organization, this looks like engaging in one-on-one conversations with program directors and volunteers and asking open-ended questions that allow for fluid conversations about program goals and client services. For example, the author spoke to volunteers and staff who provided advocacy services to clients and were engaged in program development. These meetings initially took place in-person and transitioned to Zoom meetings or phone calls once COVID-19 social distancing policies became the norm. The author started conversations by asking these individuals to describe their biggest goals for the program and for clients, and the conversations evolved from there. Staff and volunteers readily shared their advocacy experiences and their perceptions of what clients gained upon leaving the programs. During these conversations, the author asked probing questions for more information or for clarity, but the author mostly listened while
staff or volunteers described programs and their experiences. Social scientists call this the *emic* point of view or capturing the perspective of organization members in their own words (Spradley, 1979; Weller, 2000; Ladner, 2014). By intentionally seeking the *emic* point of view, one learns the language of the organization, which informs grantseeking and the crafting of proposal narratives. For instance, this information gathering exercise allowed the author to identify the theme of empowerment and what it meant to organization members to empower clients, a through-line from the mission of the organization to how individuals spoke about and meaningfully acted on their work. Knowing this underlying theme guided the author through the process of vetting grant opportunities and proposal writing.

*Participant observation*

Anthropologists frequently use this method, which involves immersing oneself in the daily lives of community members and observing regular activities while maintaining a distance in order to carefully consider and reflect on what is happening (Muckle & Tubelle de González, 2016). Within a nonprofit environment, one can observe participants by taking careful notes during meetings and listening to how staff describe their work, their program goals, and what they believe their clients need. When possible, sitting in the background at an organization’s offices and observing how staff interact with clients is incredibly informative and provides glimpses of *real* behavior. Listening and observing how supporters and volunteers talk about the work of the organization provides another valuable perspective; this can be done in-person or virtually. As the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded, the author used a nonprofit organization’s social media channels to observe how supporters talked about its work and mission. The author also attended fundraising events via Zoom, which were excellent opportunities to witness how supporters talked about an organization’s work in real time. Collecting these various perspectives of an organization’s work and impact in a community and observing staff-client interactions can add rich, differentiating details to a proposal narrative.

*Mixed methods data collection, qualitative (documentation)*

Pre- and post-surveys, when accessible, are crucial documents that report on clients’ progress and experiences with services, whether they are completed by clients or staff members. These valuable pieces of information often illustrate the clients’ perspectives of services—a glimpse of clients’ voices—which is critical in understanding the impact of the organization’s work and the *real* behavior of staff members. Documentation written by the Executive Director (ED) and program directors are great examples of learning the language of an organization and how the ED and staff visualize the work of the organization (ideal
behavior). Conducting a comparison of client surveys and internal staff documents is an excellent source of real vs. ideal behavior that adds a critical layer of understanding regarding the culture of the organization, which is very useful during information gathering and grantseeking stages. It can also help clarify client needs.

**Mixed methods data collection, quantitative data**

Tallying the results of fundraising events, such as the number of donors, their geographic locations, and the amount of dollars raised, is a great way to quantitatively assess community support. Additionally, tracking the number of clients served and the amount and type of grant support an organization has won enables them to quantitatively demonstrate their impact. Quantitative and qualitative data are key sets of information for both anthropologists and grant professionals. The numbers and the narrative both tell the story of an organization and, when taken together, are critical bodies of information for vetting of funding opportunities and proposal writing.

Employing an anthropological approach to grantwriting teases out the difference between real versus ideal behavior of program staff and volunteers, which enhances the grant professional's knowledge of program design and development. Moreover, this approach increases knowledge of organizational development as it pertains to grantseeking because it reveals the kinds of grants the organization has the capacity to manage, as opposed to what the grant professional has in mind. For instance, applying for multiple foundation grants with smaller funding awards may be more suitable than applying for state or federal grants with large funding awards. Certain foundation grants that offer smaller grant awards and/or have less stringent application and reporting processes often allow a degree of freedom for incorporating the language and values of the organization into the proposal. This type of funder may be a better fit for some nonprofit organizations, compared to funders that offer larger awards with complex application and reporting processes.

