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Editors' Note

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the 2022 iteration of the *Grant Professionals Association Journal.* As GPA's primary research publication, the *Journal* provides a robust outlet for scholarly consideration of the profession, evaluation of best practices, and discussions on how to effectively improve and expand the grants field as a whole. The *Journal* is dedicated to contributing to continuous growth for both grant professionals and the grants profession.

This year's *Journal* features four articles that reflect a variety of perspectives. These pieces address topics ranging from the value of professional service awards to the lessons learned from implementing a large research grant at a teaching-intensive university. We greatly appreciate the authors for providing their time, effort, and care to produce new research and insights that will benefit our professional community.

In addition to scholarly articles, this year's *Journal* includes *GPA Strategy Papers* published in 2022. *Strategy Papers* provide an in-depth sounding board about a single topic that can apply to grant professionals in a variety of career stages and/or areas of specialization. *Strategy Papers* are shorter than full-length *Journal* articles and offer practical, actionable solutions to current and emerging challenges within the grants profession. Like *Journal* articles, *Strategy Papers* undergo a double-blind peer-review process.

For the 2023 *Journal* and *Strategy Papers,* we invite you to provide your valuable knowledge and expertise to these publications, either as an author or a peer reviewer. We seek articles that address new concepts in our field, offer research and literature-based analysis on a particular topic, examine best practices in grantsmanship, or evaluate any of the GPCI competencies and skills in relation to your unique experiences. We are also happy to welcome new peer reviewers to review *Journal* and *Strategy Paper* manuscripts. Please contact us at journal@grantprofessionals.org if you are interested in either of these roles.

We would like to express our sincere thanks to the authors, editorial board, and peer review managers for contributing their time and effort to creating this year's *Journal.* We also deeply appreciate the thoughtfulness 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* (7th 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.

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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

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Amanda Day, GPC
Fundraising HayDay, Canton, GA

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GPC Competency 08: Knowledge of practices and services that raise the level of professionalism of grant developers

Abstract

Grant professional service awards have tremendous value to the profession, recipient, and community. To ensure such awards have longevity and honor those who make their mark in our field, members of the profession should embrace the awards, seek out worthy recipients, and strive to emulate those who have won. The case is made that everyone is capable of being an award winner and leaders are needed. We acknowledge that some of our pioneers are retiring and leaving the field for a variety of reasons, and we need to capture their stories now. By developing a public repository of their achievements through an award process, all of us will have access to those stories and will be able to continue the best practices evidenced in past achievements. The grant profession, through professional service awards, is able to thank those who came before us, appreciate the breadth and depth of their volunteerism and work, and value the foundation that those we honor have provided for all of us.

Introduction

Shortly after the acceptance speech of the 2021 Class of Distinguished Fellows recipient during the Grant Professionals Association (GPA) Annual Conference, the authors discussed their concern that many of our profession's early heroes and standard bearers were beginning to retire or leave the field due to a variety of concerns including the pandemic, medical reasons, technology literacy, and burnout. While reviewing award

programs across a multitude of professions, it was evident that many were trying to recapture the root of these awards. Why did these different professions start giving them out, why were the winners chosen, and how should the awards proceed in the future?

The grant profession is lucky in that our profession has both institutional memory available and current professionals who seek to hone their skillsets through training and credentials. It is always a good time to write down those stories, create that public memory, honor those who were our forefathers and mothers, and revel in what they accomplished in such a short period of time. Promoting the awards that are available and encouraging the grant community, both individually and collectively, to participate in the award process is paramount to the success of our profession.

To accomplish this, it is important to look at why the profession needs awards, what is their value, and how can they help the profession as it matures and grows.

Public memory is a lasting legacy, and these awards promote that concept along with the benefits the profession reaps from the work and accomplishment of award recipients. A public memory is a shared vision of the past that is useful to the present and the future. The process of constructing a past that is worthy of commemoration typically raises awareness about an extraordinary range of perspectives about the past. Public memory can be understood as a form of organized remembering, or civic remembrance. It "mobilizes a range of discourses and messages about the past and how it should be remembered" (Burgoyne, 2006, pp. 208–209). And it should be remembered.

Identifying the leaders, the idea people, the doers, and the dedicated followers is critical to answering questions of why the grantwriter strives to be the grant professional, and there is a sense of responsibility that pushes some among our profession to even more, to greatness. But for those who are serious about their responsibility and accomplish the type of feats that are generational and innovative, we need to remember them, laud their pursuit, and applaud this journey.

This means stopping and looking around at who should be honored but has not been chosen. Who would best represent our field, who has given of themself, and who has given more? Consider those who provide services to their employers and the community, but also to their profession.

Ordinary people can be leaders and heroes. These leaders need to be commemorated and pushed forward to the podium. The grant profession is relatively young and its leaders, the heroes, these distinguished few, must be encouraged to accept the acclaim presented to them. Too often, either due to humility or misguided modesty, they shy away from the award. The profession needs our heroes, we need our heroes' stories, and we need to build our public memory. This is needed to provide the next generation of professionals with examples of what a true champion is

like. Accept with pride the nomination of your peers and rejoice in the recognition afforded you for the example you have delivered.

Everyday Heroes

"A Hall of Fame is meant to be a place where those top legends at the peak of their game in their chosen genre or industry are honoured and commemorated for their efforts and legacies they left behind for others to emulate or follow," according to Welton (2018, para. 1). The Distinguished Fellow Award for Grant Professionals is essentially a hall of fame, and it has the same purpose and responsibilities of honoring our legacies and providing a guiding light for those that come after them. The award not only serves to uplift the recipient, but their organizational affiliations as well. Frey and Gallus (2015) state, "Such honors patently confer considerable prestige inside and outside the boundaries of the respective firm," (para. 9). "Awards are a welcome means of honouring dedication and commitment. They delight their winners, motivate high performance, create role models- and come at low or even no cost," continues Frey and Gallus (2015, para. 1).

In addition to the Distinguished Fellow Award, several other awards have been developed to honor our professional champions, including GPA President's Award, the Grant Professionals Certification Institute (GPCI) President's Award, GPCI Pauline Annarino Award, the two GPA Grant Maker of the Year Awards (private and public sector categories), the National Grant Management Association (NGMA) Impact Awards, NGMA Newton Award, and the NGMA Distinguished Service Award. Each of these names and recognizes a hero and in doing so has raised the awareness and credibility of all within our profession. The awards encourage the thousands of grant professionals who are studying and following the award recipients and the associations that confer the awards. Additionally, through social media, press releases, conference events, and word of mouth, these awards celebrate the profession, increasing the attention afforded the profession and the professionals who have chosen this field.

You might ask why this matters; why create heroes within our profession? Heroes do matter, and any recognition for a profession raises awareness and credibility for that profession. Those few individuals (and organizations) who embody the professional ethics, standards, skills, and competencies while performing their work at a superior level of proficiency should be singled out and held up as models. These everyday heroes, according to "Why Heroes Matter (Especially Now)" (2020), "exemplify cherished values, display qualities we admire, show us how to overcome challenges—and call us to stand up for others. They help build a better world for us all" (para. 1). Heroes exceed what is expected of them, they make a positive impact on people's lives, and they rise above and beyond the ordinary.

These qualities are on display in our profession, and it is our responsibility to seek out the heroes of the grant community and shine a light on their activities and deeds. Unfortunately, many professionals are blinded to their colleagues' accomplishments by the everyday responsibilities of the profession. A grant professional assumes the obligation and responsibility of the profession through their voluntary entry into the profession. Often this means toiling in the background, bringing in the funds to accomplish the mission of the agency or organization, and letting the award and reward go to others to tend and nurture it into implementation and maturity.

With purpose there must be those who seek out the best of our profession to inspire us and offer motivation to continue our journey. Furthermore, "heroism is contagious," as shared by Chico (2015). She continues, "One act of heroism inspires another individual to act heroically, as well as another, creating the wonderful domino effect. A single heroic action can have a ripple effect that can transform an entire community" (para. 5).

Our profession needs hero stories. As writers, we hear the stories of others. There is hard work in revealing the truth of our agency or organization, of our communities, and the needs of the population served. Because of the stress and pressure of the job, the deadlines that must be met, the many avenues of information gathering that must be traveled, and the volume of need, this work also can create or open up old wounds of the professional. Burnout and boundaryless jobs can stretch a writer's ability to manage their commitment well. Hero stories from our own profession help heal psychic wounds, inspire us to action, and promote personal growth.

Allison and Goethals (2015) explain, "The classic mythic hero is often an underdog or an ordinary person. Our research on underdogs shows that we identify with them, we root for them, and judge them to be highly inspiring when they triumph," (para. 8). The recipients of these awards are ordinary people who through their competence, commitment, confidence, and perseverance have risen to extraordinary heights and are deserving of the recognition afforded them (Cherry, 2020). "By conceiving of heroism as a universal attribute of human nature, not as a rare feature of the few 'heroic elect,' heroism becomes something that seems in the range of possibilities for every person perhaps inspiring more of us to answer the call" write Zeno Franco and Philip Zimbardo, heroism researchers (Cherry, 2020, para. 26).

There are many everyday heroes who sought out this profession or maybe landed in it by blind luck, including the former journalist, the clerk with a talent for writing, the assistant to the fundraiser, or the staff person who was assigned the writing under the vague "extra duties as assigned" responsibility on their job description. This profession has struggled to find its voice, to find its place in the nonprofit, academic, and governmental organizations. It did not just happen, but was

cultivated, nurtured, and grown from a germ of an idea. This history needs to recognize (captured and told by the everyday heroes who were involved) that we are here making a difference and changing the world for all of us.

Purpose of Distinguished Fellow Award

Recognition of individuals who excel within a specific industry is nothing new. The 1st Academy Awards was held at the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel in Los Angeles, CA on May 16, 1929, and its purpose was to "unite the five branches of the film industry, actors, directors, producers, technicians, and writers." ("1st Academy Awards," 2022).

One does not have to look far to find a hall of fame honoring a select group of individuals known for exceptional skill within their body of work. Well-known examples include the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Pro Football Hall of Fame. In the United States, we have national, state, and local halls of fame supporting a wide variety of activities and organizations including sports, music, writing, science, university alumni, and so much more. There are so many, and to understand why, we must first understand the purpose of such recognition.

"Hall of fame" is defined as "a group of individuals in a particular category (such as a sport) who have been selected as particularly illustrious" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). But a hall of fame, at least one of merit, goes much deeper than that, even the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. According to Burgoyne (2006), "In foregrounding the social context perhaps even more emphatically than the music itself, the Rock Hall conveys an overarching concern with defining the place of rock and roll in the larger narrative of nation" (p. 209).

Sports, the arts, and other professions create halls of fame to both recognize the exceptional merit and talent of individuals within the field, as well as honor the profession itself. Halls of fame can serve to remind future practitioners within a specific industry of their own past and future paths. It is a way to lift up individual performance, indeed, but to also lift the shared experiences and successes of the profession as a whole. Such understanding and continuation of needed professions are essential to society as a whole. Parsons (1939) states, "It seems evident that many of the most important features of our society are to a considerable extent dependent on the smooth functioning of the professions. Both the pursuit and the application of science and liberal learning are predominantly carried out in a professional context" (p. 457).