**Limitations**

There are limitations to this anthropological approach to grantwriting. The activities described in this paper were carried out for a nonprofit organization with a staff size of fewer than ten individuals. This idea has not been tested with organizations with larger staff sizes. Access to confidential documents, such as client surveys and internal documents written by management staff, are extremely helpful in gaining perspective of different voices (e.g., staff, supporters, and clients), but may not always be available for use, especially if the grant professional is not an employee of the organization. Observation and event attendance may not always be permissible; for instance, due to HIPAA compliance and rules.
and regulations. Furthermore, the author conducted some of this work pre-COVID-19 social distancing mandates when it was easier to move in group settings. However, witnessing the incredible work of nonprofit organizations at any level is helpful for gaining a deeper picture of their mission and organizational culture. Strategies to accommodate current COVID-19 safety precautions and for those grantwriting consultants whose clients are long-distance could include watching recorded events organized by the nonprofit or requesting to attend virtual staff meetings and events. Finally, this approach is time-consuming work that may not always be realistic, especially for freelance consultants who have commitments to multiple clients.

Conclusion

An anthropological approach to grantwriting enables the grant professional to capture the mission and voice of a nonprofit organization using three strategies: open-ended questioning, participant observation, and collecting qualitative and quantitative data. This approach incorporates various perspectives of an organization’s mission and distinguishes between how nonprofit professionals talk about their work versus what they are doing or accomplishing, providing an in-depth understanding of an organization’s culture. These strategies are useful when gathering organizational information, grantseeking, and crafting proposal narratives. Knowledge gained from language, actions (e.g., services, support), documentation, beliefs, and staff-client interactions all tell the story of an organization—capturing the voices and visions of those who are creating social change. This information can strengthen any grant proposal and set the organization apart from other nonprofits within their region that may be offering similar services.

References


Biographical Information

Erica M. Dziedzic, PhD is a grant professional and anthropologist living in East Lansing, MI. Erica started her career as an archaeologist and has worked on field projects across the United States and in Peru, Bolivia, and Senegal. She transitioned to grantwriting in order to apply the research skills she learned in academia to public sector work. Erica holds a BA in Anthropology from the University of Michigan and both her MA and PhD in Anthropology from Michigan State University. She is a member of the Grant Professionals Association and the American Anthropological Association. Erica can be reached at ericadziedzic23@gmail.com.
Strategic Pivot to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: Crafting a Competitive Grant Application

Brittany Alexander, GPC
Grant Professional, Washington, DC

Abstract

The terms “diversity,” “equity,” and “inclusion” echo through grantmaking institutions. As a result, these institutions are analyzing how their grantees address all three topics internally and externally. This strategy paper explains how to incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion in grant applications. These strategies apply to early career and mid-level grant professionals in various fields. Applying these action items while developing a proposal can distinguish an organization’s case for funding in a competitive application process.

Introduction

As noted above in the abstract, diversity, equity, and inclusion (also known as DEI) have become key touchpoints for both grantseekers and funders to address in today’s philanthropic environments. Several foundations analyze how their grantees address DEI both internally and externally. Diversity includes human differences, such as race and ethnicity, disability, and gender (Chow & GrantCraft, 2018). Equity is defined as the promotion of justice, impartiality, and fairness within the processes and distribution of resources by institutions or systems (Chow & GrantCraft, 2018). Inclusion refers to the degree to which diverse individuals can fully participate in decision-making processes (Paradiso, 2020).

Strategies to Incorporate DEI

Several foundations are exploring their grantees’ commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. For instance, the Ford Foundation asks potential grantees to explain what forms of diversity (gender, racial, cultural, religious, immigrant/refugee background, linguistic, etc.) they...
think are important for strengthening the quality of the work they are proposing. The Foundation also asks grantees how they will draw upon diverse perspectives amongst the constituents they will serve. Similarly, the McKnight Foundation integrated a diversity, equity, and inclusion information form into its grant application process. The form requires potential grantees to address whether their organization has an inclusive workplace and how their grant proposal advances equity (McKnight Foundation, 2018).