In 2018, GPA, GPCI, and the Grant Professionals Foundation (GPF) brought together their respective roles of advancing the profession, certifying professionals, and funding professionalism through the creation of the Class of Distinguished Fellows—the grant profession's hall of fame, if you will. According to the website *GP Distinguished Fellow* (n.d.), the program "strives to keep alive inductees' tradition and

spirit and to honor each year those persons who, through distinguished achievement, have excelled in their professions and volunteer roles" (para. 1).

Since 2019, five individuals have been inducted in the Class of Distinguished Fellows: Michael Wells—2019, Maryn Boess—2020, Johna Rodgers—2021, Danny Blitch—2022, and Pauline Annarino—2022 (*Distinguished Fellow Recipients,* n.d.). Nominations are accepted on an annual basis, with nominees being judged by their body of work, specifically those activities and actions which have served the grant profession and its practitioners well (*GP Distinguished Fellow,* n.d.).

And that's exactly what these five individuals have done. They have served our profession well through leadership, mentoring, training, volunteering, educating, credentialing, and giving back to this profession of ours through so many avenues. Every grant written, implemented, and managed changed lives and communities for the better. People were educated, roads were built, arts were brought to life, trees were planted, and so much more. Whether they are now retired or at the peak of their game, they have a body of work that inspires the rest of us.

Whether one sees themselves in these nominees, finds a height to attain, or believes they can be better and do better, the Class of Distinguished Fellows has met its purpose. Not only does it highlight the success of grant professionals (our community of heroes), it also inspires the next class of inductees. The stories told in their nominations and acceptance speeches tell of days gone by, improvements to the field, and dreams for a better tomorrow. Their participation in GPA, GPCI, GPF, GPA chapters, and other grant-related organizations, such as NGMA and Association of Fundraising Professionals, shows the value such organizations bring to our field and in the advancement of our leadership skills.

Ultimately, the Class of Distinguished Fellows is a recognition of leadership in the grant profession and those responsible for moving our organizations in an upward trajectory. According to Utah State University Huntsman School of Business, "Our definition of leadership is exemplified by the classic statement from Peter Drucker: 'leadership is not rank or privileges, titles, or money. Leadership is responsibility'" (Maggelet, 2016, para. 6). Maggelet continues, "We can be a leader every day by living our lives with integrity and mutual respect towards those who come in contact with us…There are many types of leaders in the world, but for me the best leader is the leader that can inspire others to be their best" (final para.).

Halls of fame and award recognition are certainly beneficial to the profession, but also to the individual recipients. According to Schlinger (2016), "There is no such thing as an insignificant award or affiliation. Whether you stood out from a group of 100 or 10, you still stood out" (para. 1). Added to your resume, website, or LinkedIn profile, awards speak to your success and dedication to the field, showing others your

work is recognized, admired, and appreciated by others. Awards are a "great way to boost your authority and presence in your industry" (Lincoln, 2021, para. 6).

Awards, including an induction into a professional hall of fame, do not necessarily demark the end of a successful career. (Some organizations require an individual must be retired for a certain number of years before their induction is even considered, such as the Pro Football Hall of Fame, but that is not the rule for all.) In many professions, such an induction happens at the pinnacle of one's career. And the peak is not the end. According to Girardin (2019), "Professional development awards can make you stand out in the eyes of supervisors and colleagues, affirm your dedication and skills, and give you access to even more opportunities for learning and growth" (para. 2). Professional awards show that you are at the top of your game, with more to give the field and those who work with or employ you.

This is the purpose of the Class of Distinguished Fellows: to recognize the leaders who then inspire the rest of us to be our best. The Hall of Fame of the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) includes inductees who "create awe in others. They are professionals who stand above the rest because of their charisma, character, and the incalculable value they bring to their organizations" (American Institute of Certified Public Accountants, 2002, p. 4). Like so many other halls of fame, the grant profession's Class of Distinguished Fellows is a noble pursuit of recognizing and honoring the best of us, while challenging all of us to bring a similar work ethic, attitude, and experience to the field. This award recognizes our heroes while simultaneously inspiring the next generation of heroes to step forward.

Imagine a world of grant professionals who pull out all the stops to be the change we wish to see in this world—that would be hall of fame worthy, indeed.

The Different Awards

Each award listed in this article has it own process and its own set of factors that are the hallmark of its winners. But each winner is a value asset to the profession now and in the future.

The Distinguished Fellows Award is the highwater mark for grant professionals. The process has a double review procedure to ensure it is not simply a popularity award, with representatives from GPA, GPCI, and GPF serving throughout each step of the process. These three organizations jointly developed this award, and they have presented it annually since 2019. No self-nominations are allowed, and the application must have letters of recommendation accompanying it.

Other Grant Professionals Association awards include the President's Award and the Grantmaker of the Year Awards (public and private sectors). According to the GPA's website, the GPA President's Award

"acknowledges the profound appreciation for the recipient's efforts to advance the Grant Professional Association, grants profession, and the community through their outstanding dedication and leadership during the president's term" (*GPA President's Award,* n.d.). The awardee is selected by the GPA President, while fellow Board Members bring forth nominees.

The GPA Grantmaker of the Year Award "recognizes grantmaking organizations that have improved the way grant professionals do their work and acknowledges outstanding contributions to the field of grantsmanship" (*Grantmaker of the Year Award,* n.d.). These awards have an application package that must be completed and submitted for review by the GPA Awards Committee. Additionally, top-scoring applicants are visited virtually by the review committee that makes the final recommendations.

GPCI has two awards: the Pauline G. Annarino Award and the President's Award. According to GPCI's website, "The Pauline G. Annarino Award acknowledges the efforts of an agency, group or individual who has elevated the status of the grants profession by promoting, steering, and/or marketing our profession as a significant contributor to our society. This work includes supporting and advancing credentialing and the GPCI examination" (*Awards,* Grant Professionals Certification Institute (GPCI), n.d.). This award is open to all grant professionals for nominations. Nominees are presented to and voted on by the GPCI Board of Directors.

The GPCI "President's Award recognizes the significant contributions of a group, agency, or individual who has provided specific assistance to GPCI, its President, and its Board Members. This annual honor recognizes the awardee's efforts to develop or implement an agenda item that has benefited the GPCI, its Board and the grant-writing profession" (*Awards,* GPCI, n.d.). The GPCI Board of Directors makes internal nominations and together vote on the awardee.

The NGMA awards include the Impact Award/Public Sector, Impact Award/Private Sector, Distinguished Service Award, and the Newton Award. The Impact awards "recognizes exceptional contribution in advancing the field of grants management" by a public official at the federal, state, or local level, or by a Congressional representative for the public sector or business and industry, nonprofit organizations, professional associations, and national publications for the private sector (*Awards,* National Grant Management Association (NGMA), n.d.). According to the NGMA website, "This could include a general or specific positive impact on professional grants management practice, methodology, advocacy, partnership, or volunteerism" (*Awards,* NGMA, n.d.).

The Newton Award "recognizes outstanding, sustained leadership in the grants management field," according to NGMA. The recipient "has executed sensitive and difficult assignments in grants policy or

grants administration…has an articulated vision for grants management professionals and has made a difference in the profession" (*Awards,* NGMA, n.d.).

The Distinguished Service Award "recognizes impact in the grants management field through innovation or creativity as demonstrated by a notable achievement" (*Awards,* NGMA, n.d.). All of NGMA awardees are nominated through the NGMA website on an annual basis.

Like the Class of Distinguished Fellows, these awards serve our profession, our associations, and society as a whole. They raise the expectations for those in the grant community and provide a goal for the wider population to aspire to and celebrate. When grantwriters win, then proposals are funded, community and organizations benefit, and the citizens gain an advantage that wasn't available before. Recognizing those who do this well, lauding their skills and integrity, opens the door for more individuals to strive to greatness and uplifts the whole profession with their effort.

Recognition of Those Who Came Before Us

While the many awards associated with the grant profession may not harken back as far as the presentation of the first Oscar or inaugural induction into the Pro Football Hall of Fame, they serve an integral role in our profession, and one must find its beginnings somewhere. These awards are lauded because of the value given to them by the associations, the nominees, the nominators, and the profession (the public) as a whole.

The individuals who have taken the time to participate in these processes recognize the good works of others and ensure that these individuals are highlighted for a job well done. Professional service awards allow all of us to recognize there are heroes among us and to understand that their contributions deserve a marker in the history books. If the grant profession as a whole, and individuals within said profession, did not invest the time, the care, and the words to explain why a colleague, mentor, or giant in the field deserved recognition, then 100 years from now, their contributions to this incredible profession of ours would be lost. And who are we as a society without the heroes of our storybooks?

Conclusion

As of 2022, the Class of Distinguished Fellows is the pinnacle of recognition for an exceptional foray into the grant profession. It celebrates those who have solved community problems through grant funding, mentored the next generation of grant professionals, brought forth a new venture within our profession (from creating the idea of an International Grant Professionals Day or serving as a subject matter expert for the creation of the Grant Professionals Credential

exam), trained fledgling grantwriters, created the next chapter of GPA, fundraised for GPF, wrote the Literature Review for GPCI, served on the board of a local nonprofit, been a voice of reason on a grant forum, and so much more. The first five inductees into the Distinguished Fellows are just a tip of the iceberg when it comes to the incredible works conducted by grant professionals.

Our profession is still in its humble beginnings. Many individuals who spend time in grant development do not label themselves as grant professionals, but rather police officers, teachers, administrative assistants, engineers, and more. It requires the work of many to bring forth the full potential of a profession, and grant professionals are more than up to the task. One means of recognition is a hall of fame and the accompanying recognition of our leaders and heroes. This is just one reason of many that the Class of Distinguished Fellows (and other grant professional awards) is vital to our profession.

The Distinguished Fellows, GPA Presidents Award, GPCI Pauline Annarino Award, NGMA Distinguished Service Award, and all the others play a pivotal role in the value of our profession. First and foremost, the awards highlight the incredible service of those in our field for the world at large to witness. Second, awards serve as a means to honor those who have gone above and beyond in service to our profession. These individuals deserve to be recognized and have others know of their success. Finally, lauding our heroes creates a standard bearer for every other grant professional. These leading figures show us the heights we can attain. Like athletes who create world records, and those athletes who train in an effort to beat those records, the grant profession's Distinguished Fellows set the bar high. They give everyone else a goal to meet and exceed. What an incredible means to ensure that we do good today and better tomorrow. If that is not a legacy worth leaving behind, then what is?

We can find value in professional service awards whether we are the recipient of one or not. What is important is the support one lends to the grant profession, their fellow practitioners, and the organizations that lift up these awards. This means paying attention to your peers. If you see an individual worthy of the Distinguished Fellow Award, a funder in line with the purpose of the Grantmaker of the Year Award, or an organization who deserves the Pauline G. Annarino Award, take the time to nominate them. If the task seems overwhelming, find a colleague who can assist with the paperwork.

If someone informs you of their plan to nominate you for an award and asks for useful information to use within the application, do not be shy or turn down their thoughtful suggestion. Rather, supply them with the information needed so they can put forth the most accurate nomination. While you might not feel deserving of said award, that does not make it so. It is up to the nominator and the review committee to

determine who meets the definition of the award requirements. If there is no one to nominate, there are no awards. And without the awards, how will our profession mark the heights of our work? Professional service awards are necessary to mark how far we have come. And what an honor, indeed, to be a part of that history.