Answering such questions requires grant applicants to explain how their organization’s commitment to DEI efforts extends beyond legal requirements (see Figure 1 from the McKnight Foundation below). An anonymous member from Grant Zone, a private community for members of Grant Professionals Association, provided the following suggestions in response to a 2019 post:

If the organization operates a school-based program, demographics, and numbers of students who receive free and reduced-price school meals are available. If the organization is a hospital or health program, demographics and payer mix are available (Anonymous Member, 2019).

![Figure 1: DEI Form (McKnight Foundation, 2018)](image-url)
A grant applicant should also consider the following when answering DEI questions:

- Describe the steps your organization is taking to ensure underserved populations have access to its services.
- Explain how the board and staff represent your organization’s target population. If not, outline your organization’s plan to diversify its board and staff. To advance diversity, equity, and inclusion in the communities they serve, organizations must understand the people being served and the communities impacted.
- If your organization offers programs, explain how it reduces cost barriers for participants.
- Is cultural competency training provided to the board and staff?

If your organization has not implemented DEI strategies, it is important to be transparent about this during the grant application process. First, identify the challenges your organization faces in implementing such strategies. Then, describe the proposed solutions. A scenario is provided below.

**Scenario:** Your organization has maintained a 50% turnover rate among minority staff for three consecutive years.

**Response:** Explain the steps your organization is taking to implement an equitable hiring and selection process. Consider how your organization prioritizes professional development for new hires.

**Importance of DEI Investment**

There is a growing shift in the perception of diversity, equity, and inclusion within organizations. The early stages of diversity education focused on 1) maintaining compliance to avoid legal consequences and 2) increasing individual diversity awareness (Vaughn, 2007). Individual awareness did not create systematic change. As a result, many systems, structures, and processes remained unaffected (Vaughn, 2007).

Diversity, equity, and inclusion are key elements in enhancing organizational effectiveness. According to Green 2.0’s 2017 survey on diversity, 100% of senior foundation staff and more than 90% of nonprofit professionals recognized that diversity enables organizations to be more connected to the communities they serve. Including perspectives from diverse individuals leads to better solutions to social issues. Ninety percent of all respondents also recognized that diversity increases creativity within an organization.

Philanthropic investments have not always prioritized DEI efforts. In 2013, the largest U.S. foundations grant awards totaled $24 billion...
Data retrieved from Candid, formerly named Foundation Center, suggests that only about 7% of those funds were designated to support ethnic and racial minorities (Chow & GrantCraft, 2018). National foundations are leading the movement in supporting organizations that address disparities and inequities. In 2015, The Ford Foundation launched a $1 billion BUILD (Building Institutions and Networks) initiative to help its social justice grantees build resilience and achieve sustainability (Ford Foundation, 2021). Since 2015, the foundation has awarded grants to 350 organizations through the initiative (Ford Foundation, 2021). More than 60% of the organizations are led by women. In 2021, the foundation announced an additional $1 billion commitment to address inequalities (Ford Foundation, 2021).

According to the foundation, the BUILD grants enable grantees to create clearer long-term strategies, make critical investments in talent and leadership, and invest in their financial sustainability (Ford Foundation, 2021). Other foundations are following suit. In 2021, the Walton Family Foundation announced a $15 million grant to the 1954 Project, an initiative of the Cleveland Avenue Foundation for Education to advance Black leadership in education (Walton Family Foundation, 2021).