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Biographical Information

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R. Lisa Jackson, GPC works with the grant team at WestCare Foundation, Inc. and supervises up to 10 writers and five contract writers. With more than forty years of experience, she previously served 12 years on the board of the Grant Professional Certification Institute in several roles including President, Secretary and Treasurer. Additionally, she is a founding member and past officer of the Grant Collaborative of Tampa Bay, a local grant group which hosted the GPA conference on St. Petersburg Beach in 2010. Lisa holds a bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Southern Mississippi. She has served as a peer reviewer for federal and state grants, and she has secured over $100 million in grant funding. She is the recipient of the Grant Collaborative of Tampa Bay 2013 Unsung Hero, the 2013 recipient of the Grant Professionals Association President's Award, and the 2021 recipient of the Grant Professional Certification Institute President's Award. Lisa can be reached at ljackson@gate.net.

Examining Trends in Participatory Grantmaking and Their Implications for Grant Professionals

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

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

In recent years, fund development professionals have been paying closer attention to giving circles, one of the fastest-growing forms of philanthropy in the U.S. Recent research suggests that donors who give in this way donate more money, spend more time making philanthropic decisions, give more strategically, and are more engaged in civic and political activities in their community. Many giving circles have a large membership and make their giving decisions using a grant application and review process. Grant development professionals are increasingly asked to respond to these funding opportunities.

Similarly, in the grantmaking space, there is growth in participatory grantmaking that relies on community members and topic experts to contribute to the design of a funder's grantmaking priorities and serve as an advisory body that reviews applications and makes recommendations for grant awards. As more foundations incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion practices into their grantmaking processes—from determining

what they fund, how to make grant applications more accessible, who reviews grant applications, and who makes grant award decisions—there is likely to be growth in participatory grantmaking in the future.

This article explores current giving circle and participatory grantmaking trends, changes in both the priorities and the expectations of philanthropy driving these trends, and the unique opportunities and challenges they present for grant professionals.

Introduction

The history of modern philanthropy is rooted in inequity. The term "philanthropy" has generally been used to describe the charitable giving of large sums of money and is perceived to be an activity exclusive to the wealthy. The concentration of wealth in the last few decades has intensified this dynamic, with targeted campaigns like the Buffett Giving Pledge that call on the world's billionaires to pledge a portion of their net worth to advance the social good. The percent of giving by millionaires increased from 10.3 percent of all donations in 1993 to 31.7 percent in 2016 (Meiksins, 2021). Historically, everyday people have not been perceived as the drivers or doers of philanthropy. Nor have they been invited to decision-making tables where priorities for philanthropic giving are set and funds are allocated.

In recent years, calls for democratizing philanthropy have been gaining ground and significant progress has been made in broadening the definition of philanthropy to encompass contributions from individuals of all socioeconomic backgrounds. Everyday people, especially younger generations, are transforming philanthropy through crowdfunding and other online giving platforms that make it easy for anyone to be a philanthropist. Such platforms also enable individual donors to be intentional in their giving, with some campaigns going directly to individual households and bypassing nonprofits as brokers of charitable dollars.

Likewise, nonprofit practitioners and advocates for equity have challenged the traditional model of philanthropy and the role of white-led foundations and wealthy white donors in shaping our collective understanding of community needs and how to address them. Some see participatory grantmaking as a way to change the face of philanthropy and democratize the grantmaking process, with an emphasis on shifting decision-making about money to those most affected by the issues. This is a timely topic given increased demand for accountability and transparency of public institutions and deeper analysis of institutional and systemic barriers to equity.

Bottom-up approaches to grantmaking have multiple benefits beyond just delivering a more equitable distribution of funds. Participatory grantmaking elevates the voices of community members, builds capacity for long-term leadership, and strengthens community trust through greater transparency in philanthropic decisions (Gibson, 2017). For foundations that use an equity lens for their grantmaking and those interested in funding work that leads to systemic change, improving their own grantmaking practices has become an important project and one that grant professionals should be aware of. Participatory grantmaking is one way that foundations are beginning to practice a deeper inclusion of outside stakeholders.

Participatory grantmaking as a philanthropic practice aligns with trust-based philanthropy. At its core, trust-based philanthropy values equity, shifting power, and building mutually accountable relationships. Funders who practice trust-based philanthropy embed trust, dialogue, and relationship-building with their grantees. Establishing participatory grantmaking processes is a natural outcome of these efforts, although this work does present some unique challenges for foundations.

It's important to note that participatory philanthropy may be a relatively new approach for philanthropic institutions, but the concept is not new to communities that have relied on mutual aid, collective giving, tithing, and other forms of community-focused support. Communities of color have particularly rich traditions of mutual aid, often forged out of necessity because of a lack of political and financial capital. The history of giving circles within communities of color is rich with examples.

Giving circles are on the rise and present a unique on-ramp for individuals who seek to make more impactful gifts through collective giving. Giving circles are also an effective platform for civic engagement and education on important issues since, depending on the model, members commit to learning about community issues and effective approaches to addressing them.

The growth of giving circles and participatory grantmaking models are worth examining. These models expand funding opportunities for aligned organizations and can be effectively incorporated into community engagement and grantseeking strategies. There are many benefits for nonprofits that receive support through giving circles. In addition to providing program and operating funds, many giving circles seek a deeper partnership with the organizations they support, including serving as frontline and leadership volunteers.

Overview of Giving Circles

The giving circle movement is answering the call for greater democracy and diversity in philanthropic giving. Giving circles are formed by individuals with common interests who decide to pool their charitable dollars and collaborate to distribute their collective funds to select

beneficiaries that align with their giving priorities. In practice, giving circles vary widely. Each has its own governance and operating structures, membership requirements, funding interests, and decision-making processes. Giving circles differ from foundation funders in that they give intentionally and thoughtfully, and in many cases, can act more nimbly in responding to emerging needs. Some have formal application processes, which make them similar to how foundation grantmaking works.

Giving circles can be as small as a couple of people or as large as several hundred members. They can be local and community-based or focus their giving nationally and internationally. Participants can be from similar backgrounds or from many different backgrounds. Most giving circles require a gift threshold to be eligible for membership, which may be prohibitive for many. While the cost of membership may be a barrier to participation, giving circles are a more democratic form of philanthropy because they rely on consensus decision-making.

Not only do giving circles leverage individual giving for collective impact, but participants are also more likely to volunteer and be involved in grassroots advocacy. By participating in a giving circle, members become more well-rounded and educated about community issues and have a broader context from which to make philanthropic decisions. As people-powered philanthropy, giving circles are communal in nature. Through collective action, giving circles can amplify the voices of marginalized groups and become tools for social and racial justice.

Giving circles are on the rise. A 2016 study by the Collective Giving Research Group found that giving circles tripled since the previous landscape study in 2007. They found 1087 independently run groups and 525 networks across the United States.

Identity is a central organizing principle for 60 percent of all giving circles, with race, ethnicity, age, gender, or sexual identity among the one or more identities that define a giving circle (Barclay et al., 2019). This is especially significant as mainstream philanthropic institutions continue to struggle with issues of racial inclusion and responsiveness to marginalized groups and communities of color. Black-led and other identity-based giving circles "pose a disruption to philanthropy's structural barriers to social change" (Barclay et al., 2019, para. 4). According to a 2012 W.K. Kellogg Foundation study, Black-led giving circles represent a significant portion of the wave of new giving circles and have been a critical source of financial support for racial justice work. According to the report, identity-based philanthropy is "a growing movement to democratize philanthropy from the grassroots up by activating and organizing its practice in marginalized communities, particularly communities of color."

Additionally, there is a strong network of women's giving circles in the United States and many are affiliated with Philanos (https://philanos.org/), the leading national women's giving circle network, which lists 80 affiliates in 27 states, the District of Columbia, Australia, and England.

Philanos sees collective giving circles as an opportunity for women to join together to learn more about community issues and collectively pool their financial resources to address them. Most women's giving circles are grounded in volunteerism and community engagement traditions. They can be small and informal or they can be highly organized and involve significant contributions and commitments from their members. Some focus on specific giving areas, while others give in various categories. Most pool their funds to make larger grants for more significant impact and use a formalized, member-driven grant review process. Through collective grantmaking, they aim to create more transformative grants to address the issues they care about, which may or may not be limited to women and girls.

Women's giving circles associated with Philanos also commit to ongoing education about philanthropy and to staying informed about emerging community issues. Regular meetings focus on this ongoing process, as well as identifying priorities for giving. According to the Philanos website, the rise of women's giving circles has contributed to the growth of collective giving, which has tripled in the past two decades.

Grantmaking through giving circles has many benefits for nonprofits and the communities they serve. Giving circles offer a new and enduring source of local funding responsive to emerging community needs. Giving circles amplify the work of the nonprofits they support through their network of members, many of whom become individual donors, volunteers, and board members of the organizations they fund through collective grantmaking. Benefitting organizations also have improved brand reputation as a result of the vetting process used for these impactful grants.

The wider community benefits, too, since many giving circle members become active and informed philanthropists who go on to serve as leaders and advocates for nonprofits in their community, or take on other community leadership roles, including elected office.

The important takeaway for grant professionals is that giving circles represent a growing grassroots philanthropic movement that should be considered when developing annual fund development plans and grant calendars. While not all giving circles use a formal grantmaking process to make philanthropic decisions, larger ones do. These grantmaking processes are led by members and include hands-on training for members to ensure informed decisions about philanthropic giving. The decision-making process is democratic, where members vote to select annual grant recipients. The grants are often large, and designed to create a lasting impact.

Case Study in Giving Circles: Ninety-Nine Girlfriends

Ninety-nine girlfriends is a giving circle based in Portland, OR that was formed in 2016 as an inclusive women's collective giving circle. Ninety-

nine girlfriends is an affiliate of Philanos and adapted the model used by Impact 100, a global network of giving circles. The Impact 100 model is simple. At least 100 women each make a $1,000 tax-deductible donation, and together, they collectively award grants in increments of at least $100,000 to local nonprofits in five grantmaking focus areas:

- Creative Expression
- Education and Lifelong Learning
- Environment and Sustainability
- Family and Human Services
- Health and Wellness

Ninety-nine girlfriends is organized to make significant and impactful grants that address local issues in a big way. Like other Impact 100 groups, ninety-nine girlfriends is volunteer-driven and plans to stay that way. Their goal is to create transformative change through collective grantmaking. Their focus is the Portland Metro Area and portions of Southwest Washington. They offer opportunities for their members to learn about community issues in addition to learning about philanthropy. Membership in ninety-nine girlfriends is open to cisgender and transgender women; and gender nonbinary, gender nonconforming, and gender queer persons.

Ninety-nine girlfriends differs from the Impact 100 model in that they are not tied to the $100,000 number, although they still make large impactful grants, giving them the flexibility to support more nonprofit organizations and to respond to emerging needs. According to Pip Denhart, co-chair of the ninety-nine girlfriends Coordinating Council, "a more flexible approach to grantmaking allows us to do things in alignment with our values" (personal communication, April 26, 2022).

Each member of ninety-nine girlfriends contributes $1100 annually, with $1000 going towards the annual grantmaking cycle and the remaining $100 going toward education and administration expenses. Their structure is similar to other Impact 100 groups in that they use five similar focus areas for grantmaking. They form grant review teams for each focus area, and each team receives intensive training on bias and trust-based philanthropy, in addition to learning about the grant review process.