There are several resources available for organizations that wish to advance their grantseeking practices using a DEI lens. Examples of resources include:

- **Tools for Organizational Self-Assessment Related to Racial Equity**, Coalition of Communities of Color
- **Advancing the Mission: Tools for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion**, Annie E. Casey Foundation
- **Racial Equity Impact Assessment Toolkit**, Race Forward

**Conclusion**

Advancing DEI efforts have been an ongoing organizational challenge. While organizations have made progress, continual work is required. As organizations continue to advance DEI efforts, they should assess and identify gaps to determine where to concentrate their focus. Funders collect grantee data that highlights how organizations support diversity, equity, and inclusion. To craft a competitive grant application, applicants should incorporate a DEI lens that best reflects the organization’s mission, values, and organizational culture.
References


Biographical Information

**Brittany Alexander, GPC** is the development manager for a national organization. Since 2015, Brittany has secured more than $13 million for small, mid-size, and large organizations. She has unique experiences as a grant professional for both direct service and advocacy organizations at the state and national levels. She can be reached at baalexander08@gmail.com.
A Call For Strengthened Self-Governance Among Consultants

Fielding Jezreel, MSW, GPC
Jezreel Consulting LLC, St. Louis, MO

Abstract
The Grant Professionals Association (GPA) Code of Ethics states members are expected to practice their profession with the highest sense of integrity, honesty, and truthfulness to maintain and broaden public confidence. Discussions of ethical behavior are, at their core, about self-governance.

Introduction
The author, during college, was informally introduced to the concept of self-governance. College students are notoriously bad at self-governance, but students quickly adopted self-governance to preserve the hands-off approach of the college administration. Using self-control and collective action, students effectively dealt with situations (i.e. hosting a party in a dorm room) without needing to involve student affairs, thus maintaining their freedom. However, this approach also meant a community of people were often punished for the actions of one or two students, if the group could not effectively convince the guilty party to take responsibility.

During the author’s second year, a student and their guest carried a couch from the shared lounge to the second floor and tossed it out a window. The couch broke and needed to be replaced. While several dormmates were aware of who had tossed the couch out the window, the guilty party refused to take responsibility. The cost of the couch was divided equally among everyone who lived in the building. The author was personally billed for approximately 1/30th of a couch, a small price to pay to learn the lesson of holding peers accountable.

Whether it is personal experience with peers, stories that circulate, or public exchanges on GrantZone, GPA members likely are aware of cases where peers seem to be tiptoeing along the edge of an ethical cliff. The challenges of consulting open additional dilemmas unique within the profession. By focusing self-control and an understanding of best practices in the grants profession, this paper encourages consultants
to hold themselves to the highest ethical standards. This is important because consulting grant professionals collectively pay the price for bad behavior of consulting grant professionals. Trust is eroded. Boards refuse to approve consulting contracts. Organizations try to do it all alone without the support that grant professionals can offer them to be successful.

**Context and Trends**

A variety of factors make this subject a timely topic to discuss.

1. As people search for more autonomy, higher/fairer pay, or added flexibility in their work life, the field of grant consultancy is growing. “Gig work” is more common and less stigmatized and grantwriting lends itself to working from home. Trends appear to show grant professionals turning to consulting earlier in their careers compared to previous years.

2. Grantwriting services are in high demand. In many parts of the country, contracted grant professionals are constantly turning down work because they are at capacity. This trend is likely to continue. Contributing to the rise in demand for consulting services, nonprofits are more comfortable with remote and contractual workers.

3. GPA professionalized the field by drafting a Code of Ethics and creating infrastructure for the Grant Professionals Certification Institute. GPA paved a path for this critique. Together, consultants can pave the path toward developing a code of ethics of consulting grant professionals.

Some ethical questions are clear-cut, while others are contextual (Lexon, 2008). Geography, client base, and other factors may impact just how ethical or unethical any given action or decision may be. Below, a few examples are provided.

**Case Discussions**

**Case Facts:** Ashley is new to consulting. She spent two years working full-time in grants for a nonprofit, invested heavily in professional development, and determined she was ready to start taking on contract work with the intention to grow contract work into a full-time endeavor. A colleague introduced her to a company, Clarity Ltd., interested in pursuing a Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) grant. She conducts a little bit of research about SBIR and the company in advance of her introductory call with Clarity. She is excited to learn about the technology Clarity is developing. In the conversation with Clarity, she is asked if she is familiar with SBIR and what experiences she has with MedTech. She shares she is familiar with SBIR and her background of working at a
research university will help her get up to speed quickly with work Clarity will propose.