Ninety-nine girlfriends is committed to a transparent grantmaking process, from the initial announcement of their annual grantmaking cycle to final grant decisions. Here's how it works:

1. The annual grant cycle is announced in advance.
2. Multiple information sessions are offered so prospective applicants can understand the process and get answers to their questions before completing the application.

3. Volunteer teams review applications to make sure they meet eligibility qualifications.
4. Qualifying applications are then forwarded to the grant review teams in the five focus areas. Review teams use tenants of trust-based philanthropy and an equity lens in their review, in addition to assessing alignment with their funding priorities and values.
5. Semi-finalists are invited for a site visit or virtual call. This is an opportunity for review teams to ask questions and for the applicants to share more information about their work.
6. Finalists are selected based on the strongest alignment with funding priorities and values. There are generally two finalists selected in each focus area.
7. Finalists are invited to present at a "Meet the Finalists" event. Members then vote on which finalists will receive an Impact Grant award (of $50,000–$100,000 depending on the size of that year's membership) and which finalists will receive a smaller award, usually at least $5,000.
8. After funding decisions are made, grantees are assigned a ninety-nine girlfriends liaison who connects with them regularly about how things are going and any additional needs, such as volunteers, special donation drives, etc. These additional opportunities for support are used to activate the ninety-nine girlfriends membership to get and stay involved in the organizations that they support.

Members of ninety-nine girlfriends do not view their work as just a philanthropic project. Members commit to ongoing learning and civic engagement. Additionally, ninety-nine girlfriends takes a relational approach to the nonprofits they work with. Through the liaison process, they create opportunities for information exchange with the hope that grantees are more comfortable being transparent about what's happening in relation to their grant. Their approach is trust-based philanthropy in action.

According to Tammy Wilhoite, co-chair of the ninety-nines girlfriends Coordinating Council, "we are people who want to be part of the solution. This is a civic engagement project" (personal communication, April 26, 2022). Meeting other women, creating community and connection with caring people, and learning about community issues are major motivations for joining ninety-nine girlfriends. Each girlfriend commits to ongoing learning about the focus areas addressed in their five grantmaking portfolios, and these opportunities are typically offered monthly. Many girlfriends move on to other leadership opportunities in the community, including serving on nonprofit boards.

Ninety-nine girlfriends prides itself on its nimble approach to grantmaking and commitment to ongoing learning. Their grantmaking

has changed as they have grown their membership and built more partnerships with the nonprofits they support. They see themselves as a responsive grant funder, able to address important issues of the day. Racial equity is a priority and the focus of their 2022 grantmaking cycle. They are committed to changing practices and behaviors that perpetuate power imbalances and creating an inclusive women's collective. For instance, they created the Girlfriends Fund to subsidize the annual $1,100 membership cost for applicants facing financial difficulties. Ninety-nine girlfriends also launched their Fellows Program in 2017 to invite young women ages 20–35 to learn about and participate in collective grantmaking. The fellows bring new perspectives to the ongoing evolution of how ninety-nine girlfriends operates amd have helped integrate more gender-inclusive language into the organization. They have also influenced the grant review process. Indeed, the Fellows Program at ninety-nine girlfriends reflects a larger trend within philanthropy, as a new generation of "everyday" philanthropists apply a transparent, hands-on approach to support causes and issues that interest them.

Overview of Participatory Grantmaking

As the nonprofit sector increasingly embraces principles and practices of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice, practitioners are asking important questions about how these frameworks apply to institutional philanthropy. Foundations are being challenged to review their top-down, closed door, expert-driven practices. As a result, there is growing interest on the part of traditional grantmakers to experiment with strategies that access and connect with the lived experience of the people they seek to benefit through grantmaking. Participatory approaches to grantmaking are changing the role of foundations in driving social change as "arbiters of what gets done to facilitators of a process in which they work with other organizations and non-grantmakers to designate priorities and act" (Gibson, 2017, p. 7).

Engaging with external stakeholders is one way that foundations are shifting away from top-down approaches to grantmaking and incorporating closer community connection and lived experience in their decision-making. Participatory approaches to grantmaking take on a variety of forms. Some foundations use blended structures that include non-grantmakers in addition to trustees. Others invest in peer-led grantmaking panels, which may or may not include donors. This approach includes inviting non-grantmakers to help determine funding priorities and encouraging stakeholders with connections to the community to serve on foundation boards and advisory committees.

However, unlike giving circles, institutional philanthropy has more challenges with incorporating participatory grantmaking practices. Regardless of which approach is adopted, participatory grantmaking is still the exception in philanthropy because of these unique

challenges. Grantmaking decisions are impacted by power imbalances, institutional priorities, legal regulations, and potential conflicts of interest. Participatory grantmaking is a major paradigm and cultural shift for larger and more established philanthropy institutions. Not all stakeholders are convinced that foundations should transfer control of funding decisions because they are still fiscally and legally responsible for their practices. Additionally, there is no consensus about what "participatory grantmaking" means (Gibson, 2017). Other potential pitfalls of participatory philanthropy through collaborative grantmaking include:

- Challenges in balancing experts and people most affected by decisions.
- Engaging marginalized communities may lead to an overemphasis on process rather than outcomes. Emphasis on process can be expensive and time-consuming.
- With more stakeholders involved it may be difficult to assess accountability for decision-making and outcomes.
- Participants in these processes expect more accountability and communication than foundations are generally accustomed to.

These challenges notwithstanding, there is growing interest in participatory practices, and it's expected that foundations will adopt some of these methods to increase their transparency and accountability to their constituents and/or beneficiaries. At the center of this shift is a recognition that innovative solutions to address social problems rooted in structural inequities will not come from top-down approaches, but rather, in partnership with people who can bring their lived experiences to decision-making tables. Grant professionals are uniquely positioned to both monitor and influence this growing trend.

Models of Participatory Grantmaking

There are different models of participatory grantmaking. Some foundations involve non-grantmakers in funding decisions through blended structures that include both donors and non-grantmakers, such as councils and advisory boards. Others use a completely peer-led grantmaking panel in which no donors participate.

The Giving Project is a participatory funding model that has been adapted by social justice-oriented foundations such as Social Justice Fund NW in Washington, the Latino Community Foundation in California, and Crossroads Fund in Chicago. The model involves a cohort of people across race and class who commit to learning together, mobilizing resources, and funding social change. The model is transformative. Giving Project participants explore systems of race and class oppression, engage in grassroots fundraising, and participate in democratic

grantmaking. Through an active peer learning community, members are grounded in shared vision, values, and priorities for democratic grantmaking. The vision for the Giving Project Network is well-resourced liberation movements and the values include: movement building, inclusivity, Black liberation, decolonization, racial justice, collective liberation, accountability, and power sharing. Collectively, Giving Projects have trained thousands of donors and moved $14.5 million to grassroots community organizations from over 19,000 unique donors (https://givingproject.com/). Foundations that have adopted the model tend to be social justice funders that fund movements seeking racial, social, and economic justice. They are an important source of institutional and individual support for social justice initiatives that may not garner grant support from mainstream foundations.

Implications and Additional Resources for Grant Professionals

The growth in giving circles has clear implications for grant professionals. Giving circles such as ninety-nine girlfriends and those in the Impact 100 and Philanos networks tend to make larger impact grants that can help a nonprofit implement an innovative idea, scale their programs, or achieve other strategic priorities. The application process differs from giving circle to giving circle, but a general commitment to transparency makes them accessible to grant seekers. To identify a giving circle in a particular community, some foundation search engines such as Grant Station will work. The Philanos website at https://philanos.org/ lists affiliated women's giving circles across the U.S., District of Columbia, and overseas. Global Impact 100 chapters are listed on their website at https://www.impact100global.org/.

The movement towards participatory grantmaking by traditional grantmakers is less clear, but still something to watch out for. Grant professionals may be in a position to influence this change in the field by participating in volunteer opportunities to provide feedback to foundation funders, either through surveys or focus groups or other feedback mechanisms. These are opportunities to shape grantmaking priorities as well as provide feedback on the grant application and review processes. Review the foundations in your region for these opportunities and participate in dialogues with foundation officers, such as "Meet the Funders" forums. For published resources on participatory grantmaking, visit the collection on IssueLab at participatorygrantmaking.issuelab.org.

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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 48 nonprofits in Oregon and the West Coast since 2016. 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 is a guest lecturer on government funding for Portland State University's Certificate in Fundraising Program. In 2019–2020 she joined a giving circle in support of grantmaking for a regional foundation and continues to be interested in models for collective giving and collaborative grantmaking. She can be reached at deborah@steinkopfstrategies.com.

Grant Professional Certification: Does It Pay Off For Consultants?

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GPCI Competency 06: Knowledge of nationally recognized standards of ethical practice by grants professionals

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

Abstract

Currently, more than 400 people around the United States have their Grant Professional Certification (GPC). The authors were concerned with the extent to which obtaining the GPC credential had impacted consultants and more specifically their earning power. To measure impact two surveys were developed—one for consultants with 44 respondents and another for nonprofit organizations that hire consultants with 27 respondents. The study results indicate that earning the GPC did have a positive impact on the majority of respondents, and their revenue increased after earning the credential. A high number of respondents also indicated that they took the exam because of the prestige associated with the credential. Of the nonprofits who completed the survey, most were not aware of a credential that was specific to the grants profession but some did indicate that certification is impactful in deciding whether or not to hire a consultant. The authors concluded that taking the GPC has a positive impact on the practice of many consultants tangibly and intangibly. These include the tangible or quantifiable result of increased revenue and intangible benefits such as increased confidence in grantwriting abilities.

Introduction

The Grant Professional Credential (GPC) has been available to qualified grant professionals since 2007. The GPC is earned through a rigorous application process and passing the two-part exam, which includes multiple-choice and the written essay. As the authors were studying for their GPC exam, they discussed the potential difference(s) they might expect for each of their consulting businesses. Over the past decade, one of the authors asked several certified grant professionals if the credential had made a difference in their business. The responses were fairly streamlined with a hard yes or definite no. There did not seem to be any middle ground in these very informal conversations. After receiving the GPC credential, the authors continued to discuss the payoff of earning their GPC. Did the business growth experienced by the now certified authors have to do with being only two in several hundred people across the globe that has this professional credential, the economy, or the pandemic? Or a combination of all of these? The effects of the pandemic and the current economic climate were not included specifically in this study.

Study Background

In 2003 the Grant Professionals Certification Institute (GPCI) was established as an American Association of Grant Professionals (AAGP), now called the Grant Professionals Association (GPA), affiliated certifying organization. Over the next four years, dedicated professionals worked together to create the GPC exam questions. The first GPC exam took place in 2007. Currently, the exam includes two separate sections: the Multiple Choice Exam and the Writing Exam. Both sections can be taken during the same test seating or at different times. The exam does not test for knowledge but instead evaluates the current grant development competencies and skills of the examinee. According to the *GPC candidate Guide,* "The GPC examination measures a candidate's competency and skill pertaining to the grants profession. Those competencies and skills and the weight each should receive on the test were determined through a rigorous process that involved the participation of dozens of professionals nationwide, assisted by credentialing experts." (Grant Professionals Certification Institute (GPCI), 2021)

According to the GPCI, "In 2019 the GPCI gained accreditation from the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA). The GPC is the first professional credential for individuals working in the grants field to be recognized by NCCA." (GPCI, n.d.)

At the time of writing this article, there are 426 current certified grant professionals through the GPCI. The GPCI does not track the number of consultants that have earned the GPC credential.

Purpose of the Study

The study examined the following research questions:

1. RQ1: Does the GPC credential pay off for consultants?
2. RQ2: Does the GPC credential make a difference to nonprofit professionals when hiring grant consultants?

Study Design and Methods

The authors conducted a literature review for this study and developed and distributed two surveys. The authors reviewed articles in the *Journal of the American Association of Grant Professionals* and the *Journal of the GPA* published between 2002–2021. Additionally, two literature reviews by Michael Wells in 2006 and updated by Bonnie Houk, GPC, and Lisa Jackson, GPC in 2017 were analyzed. Two surveys were conducted as part of this study. One survey was created for consultants who have the GPC credential. Another survey was designed specifically for nonprofit professionals involved in the hiring process. Forty-seven GPC-certified consultants responded to the survey. The nonprofit survey garnered 27 respondents.

The authors developed and published an anonymous online Consultant Survey in Survey Monkey, designed specifically for consultants who had already earned their GPC certification, to determine whether taking the exam increased their earning potential. A second survey was created specifically for nonprofit leaders involved in the process of hiring contractors, or consultants. The surveys were published on March 30, 2022, and remained live until April 22, 2022.

To promote the surveys, several methods were used:

- an article in the *GPA News* (April 12, 2022) that included the link to the survey which has a distribution list of 8,000,
- posting the survey link weekly on Grant Zone (GPA Forum) both in the General (3,200 members) and Consultants (450 members) message boards,
- promoting the survey on LinkedIn and Facebook: both authors posted the survey on our personal LinkedIn pages and in the several membership-based and open groups,
- sending messages through the GPA Member Message Board to those members who have designed that they are a consultant on their profile, and
- Fundraising Fridays, a local San Diego weekly nonprofit online networking group were asked several times to complete the survey.

Survey Respondents

The authors received 44 (n=45) responses to the Consultant Survey; this is 10.56% of the total number of people who have earned their GPC. As stated previously, GPCI does not track the number of people who have earned their GPCs that are also consultants. Twenty-seven (n=27) responses were received from nonprofit organization leaders. These respondents have experience contracting with an outside firm for fundraising assistance.

Survey Questions

The Consultant Survey was created to address RQ1 and included twelve questions with both multiple-choice and open-ended response options to collect information about years of experience in the field, the reasoning for taking the exam, the impact on a consultant's earning power, the tangible impacts of taking the exam on a consultant's business, and other anonymous demographic data.

The Non-profit Survey was created and distributed electronically to help assess RQ2: The perception of contracting with a GPC credentialed grant consultant vs. a non-credentialed grant consultant. The survey was open to any nonprofit leader involved in the hiring process. This could include an Executive Director, HR staff, or program manager. It consisted of four questions:

1. Did you know there is a certification that can be earned by Grant Professionals based on their experience through the Grant Professional Certification Institute (GPCI)? Note this credential is different and distinct from the CFRE. (Yes or No response)
2. Does a third-party credential make a difference to you when deciding to contract with a Grant Consultant? (Yes or no response)
3. Why or why not? (Narrative response)
4. What is your organization's annual revenue? The authors posed this question to help determine the size of the organization.

Literature Review

Fundraising for the benefit of others has occurred throughout history and in all cultures in multiple forms. The professionalization of fundraising in the mid-1900s narrowly included grantwriting because of the popular and occasionally ongoing perception of grant development (writing) as a task that anyone can do without any specific skill set.

Grant development does in fact require special skill sets that are different from other types of technical or fictional writing and fundraising in general. The advancement of grantwriting as a profession has helped to solidify the minimum expectations of a grant professional. The first set of known published grant professional core competencies

was introduced by Deanna Nurnberg in her 2003 AAGP article titled "Identifying Professional Competencies." These initial competencies, in part, include:

(1) Proposal Development. These skills and knowledge generally fell into two categories:

- Coordination, in which a grant professional was involved more in coordination than a writing role—working with others to develop a program, write proposals, and implement a project.
- Writing, in which a grant professional served as the main program developer and/or proposal author.

(2) Compliance and Grant Management such as regulatory compliance; project oversight, and reporting; maintenance of grant-related records; and financial management of grants and grant-funded activities.

(3) Prospect Research. Grant professionals must collect and analyze data on grants and foundation trends, activities and services as well as identify prospective corporate, foundation, and government donors through a variety of research tools.

(4) Planning (strategic, long-range). Grant professionals need to be competent planners and should be able to help their programs or organizations conduct strategic/long-range planning.

(5) Communication. Grant professionals need to be able to communicate effectively with both internal and external audiences. They must possess solid written and oral communication skills.

(6) Relationship-Building. An important competency is the development and nurturance of key relationships necessary to support grant acquisition and implementation.

(7) Evaluation. Grant professionals require knowledge related to evaluating and monitoring programs and initiatives to ensure that programs are achieving the objectives promised to funders. Many grants require evaluations, and professionals often identify and work with evaluators to design project evaluations; coordinate follow-up and evaluation of funded projects and proposals; and coordinate data collection for their agencies for a variety of purposes (Nurnberg, 2003, pp. 25–26).

In 2017 the GPCI adopted nine expected Core Competencies and a multitude of skills, based in part on the original core competencies. Competencies and skills are updated when the GPC exam is updated in order to continue the effort to grow the profession. The competencies are available to view online and in the *GPA journal.*

In 2019, the GPC exam became accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA). This accreditation has added additional value to earning the GPC. Taking a certification exam that is also accredited addresses the original issues in the grant profession

brought forth by AAGP. These are "1) the need for ethical practices and 2) the need for a mechanism to promote and uphold those ethical practices. The mechanism would come to be defined as 'certification'" (Houk, 2020, p. 35).

In addition to developing a more thorough understanding of the competencies when taking the GPC exam, others have researched its professional benefits. For example, according to Blitch et al. (2015), survey respondents who completed a survey about the collective value of the grants profession who had their GPC certification secured a significantly higher percentage of capital and research grants than non-GPC respondents. This result indicates that grantwriters who have earned their GPC may have higher-level skill sets than those who have not taken the exam.

Grant professionals have also sought methods for measuring the success or validity of their work outside of more traditional measures like hit rate or revenue received. According to Neese and Boll (2018), "without a comprehensive performance evaluation tool that can be used as a gauge of success, it may be difficult for both employees and consultants to make a case for wage increases or performance-based rewards" (p. 12). While not designed as an employer evaluation method, earning the GPC could help a consultant or employee to build a case for a pay increase.

GPA Compensation Surveys

The 2020 and 2021 GPA Compensation surveys were examined for this study. Our study and survey questions focus more on the business (Consultancy) revenue, not salary. The intent is to measure the effect, if any, of earning a GPC credential for a business. It is understood that the GPC credential is for individuals and not entities. It is also understood that business revenue is not the same as a personal salary. However, both GPA surveys provided beneficial information.

In 2020 the Grant Professionals Association surveyed grant consultants' salaries and benefits. One question in this survey asked: "What effect has becoming GPC certified had on your salary?" The results show that the majority of respondents' salaries increased after receiving their GPC certification (Grant Professionals Association, 2020, p.12).

The 2021 GPA Compensation Survey provides some detail specific to consultants with a GPC credential related to company revenue and owner pay draw/salary. This survey notes that 12% of respondents hold a GPC and that "Mean salaries were highest for full-time Consultants at $101,848." (Grant Professionals Association, 2021, p. 1) No correlation was found between the business revenue level and the GPC credential in these survey results.

Study Results

Key results of the study are as follows:

Respondents' Experience

For the first question, "How long have you had your GPC credential?" most respondents (31 out of 44) answered "5 to 10 years" or "10 to 20 years." Table 1 below details the number of people who responded to each option and the percentage of the total number of responses.

Table 1. Experience of Survey Respondents

Answer Choice	Responses	
Three to five years	20.45%	9
Five to ten years	31.82%	14
Ten to twenty years	38.64%	17
More than twenty years	9.09%	4
Total	**100.00%**	**44**

The majority of respondents to the Consultants Survey have been working in the grants field for ten to twenty years (38.64%), closely followed by five to ten years (31.82%). The lowest number of respondents had been in the field for over 20 years (9.09%).

Reasons for Taking the Exam

The authors asked respondents to select from a few choices regarding why they chose to pursue taking the exam (Q3), which included Increased Earning Power, Expanded Knowledge Base, The Prestige of the Certification, or Other. More than half of the respondents selected Prestige (51.1%) as their reason for choosing to take the exam. A breakdown of responses by each category is as follows.

- The Prestige of the Certification: 51.1%
- Increased Earning Power: 35.6%
- Expanded Knowledge Base: 8.9%
- Other: 4.4%

For those who selected Other as their response, two individuals reported that their employer would pay for them to take the exam as their motivation. Additional responses included "to prove to myself that I could do it!" and "to certify to my employer that grant writing is a legitimate specialty."

Impact on a Consulting Business

The authors were interested specifically in the impact that taking the GPC exam and certifying had on consultants' business. The first question (Q4)

was whether or not the GPC has made a difference in their business; 73% of respondents selected "Yes" for this question. To determine the specific difference, the authors provided a multiple-choice breakdown of options in the next question (Q5) which included marketing, financial, expanding the growth of your firm, and increased sales, for which respondents could select more than one response. The majority of respondents selected "marketing" for their response to this question at 88.24%, followed closely by "financial" at 50%.

Finally, the authors included an open-ended question in this section (Q6), "What are the tangible impacts that earning a GPC made for your business?" By and large, the responses to this question were positive, and a common theme was prestige or credibility. For example, one respondent stated, "It adds legitimacy to my grant consultancy. Potential clients are impressed with the GPC. When I received the GPC, I raised my consultancy rates, and my clients were willing to pay more for my commitment to grants and earning my GPC."

Another stated, "Continued prestige among the professionals in my state and across the country. And, as a trainer, the GPC adds a layer of professional cachet that most others cannot bring to the party. The GPC is featured prominently on the one-page bio I share with potential clients and contractors. It sets me apart from others who LIKELY are just as qualified but do not have the actual evidence of their abilities."

Other respondents noted that while the exam may not have had tangible benefits, there were some other benefits to them personally that they may not have been able to quantify: "Perhaps it gives me more credibility but I see every day that our business grows due to referrals. The more good work we do, the more clients we get, regardless of my having a GPC. At the same time, I do feel more confident having my GPC, and I know that confidence positively influences my work and our business."