**Ethical Questions:** Should Ashley share directly with Clarity that she has never worked on an SBIR grant before, and in fact, did not even know about the program prior to her colleague giving her the information leading up to the call? Should Ashley accept the work if it is offered to her? Broadly, how direct should consulting grant professionals be about their work experience?

**Discussion:** As a consultant, the anxiety of signing the next contract is very real, and it is rewarding to find work personally exciting and fulfilling, even if it is outside the scope of a consultant’s experience. According to the Code of Ethics 7: Members shall recognize their individual boundaries of competence and are forthcoming and truthful about their professional experience, knowledge and expertise.

Ashley does not lie to the potential client, but she does skirt their question. A more direct response, and more ethical, would have been “I have never written an SBIR grant, but I have written several NSF grants focused on medical technologies for a research university. This is work I am passionate about, I believe I can do the work successfully, and I am willing to spend time learning more about SBIR. I just want to be upfront with you about my experience.”

A similar scenario often comes up when a client asks the consultant if they have experience with [insert name of funder]. If the consultant has submitted an application to the funder, the answer can be “yes” without lying. But beneath that question, which the nonprofit should ask, is, “Do you have a history of success with this funder, and do you have a history of success with this particular funding announcement?”

**Case Facts:** Jorge runs a consulting firm and after many years of consulting has a strong network that he uses to garner business. Like many founders of grantwriting firms, the grantwriting is done by subcontractors; Jorge spends his time networking and responding to requests for grant professionals. However, unlike many grantwriting firms, Jorge submits his personal résumé and a biography to secure work. On application materials, he does not share he has subcontractors; he does not have a website and instead provides links to his personal LinkedIn page.

**Ethical Questions:** Is Jorge implying, through omission, that he will be the writer completing the work? If so, is this a direct violation of the GPA Code of Ethics?

**Discussion:** If the bid includes a lie—for example, Jorge explicitly states he does not use subcontracted labor—then the answer is simple. However, if the bid questions do not ask about subcontracted labor, then there is not an outright lie, making the behavior questionable, at a minimum. The GPA Code of Ethics does not provide much insight (reference Code of Ethics 7, above). However, technically, Jorge has
not lied about his experience, knowledge, or expertise—which are all exemplary. However, the extent to which a client will benefit from this vast experience is unclear as he has not written grants in several years. Further discussion of this case example might focus on whether this is an example best left for self-governance/ethics (Schultz, 2007; Tams, 2019) or whether it should move towards compliance—much like Code of Ethics 19: Members shall not accept or pay a finder’s fee, commission, or percentage compensation based on grants and shall take care to discourage their organizations from making such payments.

Case Facts: Chris starts a new consulting group, Minnesota Money Makers, and has offered six other grant professionals the opportunity to join as subcontractors. It is a real “who’s who” of grant professionals in Minnesota and everyone is very excited about the variety of unique, quality services offered through one consulting group. As Chris starts to draft marketing materials, he asks each subcontractor to provide a short biography, a headshot, a list of the major grantmakers from which they have received awards, and the total dollar amount awarded. The subcontractors eagerly provide this information they assume will accompany their profile.

The website goes live and the subcontractors realize the lists of agencies each provided, along with the total grant dollars they had personally raised, are now posted on the website as if Chris’ consulting group held sole responsibility for earning the grant money.

Ethical Questions: Does this approach misrepresent the history and experience of the consulting group? How should independent consultants and consulting groups distinguish between individual and group efforts and how should they talk about successes?

Discussion: As a new consulting group, it is important to show the intended audience the experience and types of work the team excels in providing to clients. The best consulting groups are greater than the sum of their parts—they offer a new way of getting grant work done or they offer a higher quality of service because of the structures and teams they have in place. Others are merely a loosely-structured group of subcontractors that take work from the business owner who charges more than they pay the subcontractors to pay themselves for finding work. In this case, Chris is using the personal successes of independent contractors to promote their new business. While their intent was simply to bring together several of the area’s best consulting grant professionals into one space, the way the website discusses the arrangement is misleading. This could be a simple fix: “Minnesota Money Makers brings together some of the region’s most experienced, unique, and successful consulting grant professionals. Combined, our Grant Professionals have secured $420 million in federal grant funds to benefit our community.” The discussion here rests on how consulting firms market their services and how work is credited.
Next Steps
Just as the author wanted to maintain their autonomy in college, it is safe to assume grant professionals likely want to maximize their ability to make decisions as a consultant based on the unique context of their work. Could GPA construct a more specific code of ethics or even a compliance guide just for grant consultants? That discussion could be worth pursuing. However, this gray area also requires grant professionals to devise new strategies to maintain and grow trust with the communities and entities they serve. One person throwing a couch out of the window—or, in this case, one grant consultant stumbling along the edge of an ethical cliff—does, in fact, hurt all.

There are likely many ways to make ethical decision-making more accessible to consultants, starting with the following possibilities:

1. Pull back the veil on reporting unethical behavior through GPA through a more robust FAQ page, an anonymous question and answer session at a conference or monthly call, and/or an annual report on potentially unethical grant activity. How many reports are made each year? What types of reports are made? Is there action that can be taken that does not include stripping someone of their membership/GPC? Answers to these questions would help to normalize reporting and provide the opportunity to reinforce the standards that may be common issues.

2. Provide opportunities for GPA members to “be the jury” in case examples similar to the ones provided above. Conversations among consultants about key contextual features can help to develop norms around ethical and unethical behavior.

3. Consultants may not always agree, but in the process, there is the opportunity to reflect on behaviors and hear others voice potential concerns.

4. Normalize asking peers for their feedback on potentially unethical behavior (the consultant’s own behavior) and normalize sitting with responses that make oneself uncomfortable or suggest a re-examining of behavior.

5. Create a “body of practice.” GPA serves, in part, as a collector/curator of a body of knowledge. GPA members are missing a body of practice to similarly guide consultants along a path of being business owners as well as grant professionals. Consultants can collectively create this resource, but the structures and platform are missing.

6. Build a better network. Many grant consultants work alone, and none can justify writing every type of grant out there. Consultants might identify individual strengths and experiences and ask the
following questions: What type of work should I not be doing? Who do I know that does that work? What types of proposals do I want to gain experience writing? Who do I know that I could collaborate with to gain the desired experience?

Conclusion
Consultants must have a network to avoid ethical violations. That network provides feedback on ethically ambiguous situations, creates opportunities to best serve clients through referrals, and serves as a failsafe for unethical action. Consulting grant professionals provide such a valuable service to nonprofits. Professional integrity must be upheld. It takes GPA members recommitting to the shared code of ethics, but even going one step further: a commitment to an abundance mindset, a collaborative spirit, and, when necessary, advisement from peers.

References


Biographical Information
Fielding Jezreel, MSW, GPC specializes in helping nonprofits plan and apply for federal grants. With a soft spot for small, grassroots organizations, she also helps nonprofits streamline their grantseeking strategy through training and one-on-one coaching. Fielding has worked in the grants field since 2013. She has a Master of Social Work degree from the Brown School at Washington University in St. Louis. After three years on the board of the St. Louis Chapter of the Grant Professionals Association, she continues to support the Programs Committee to develop high-quality professional development opportunities for grant professionals. She can be reached at fielding.jezreel@gmail.com.
How Geography Shapes the Grantmaking Landscape

Liz Kinne, GPC
Grant Pro Group, Salt Lake City, UT

Abstract
When looking for funders and grant opportunities, grants professionals often tap into various online databases such as the Foundation Directory Online or GrantStation. If the funder's name is known (e.g., Ford Foundation), then one can easily learn more about that particular grantmaker by researching their profile, website and 990s. But what if you do not know who these grantmakers are in the first place? There are over 86,000 foundations in the United States alone, not including corporate giving. With so many keyword search options available, what is the best way to find funding? Answering the “where” question first will allow grant researchers to understand where funders are giving their money, and avoid spending unnecessary time learning about misaligned funders.