Increase in Revenue

The next two questions were designed by the authors to see if there was a quantifiable difference in revenue before taking the GPC exam and after. Prior to the exam (Q7), the range of revenue for the majority of respondents was between $30,000 and $74,999. The authors based the ranges listed on the 2020 GPA Salary Survey. Following the exam (Q8), that range shifted to the majority of respondents answering either $75,000–$99,999 (25.58%) or $100,000–$150,000 (23.26%). These data show that for the survey respondents, taking the GPC did have a positive impact on their revenue. Figure 1 on the next page shows that respondents did earn more after taking the exam:

It is important to note that the authors added additional instructions to the survey which may have impacted respondents' answers to the questions regarding revenue before and after taking the exam—after

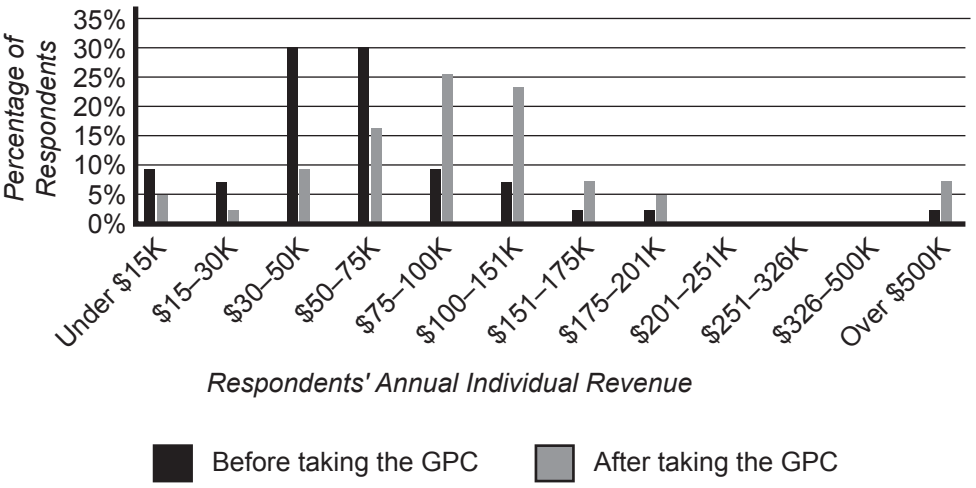

Figure 1: Individual revenue comparison, before and after taking the GPC exam

that date eight of the forty-five responses (17.77%) were submitted. These instructions clarified that questions 7 and 8 were designed to be answered from an individual perspective, rather than that of a business, for individuals who may own a consulting firm and hire subcontractors or employees.

Demographic Information

The remaining questions asked for demographic information from respondents. The first (Q9) is whether or not consultants considered themselves to be full-time or part-time employees. The majority of respondents (68.89%) were full-time consultants. A reflection of the grants field at large, the vast majority of respondents were female (88.89%). The next question (Q10) asked respondents to list their location including city and state with the option to respond N/A if they preferred not to answer. The authors have chosen not to include these specific data as they may identify individual respondents; it is important to note that respondents were from all over the country and reside in rural, suburban, and urban areas. The majority of respondents fell within two age ranges, ages 50–59 at 35.56% and ages 60–69 at 31.11%.

Non-profit Survey

Slightly over half (56%) of the respondents (n=27) had knowledge of a third-party credential for grant professionals. Forty-four percent (44%) of survey participants do not have any prior knowledge of a grant professional-specific certification.

Over half of the respondents determined that a professional with a grant credential makes a difference when contracting with a consultant.

The narrative responses shed some light on the perception of credentialing in general and the GPC more specifically.

One respondent stated: "Grant writing is such a specialized field, we typically look at success rates via referrals and have never seen anyone with such a credential from any contractors hired."

Another noted: "I don't have to check on their experience or question whether what they write on their resume is true. I also know I'm getting an ethical grant consultant."

One commentary included:

> "GPC or CGMS (Certified Grants Management Specialist)(e.g.) credential is one of a number of ways that a consultant can demonstrate the necessary/ critical knowledge for (especially Federal) grant-related support. However, hands-on experience (that also demonstrates skills and abilities) matters more to me than someone's ability to pass a knowledge-focused test. A credential alone (without associated/relevant experience) would be insufficient."

Other comments include:

> "Credentialing does not trump years of experience in this field. I would hire a tenured grant writer over someone who just received this certification."

> "We've contracted with a grants professional in the past and I'm not sure we even knew whether she was credentialed. [It] would be good to know more about why it's important/helpful. None of our fundraising team have the credential either."

> "[Having the GPC] shows experience and competencies. [It] shows that you care about your field and being the best you can be."

The majority of survey participants (n=26) work within organizations with over $1 million in annual revenue. See Figure 2 on the next page for additional details.

Analysis

The majority of consultants report that earning the GPC has impacted their consulting business and that the revenue for their business increased after receiving the GPC. However, the main reason that people chose to take the exam was because of the prestige associated with having the credential. Thus, while the initial reason for taking the exam

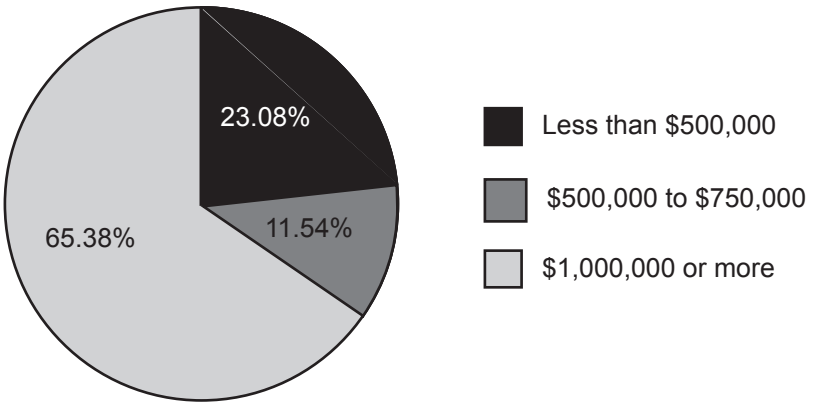

Figure 2: Annual revenue of survey participants' organizations

may have been more personal than collective, a consultant's business is positively impacted by earning the GPC. Overall, respondents indicated increased confidence after receiving the credential which may have also led to increased sales and the ability to charge more for services. A significant number of consultants also use their GPC to market their services which could also be tied to additional revenue.

It is important to note that the authors added additional instructions to the survey, which may have impacted respondents' answers to the questions regarding revenue before and after taking the exam—after that date eight of the forty-five responses (17.77%) were submitted.

Nonprofit leaders do not seem to understand that the GPC exam is experience-based, in addition to knowledge-based. As noted above and by the GPCI: *A credential is an objective measure of the level of experience and expertise in the profession as defined by the profession as a whole.* Nearly half of survey respondents did not know that a grant professional-specific credential is available. The narrative responses seem to indicate that many of the respondents are not aware that the GPCI requires at least three years of grant development experience within the past five years and a minimum of five successful grant proposals in the past seven years in order to be eligible to apply for the exam. In other words, experience is required to apply to take the exam. The GPC test is designed to measure the experience related to the grant competencies and skills more so than institutional knowledge of grantwriting.

Conclusion

Earning the GPC is impactful to consultants as it generates many positive outcomes for their business. The GPA already offers many opportunities for consultants to connect, such as through conferences and the GPA Forum; it may be helpful to consider how these networking opportunities could be used to recruit more consultants to take the exam. A focus

group with consultants who have earned their GPC might expand the efforts in this study as well as develop a marketing plan for promoting the value of the credential to others in the profession.

Additional marketing efforts by current GPC professionals and the GPCI could help increase understanding of the GPC credential so that nonprofit organizations, as well as grant professionals, better understand the value of working with a credentialed grant professional.

The fact that nearly half of nonprofit respondents did not know a third-party credential exists for grant professionals demonstrates the need for more comprehensive communication about the certification in the nonprofit sector. Social media could be an effective medium to use to increase knowledge and awareness of the certification. Credentialed professionals could share basic information about GPC, the core competencies, and what the certification means to them. The GPCI could market the certification more broadly within and outside of the nonprofit sector.

The authors have gathered several data points that validate the impact of earning the GPC on a consultant's business through this study. Earning the certification can significantly impact business revenue, the grants profession, and the nonprofit sector.

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Uncharted Waters: Implementing a Major Grant at a Teaching Intensive Institution

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

Abstract

Implementing a large grant at a mid-sized teaching university provided an education to all involved. To effectively support the program scholars, the Principal Investigators inspired changes from admissions to financial aid to human resources. To successfully implement the grant institutional adjustments and changes were prioritized. This paper delineates selected motivating factors that required policy, practice, and culture change and the resultant effects. Receiving this grant will impact the university well past the current funding period. Lessons learned can assist other similar institutions in grant implementation.

Introduction

> According to Darwin's *Origin of Species*, it is not the most intellectual of the species that survives; it is not the strongest that survives; but the species that survives is the one that is able best to adapt and adjust to the changing environment in which it finds itself (Megginson,, 1963)

Institutional change is a slow process. Done intentionally and incrementally, culture change can be successful and profound. However, defining events can engender rapid change. While discussion abounds on changing the culture at research institutions to value teaching (e.g. Anderson et al., 2011; Pfund et al., 2009; Wieman et al., 2010), little can be found about transforming teaching universities to value and support research. This paper addresses how the award of a four-million-dollar National Science Foundation (NSF) grant to science faculty at a mid-sized public teaching university necessitated culture change on multiple levels across multiple divisions. This paper discusses the challenges associated with grant implementation in an academic institutional culture where, previously, research grants have been limited in scope. The story and model presented herein illustrate the cooperation avenues needed to effectively shift an institutional paradigm.

NSF said "yes!" The National Science Foundation awarded East Stroudsburg University (ESU) faculty a $4 million Scholarships in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (S-STEM) grant. The word, and celebration, spread rapidly from the principal investigators (PIs) to the Director of Sponsored Programs and Research, the Provost, Deans, Department Chairs, and personnel at the partner community colleges. Everyone rejoiced at the award of the largest grant ever received at ESU. Later that week, the PIs huddled together planning the first steps to implement the many facets of this complicated interdisciplinary, interinstitutional grant program. The top priority—a website to help recruit scholars. Admissions and Financial Aid needed to be on board. It was necessary to hire ESU students as tutors and mentors to support the recruited scholars, etc., etc. The PIs began to meet with division heads and stakeholders to begin the grant implementation. Despite all the meetings, no one expected the profound impact this program would have on disparate campus offices. In words widely attributed to Socrates, "You don't know what you don't know."

The Environment

East Stroudsburg University is a mid-sized (6,500 student) public university, part of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE). PASSHE boasts 14 independent sister institutions ranging from

enrollments of 1,000 to 12,000. While master's degrees are granted at many of the universities, only two award doctoral degrees (in education and health sciences). ESU, located in the heart of the Pocono Mountains, was established in 1893 as a normal school (a school focused on training teachers) and was expanded in 1983 to a university. ESU has a strong, proud tradition of teacher preparation and a focus on teaching. Faculty teach all courses and even laboratories. Faculty are unionized and faculty evaluation centers primarily on teaching with smaller service and research components. Given this history of a teaching focus with a lower research emphasis, the award of a major research grant provided opportunities for institutional growth, but also presented significant challenges for implementation.

"Clear Path" is a Track 3 NSF S-STEM award that provides direct student financial support and academic services to accepted scholars. Research on effective student support and STEM learning is a critical component of the Track 3 S-STEM award. Clear Path supports 120 community college students in obtaining their Associate credential and in transferring from community colleges to ESU to pursue a bachelor's degree in ten science disciplines. While Clear Path scholars can transfer to ESU from any community college, Clear Path includes three local community colleges as partners. Scholars at the partner community colleges are eligible for scholarships in their second year of community college, are assigned an ESU student as a peer mentor, and are included in cohort-building activities even before transferring. Coordinating these myriad activities requires extensive cross-divisional and cross-campus communication.

Clear Path implementation forced communication and coordination among ESU divisions, e.g. financial aid and faculty PIs, admissions and faculty chairs, public relations and academic affairs, that had previously operated in defined silos. It also demanded increased communication between ESU and the partner community colleges. These effects of Clear Path will remain long after the end of the current funding period. This paper delineates relevant broader impacts of Clear Path and offers suggestions to future awardees and institutions about how to prepare for such a far-reaching grant.

Identifying Patterns in Institutional Challenges

> High performing organizations have cultures of creativity and risk. They encourage workers to innovate and play. (Hargreaves, n.d.)

Risk, by its very nature, involves taking a chance. Educational institutions deal in the hopes and dreams of students. Naturally, this makes them cautious. Faculty members face high-stakes evaluations, most notably at tenure time. Public institutions must answer to state government and

to taxpayers. Media can publicly spotlight mistakes leading to severe consequences. Yet, in spite of the risk and associated consequences for failure, innovation can flourish. Sometimes all it takes for innovation to erupt is a defining event. In this case, the defining event was a $4 million NSF S-STEM grant. The PIs anticipated a successful, productive, and rewarding sail through the five years of the award. However, an unexpected tsunami was on the horizon.

Identifying patterns is critical to scientific investigation. In fact, mathematics, the foundation of science, is commonly defined as the science of patterns (Steen, 1988). As scientists, the PIs naturally applied their scientific reasoning skills to successfully implement the grant without understanding that many university practices are not fundamentally logical. Policies and practices had evolved over time without sufficient attention to consistency, logic, and interdependency of divisions. Significant implementation problems surfaced almost immediately. The coordination, institutional buy-in, and policy and practice changes necessary for successful implementation presented rougher seas than anyone imagined. The PIs were determined to ensure grant success and find a way to surf the waves.

Implementation of Clear Path involved program promotion and identification of scholars, followed by acceptance and evaluation of financial need, followed by actual funds transfer, all accomplished within the confines of the granting agency parameters. This path began with the faculty PIs working with public (university) relations, followed by the office of admissions, then financial aid and finally the business office. This was a channel that had never been navigated. Through Clear Path two PIs holistically advised the 120 scholars. Through this experience, patterns were recognized from what had previously seemed to be idiosyncratic problems. For example, no longer did the PIs have one advisee with a financial aid problem, now they had dozens—and those problems evidenced a systemic issue.

Initial Implementation and Award

> Sometimes big waves are hidden inside small waves;
> the revolt of every big storm starts with a small wave!
> (Ildan, 1993)

The Clear Path grant application, filed in September 2015, proposed that the first cohort of scholars would matriculate to ESU in fall 2016. Serendipitously, the final timing of the actual award (mid-September 2016) rendered that impossible. A major cause of the delay in award date was the need for a new performer review of ESU Business Office policies. The first time an institution receives an NSF grant, NSF considers them to be a new performer and conducts a review of internal policies to make sure the institution will be able to appropriately monitor the

use of taxpayer dollars. Communication between the Business Office and faculty was virtually nonexistent; faculty pay issues were handled through Human Resources and department budgets were routed through the Deans' offices. With the grant pending award, NSF queried Business Office practices to ensure compliance with NSF policies and procedures.

The PIs assertively pursued timely response to ensure NSF received all needed information and that ESU resolved all issues. The risk of non-compliance was denial of the award. One example of needed policy shift was in granting agency communication. NSF program officers communicate with funded institutions through an identified PI, not through administrative offices or divisions. This established point of contact assures effective communication. The PIs had to clearly communicate NSF practices to involved divisions and ascertain respect as leaders to establish adherence to granting agency practices over established university practices. Despite initial choppy seas, all parties found a way to work together to establish effective communication that continues to benefit all grants.

By October 2016, a mere month after award, the PIs had begun to see the size of the approaching wave. Due to the new performer delays, the PIs worked with NSF to reconfigure the proposed cohorts and build in a planning year. Matriculation of the first cohort of scholars was delayed to fall 2017. The planning year allowed enhanced time for recruiting and for initiating the infrastructure improvements that continue into year six of the award. The planning year proved essential to Clear Path's success. Providing effective scholar support required coordinating a greater number of moving pieces than the PIs anticipated. The PIs and Admissions had to recruit scholars; the PIs and Human Resources had to establish procedures for faculty compensation and for continuing peer tutor/mentor hiring and compensation. The Clear Path team needed to institute a system for awarding the grant aid directly to scholars, managing their initial enrollment, reporting GPAs, and logging advising, to name just a few tasks. All of this was being done while research protocols had to be put into place to get the needed data to answer the research questions of the project.

A major lesson learned from Clear Path implementation is that a significant planning period is essential for any major grant, particularly when coordination of multiple divisions is necessary. The planning time can be used to develop program related materials and establish the inter- and intra-institutional connections necessary to identify, support, and build the scaffolding necessary to accomplish the program objectives. The time is essential to educate divisions that will be involved in the program about the purpose and needs of the program. If there are off-campus partners, the planning time allows meaningful relationships to grow, in our case between the PIs and science faculty at our partner community colleges. During this period each partner community college identified a liaison who was paid to facilitate the growing partnership

between ESU and the community colleges. Specific examples of infrastructure support and motivation for the incorporation of a planning period follow.

Recruiting

> Doing business without advertising is like winking at a girl in the dark. You know what you are doing, but nobody else does. (Steuart Henderson Britt, in Taylor, 2020)

The first step in implementing Clear Path was to identify and recruit the STEM scholars. While it may seem simple to recruit when significant scholarships are available, there were numerous challenges. To fill our first cohort, a top priority was to set up a website that would advertise the scholarship and facilitate student application. This involved coordination and communication with the ESU public relations division. Unfortunately, the infrastructure that supported our web-based advertising was outdated and cumbersome. The ESU scholarship page, the natural home for Clear Path, had been authored more than a decade previously and as new scholarships and funding opportunities became available, they were simply added to a list of scholarship options. This list was arranged alphabetically in a sidebar that forced the user to scroll down several computer screens in a format that was completely unfriendly for mobile devices. Requirements for scholarships were not listed; scholarships were not organized to facilitate student application. There was simply no indication of which student might be eligible to apply for which scholarships. Many opportunities for much-needed student funding were available, but ESU was not advertising them; Britt would say ESU was winking in the dark. Student support funds were remaining on the table.

Clear Path shone light on the lack of communication between public relations, responsible for ESU's institutional web presence, recruiting, and admissions, and student scholarships, generally organized by the university foundation. While there was general recognition that changes were needed, there was no driving force to institute change. The award of Clear Path provided the needed urgency. The Clear Path PIs reached out to and met with representatives from each area to discuss reorganization and a cooperative path forward. The meetings led to a major change in the organization of the scholarship page which now facilitates student applications. The redesign includes a scholarship landing page where the student indicates attributes and interests. This generates a subset of scholarships that might apply to the student's situation (*Scholarships: Financial Aid,* n.d.). This change was critical to successfully implementing Clear Path, but it also benefits current students seeking scholarship support and enhances university

recruiting efforts. Additionally, the Clear Path scholarship is listed on all relevant department pages, setting the precedent for advertising specific scholarships on department pages.

By year four of the grant, most of our scholars were recruited from word-of-mouth. The PIs have established strong relationships with our partner community colleges, particularly with the liaisons and science faculty members. Initially, some of our community college colleagues were wary that Clear Path was out to "poach" their students. But through open communication, respect, and consistently supportive actions, Clear Path has emerged as a true partnership. Recruiting is now a joint effort. Alumni and current scholars talk with their friends, grant-funded faculty liaisons at our partner community colleges champion the Clear Path program, and ESU department chairs refer their community college transfers to the Clear Path program. Still, some students independently find the program on the web and apply. All scholarship opportunities, not just Clear Path, are being advertised more effectively.

Admissions

> Departments and groups within the team must break down silos, depend on each other and understand who depends on them. (Jocko Willink, in *Silos Quotes,* n.d.)

Admissions was probably the easiest department with which to establish a productive relationship. The admissions team included faculty on their admission visits prior to the Clear Path award and the PIs had been to recruiting events with admissions personnel. The communication channel was present and the admissions team considered faculty as valuable resources for answering detailed questions about academic programs posed by potential students.

The ESU admissions team already included a transfer specialist with contacts in the community college partners' transfer offices. The transfer office was willing to learn about Clear Path and to introduce the PIs to recruiting contacts. Initial efforts included delivering Clear Path posters and handouts to community college contacts and offering advice about designing effective materials. However, as the PIs developed connections with the science faculty, the PIs' recruiting efforts became more independent of the admissions and transfer offices. The PIs found the most effective recruiting technique was to coordinate with community college faculty. The most effective technique was to arrange to speak to community college science classes, followed by staffing a table in the science building so students could ask questions. The majority of Clear Path recruiting trips occurred outside the admissions process.

From a teaching perspective, this was an ideal outcome. Faculty teach their students and then bask in the glow of the students' successes. The

transfer specialist supported the PIs in their initial recruiting efforts, then watched them expand the recruiting opportunities. In the end, some Clear Path scholars applied without ever talking with a member of the admissions team. Clear Path set the precedent for programs to recruit applicants directly with coordination and support from the Office of Admissions.

Financial Aid

> To give away money is an easy matter…and in any man's power. But to decide to whom to give it, and how large and when, for what purpose and how, is neither in every man's power nor an easy matter. Hence it is that such excellence is rare, praiseworthy and noble.
>
> —Aristotle

Once scholars are accepted, the university must determine their eligibility for this academic yet need-based scholarship. Clear Path establishes need using the FAFSA. The financial aid offices at thousands of universities, including ESU, process student FAFSAs, so one might expect this to be a simple task. At ESU, major programs, like federal Pell grants, are automatically awarded to qualified students, who are free to either accept or decline them. The Clear Path program, servising 120 scholars over five years, isn't large enough to warrant an automated system. However, that lack of automation caused delays in the awarding of Clear Path scholarships and significant stress and frustration for scholars.

Example 1

Sasha was accepted into the Clear Path program right after she finished her first year at a partner community college. She received a Clear Path scholarship during her second year at the community college. Upon matriculating to ESU, Sasha received a financial aid package that included a Pell grant, a PA state grant, and loans. She, and her parents, were upset at the amount of loans Sasha would need and thought they couldn't afford ESU after all. Sasha was ready to decline her enrollment. Fortunately, Sasha reached out to the Clear Path liaison at her community college, who contacted one of the ESU PIs, who contacted ESU's office of financial aid. The Financial Aid office hadn't evaluated Sasha for a Clear Path scholarship. They had expected the Clear Path PIs to send their office a list of Clear Path scholars before the Clear Path scholarship would be awarded. Scholars could not be put on the list for financial aid until the scholars were admitted to ESU, but the PIs had no way of knowing which accepted scholars had been admitted and which were still in process, so there was no clear communication avenue. In the end, Sasha received a Clear Path scholarship that allowed her to attend ESU.

But for Sasha the lack of communication nearly derailed her educational goals; the system needed an adjustment.