Introduction
Finding funding and establishing sustainable and meaningful partnerships can be a difficult task. There are a plethora of private foundations and government grant opportunities available, and given the abundance of information available online, where should one start to find an appropriate match?

When using online research tools, there are many keyword search options including area of interest, target population, or type of support. While these are important keyword research parameters to consider, using a place-based approach may be a more efficient and effective way to find new partners as most grantmakers have a geographic preference for their giving. This paper provides an overview of how geography shapes the grantmaking landscape, and why grant applicants should incorporate a geographic framework when planning programs and projects.
Grantmakers give locally, regionally, and nationally, and it is best to understand where the money goes and why

Both novice and experienced grant researchers may feel overwhelmed by the sheer volume of grant opportunities available today. There are currently over 900 federal grant programs offered by 26 different grant-making agencies (grants.gov, 2021). According to the most recent data available, there were 86,203 foundations in the United States in 2015, which funded grants totaling $62.8 billion. In the same year, 92% of foundations were independent organizations, while 3% were corporate, and 1% were community organizations (Foundation Center, 2021).

According to the Foundation Stats published on Foundation Directory Online, the state of New York has the most grantmaking operating foundations (11%), second is California (9%) with Pennsylvania coming in third (8%).

It is likely that most of these grantmakers have geographic parameters.

At first glance, grant researchers might perceive that their mission strongly aligns with a particular funder’s focus areas such as animal rescue, human rights, or hunger. However, further investigation may reveal that the applicant’s organization does not serve the funder’s geographic priorities. This may be a regular stumbling block that can be avoided if the researcher sorts or filters the data by geography first.

When using an online database tool, start by entering the state where your organization resides and primarily offers services. This will present all of the funders located within your same geographic area. However, grantseekers must conduct a more nuanced analysis from here. Just because a funder’s address is in a particular city does not mean that this is the only place that they fund. Some private foundation funders give in areas outside of where their mailing address is located due to trustee preferences.

What if your organization provides goods and services on a national scale or would like to expand its services nationally? How can it be determined if a grantmaker supports organizations with a nationwide reach within the United States? The Kresge Foundation, for example, currently has a grantmaking and social investing focus that targets “America’s Cities.” Since the foundation’s wealth was amassed through the S.S. Kresge Company and eventually the nationwide Kmart chain, they also make specific grants to organizations located in their hometown of Detroit, Michigan. When tapping into an online database that offers a map feature, be sure to use it. This feature shows where the grantmakers are located as well as all of the grant awards that were made to the same location. This detail can reveal information about grantmakers that give nationwide and generate a new list of prospects.
If needed, refine the geographic parameters further sorting by county and/or city. When filtering by city (if using an online database), the information will include the funder’s mailing address, but it may also indicate the city(s) that the funder supports, and those may not be one and the same. A funder headquartered in Missouri may also make grants to organizations based in Omaha, Nebraska where a branch of a parent company is located. If the grantseeker is searching on behalf of a hyper-local organization such as an arts council, they will want to know who all of the funders are within their respective communities. This can be an effective way to garner information about potential partners, such as private family foundations, who were otherwise unknown.

**What if a grantseeker wants to expand into new areas? How can they best position themselves with aligned funders?**

It is important for grantseekers to thoroughly understand the geographies they serve. For instance, the Senior Charity Care Foundation (SCCF) is a nonprofit that serves a specialized target population within a specific part of Utah. This organization restricted their geographic area because as a start-up they could not serve the entire state. Instead, they first focused on five counties within a densely populated part of the state and only expanded to new communities when funding became available.

To clearly understand and articulate the need and thus justify where expansion should occur, SCCF performed a service area gap analysis. This involved cataloguing the physical address and number of people already served into a master list (i.e., Excel file) for easy sorting. This allowed the information to be easily sortable by city and/or county. In addition, all of the unserved locations and potential number of new people that could be reached in each particular location were catalogued. SCCF then mapped this data using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology which provided a compelling visual representation of the service area gaps and provided a data-based justification for why specific communities were ripe for expansion due to unmet needs.

The results of the service area gap analysis equipped the Senior Charity Care Foundation with a powerful mapping tool to find new funders. This level of detail empowered SCCF to successfully win highly competitive Community Development Block Grant awards from various entitlement cities. Being able to delineate how many more people in a particular city could be served if a grant was provided made for a persuasive argument. While the service area gap analysis required some upfront work and technical GIS expertise, the investment was well spent. In just two short years, SCCF was successful in securing five new CDBG grant contracts valued at $50,000 annually which expanded their impact to serve 20–30% more seniors each year.
What about U.S. foundations and grantmakers wishing to make grants abroad?

Nearly 90% of international giving is via U.S.-based organizations working overseas. Given the prevalence of these types of entities, it’s certainly worth looking into if a grantseeker’s organization aims to serve internationally. According to the *Global Philanthropy Report* published in 2018 by Paula D. Johnson with the Harvard Kennedy School, Institutional philanthropy has a global reach. 260,358 foundations in 38 countries and Hong Kong were identified, representing only a partial picture of the sector (Johnson, 2018).

More than 90 percent of identified foundations are independent, but there are strong regional variations. Independent foundations are the predominant model in the United States (96 percent) and in Europe (87 percent); corporate foundations are significant in Latin America (50 percent); government-linked foundations are common in China (38 percent) and the UAE (73 percent); and family foundations are prevalent in Africa (35 percent).

The Council on Foundations has some great resources for organizations looking to partner with grantmakers that give on a global basis (Council on Foundations, 2017). Grantwatch.com also features a search engine that identifies 332 international grantmakers.

Taking a placed-based approach to grantseeking and partnership building is not without its complications

For some organizations, restricting the funds they receive to serving beneficiaries from specific locations can be too much of an administrative and accounting challenge. But not all grantmakers are as geographically limited as the CDBG entitlement cities. Some grantmakers fund at the statewide level which can make them an ideal candidate for organization’s serving multiple counties, or the unhoused in their non-metropolitan community and/or for organizations that lack the address data of their beneficiaries (e.g., an animal rescue).

And while some funders’ online profiles will delineate a specific state they support, it is important to dig deeper to see exactly where their awards went. It could be that the funder’s online profile states they fund throughout California; however, when researching their 990, it may reveal that only organizations based in Silicon Valley received funding. Spending more time researching these geographic parameters on the front end will help to narrow a more viable prospect list.

Conclusion

There are many paths that a grantseeker can take when looking for new partners and the search can be overwhelming. Through the lens
of geography, grantseekers can optimize their search for potential funding sources for their programs or projects. While there are many other aspects of a funder’s profile that are important to consider when deciding if a funder is a good match (e.g., giving limitations, types of support, and subject areas) understanding, in-depth, the geographic preferences of a funder will better inform the match selection process and improve a grantseeker’s chances of securing funding.

References


Biographical Information

Liz Kinne, GPC founded Grant Pro Group, LLC in 2013 and has over twenty years’ experience serving as the lead grant researcher, writer, and manager for dozens of nonprofits and government agencies. As a professional grantwriter and fundraising practitioner, Liz is recognized as a woman of integrity and compassion who has provided her services and expertise to more than 100 nonprofits and government agencies, from health and human services and arts and youth development to post-secondary education, economic development, and ecological conservation.

Liz has held the prestigious Grant Professional Credential from the Grant Professional Certification Institute since 2008 and has authored and co-managed 600+ grant
awards. She also published a Strategy Paper in May 2015 for the GPA's annual Journal.

Liz entered the world of grants early in her career when she managed a publicly-funded grantmaking program designed to support river habitat restoration projects for the Washington State Department of Fish & Wildlife. Her lived experience with poverty during her childhood motivates her to establish meaningful partnerships and manage resources with efficiency, equity, and wisdom. Apart from her professional pursuits, Liz spends her spare time with friends and family and loves to ski. She can be reached at liz@grantprogroup.com.