Obviously more and clearer communication was needed. The problem was identified as the timing of Clear Path acceptance compared to ESU acceptance. Sometimes the cart is before the horse. To ensure a scholar is appropriately identified in the system throughout all facets of the enrollment, there is now a code in the student's record indicating that the student is a Clear Path Scholar. This new practice is modeled after other designations already in place, like honors or athlete. In order for the system to be seamless, the timing of the inclusion of that code and the ability of the financial aid office to detect the code is critical. Avoiding financial aid mishaps like Sasha's required taking a step back and including the office of admissions in the communication chain generally reserved for financial aid. Currently, admissions personnel mark the accepted student as Clear Path when sending the paperwork to financial aid, and financial aid personnel manually award Clear Path funds immediately after the automated system packages the financial aid. This communication channel, faculty to admissions and admissions to financial aid, was not previously navigated. Although developed for Clear Path, the process has led to greater communication between financial aid and admissions, benefits all students, and is being applied to other programs.

Example 2

Jamison's parents were on disability and didn't need to file a tax return. His FAFSA was selected for verification and the family was having trouble submitting the required documents to satisfy the verification process. Jamison talked to his Clear Path advisor, who called the Financial Aid office and made the family an appointment with a financial aid officer. The financial aid officer helped the family understand the requirements, which resulted in Jamison receiving the appropriate funding.

Example 3

Maria expressed surprise and disappointment with her financial aid package and confided to the Clear Path advisor that she was going to drop out because the tuition was unaffordable. The Clear Path advisor was surprised that a $10,000 scholarship wasn't enough to alleviate financial stress. Maria reported that she hadn't qualified for the Clear Path scholarship. Once again, the Clear Path advisor called the Financial Aid office and made Maria an appointment to review her FAFSA. Sure enough, there was an error on the FAFSA, which when corrected, allowed Maria to receive the full $10,000 scholarship. Maria stayed in school and graduated with honors.

Of course, Financial Aid personnel are available to students for individual consultations, but not all students are aware of that fact. Faculty advisors can and do help students make appointments with financial aid personnel. Still, too many students, particularly, first-generation college students, are unaware of the opportunities available to them. The Clear Path team wanted an easy and advertised means for students to get help with FAFSA questions and challenges. The team met with the Financial Aid director to brainstorm methods to support students. As a result, the ESU Office of Financial Aid has established well-publicized "FAFSA Thursdays." On Thursday afternoons financial aid personnel are available in a computer lab to help students with financial aid issues. Students can log into their FAFSA account and receive one-on-one help from trained professionals. The result is less student frustration and more money awarded to students across the university, not just to Clear Path scholars. As a result, retention has been enhanced.

Employees

> To do the same thing over and over again is not only boredom: it is to be controlled by rather than to control what you do.
>
> —Heraclitus

Clear Path requires numerous undergraduate students to serve as mentors and tutors to the Clear Path scholars. The hiring process at ESU is multi-step and complex, involving many reviewers and approvers. Student workers are hired on a semester-by-semester basis. Given the number of mentors and tutors (often more than 50) associated with Clear Path, repeated hiring and the associated paperwork was cumbersome and a waste of valuable faculty time. Clear Path PIs wanted to hire student workers for the life of the grant. No one wanted to complete the same paperwork repeatedly to hire the same student semester after semester. Also, previously, student workers were associated with and paid by the budgets of academic departments or other divisions. There was no mechanism to pay Clear Path workers using grant funds as there was no single department or division for which they worked.

The PIs met with representatives of Human Resources to discuss their frustrations. Open communication resulted in changes that allow both students and employees to be hired for the life of the grant or until the student graduates or is otherwise dismissed. The Clear Path program was assigned department status to facilitate paying workers. As a result, hiring has been made easier and paperwork and time reduced. PIs of other grants that hire students are benefitting from this increased flexibility and new hiring practices.

Supporting Students One at a Time

> Every child deserves a champion—an adult who will never give up on them, who understands the power of connection and insists that they become the best that they can possibly be. (Pierson, in *25 Inspirational Quotes for Teachers,* 2018)

Many Clear Path scholars don't have any family members who've graduated from college. These first-generation college students (First Gen students) often need support in managing financial aid, roommate issues, academic issues, and, most importantly, feelings of belonging. Of course, before Clear Path, everyone knew these First Gen students existed, but with 4 million reasons to support them, the Clear Path team championed the needs of First Gen students with new vigor. The PIs worked with the provost to develop a First Gen recognition program. The provost funded a First Gen button designed by an art professor. Any faculty or staff member can request a button to wear or display outside their offices identifying themselves as First Gen. The goal is to make First Gen students feel welcome and to allow them to identify faculty and staff who have been there, done that.

There is also a First Gen email address, monitored by a member of the provost's staff who is First Gen. First Gen students can use that resource to ask questions or seek support. The buttons and First Gen email address facilitate communication between First Gen students and those best equipped to help them. The PIs have had opportunities to present the needs of First Gen students at campus events. These opportunities serve to educate all faculty and staff about the challenges First Gen students face. As a result, all First Gen students realize they belong in, and are valued by, the university community.

Decide and Publicize

> It's a lack of clarity that creates chaos and frustration. Those emotions are poison to any living goal. (Maraboli, 2014)

Transfer students face different challenges in completing their degree than native students. In particular, general education programs vary greatly from institution to institution. A student who is on track to fulfill the general education program at their current institution may not be on track at the transfer institution.

Example 1

Vanessa transferred 72 credits from a community college. Vanessa changed majors a couple times at the community college, hadn't earned

the associate degree, and was missing a few general education courses. Although Vanessa could complete all major requirements in two years, there wasn't room in Vanessa's schedule for the additional general education courses. The PIs asked the associate provost for flexibility in the satisfaction of general education requirements for Vanessa.

After several such appeals for different scholars, the associate provost worked with the PIs to discuss parameters to allow transfer students to satisfy the spirit of the general education program, not necessarily the exact requirements. Significant discussions ensued between the PIs and others in the academic division about how to operationalize the "spirit" of the program. The result of the discussion was a new policy, linked to the ESU website, describing how the general education program applies to transfer students (Transfer Students, 2018). For example, students transferring in at least 24 credits are exempt from the First Year Experience requirement. All transfer students and their advisors benefit from this clarity.

Example 2

Course equivalencies are another common obstacle for transfer students. ESU has a growing list of courses from various institutions and the faculty-approved ESU equivalent. This list is available to students on the ESU website (*Transfer Course Equivalency Guide,* n.d.). Students can select the institution where they took a course, then the course, and the widget will reveal the equivalent ESU course. This opportunity existed before Clear Path, but Clear Path brought additional attention to the list. The additional attention led to more efficient and consistent maintenance of the list. Now, additional programming was placed in the system so that every time a chair approves a transfer course, the chair has the option of specifying whether the equivalency applies to all students or only to the student in question. Courses that apply to all students are then added to the list on the website. Any student taking a course at another institution, not just transfer students, and their advisors benefit from keeping this list up to date. Chairs also benefit by not having to review courses for transfer equivalency multiple times, streamlining the process for all participants.

Example 3

Vanessa also benefitted from Pennsylvania's reverse-transfer policy. In Pennsylvania, students who transfer to a four-year institution can reverse-transfer courses from the four-year institution to the community college. Students can use these reverse-transfer courses to complete the associate degree. This state-wide policy predated Clear Path, but wasn't well-known. Additionally, it was cumbersome to transfer credits from ESU to local community colleges. Clear Path personnel worked with the transfer office to streamline the process. Of course, this change benefits

community colleges by improving graduation statistics, but it helps students as well. Although Clear Path has an 82% graduation rate, some scholars leave due to extenuating circumstances. Having the associate degree allows them to leave with a credential. Additionally, current students may receive a raise or promotion at their part-time job by virtue of earning the associate degree while still pursuing their bachelor's degree.

Organizational Changes

> Human artifacts not only include material structures and objects, such as buildings, machines, and automobiles, but they also include organizations, organizational structures like extended families… tribes, nations, corporations, churches, political parties, governments, and so on. Some of these may grow unconsciously, but they all originate and are sustained by the images in the human mind. (Boulding, n.d.)

The effects of Clear Path aren't just at the student level. Clear Path implementation and requirements supported changes in organizational structure that don't directly involve the students. For example, The Office of Sponsored Programs and Research (OSPR) moved from reporting to the vice president for finance to reporting to the provost and vice president for academic affairs. The move recognized that the role of this office was in support of faculty and student research. OSPR's important role in communicating with faculty doing grant work has been recognized and facilitated with this shift in reporting structure.

Changes were also required involving faculty compensation. Previously there was no clear and consistent mechanism for how faculty were paid for grant work completed in the summer. ESU is part of PASSHE, and PASSHE had established rules for how faculty would be paid for summer work, including grant work. It had been ages since the policy was visited or revised. Unfortunately, the PASSHE rules were more restrictive than many granting agency (in this case NSF) rules. This limited faculty compensation for work done as part of the awarded grant—even though grant funds were awarded for that purpose and the compensation was at no cost to the university. The Clear Path PIs worked with the faculty union to negotiate with PASSHE leaders to establish updated rules for grant-funded faculty work. The result is that there is now flexibility in additional compensation that allows alignment of the faculty compensation with the funding agency's policies. Therefore, faculty are appropriately rewarded for their time and effort using grant funds they garnered. Establishing new policies at a system level required open communication among the Clear Path PIs, the faculty union, and

PASSHE leadership. This new policy impacts faculty at all fourteen PASSHE institutions regardless of the granting agency.

Before Clear Path, it was unheard of for a few faculty members to be responsible for spending millions of dollars. Some administrators thought administrative approval (not just budgetary oversight) should be required before money was spent or any changes could be made. Education concerning the responsibilities and communication channels was needed after an ESU grant accountant emailed the NSF program officer repeatedly with a minor question about a small shift in use of funds. NSF Program Officers communicate through one PI only, ensuring someone is aware of all communications about the grant, eliminating potential mixed messages. It required a few meetings between the PIs and ESU administrators and a supporting email from the program officer to ensure the PI's leadership role was recognized. Future grant recipients will not face this barrier and will have a smoother path now that there has been a shift to recognize the lead roles the PIs play in large grants.

Conclusion

> Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.
>
> —Henry Ford

When writing the Clear Path grant proposal, the PIs expected to significantly impact students and the STEM programs. However, the PIs never expected the institutional broader impacts described herein. The grant proposal spoke to the impact of the program on the scholars and on the science departments that educate them, but was silent about the impacts on the marketing of scholarships, financial aid process, hiring processes, First Gen program, transcript evaluation, OSPR, and faculty pay as just a few examples. Enhanced and necessary communication among university divisions is never mentioned or considered in the proposal—there simply isn't a heading for such in the grant solicitation. And as new performers the ESU team was blissfully unaware of the myriad of barriers and major changes in policy and practice that were required to engender success.

The list of specific challenges will be different for each particular grant and institution or institutional cooperative. But a critical lesson learned from Clear Path is that careful and structured thought about these impacts allow PIs and grant office personnel to be more prepared to implement a major grant. A critical recommendation from the Clear Path team for other new performers is that, wherever possible, include a planning or set-up period. This time will allow the PIs and associated personnel to identify potential challenges, put needed infrastructure in place, and build communication channels with personnel in a variety of divisions and institutions without the pressure of students waiting

for results. "You don't know what you don't know." With additional preparation, more effective student support can be provided from the beginning, which leads to enhanced retention and student success. The serendipitous timing of the Clear Path award afforded the PIs the opportunity to ramp up the program gradually and was a contributing factor in its success. It allowed time for the PIs to pivot, establish communication, and find solutions. At ESU most personnel sensed the importance of the Clear Path program and wanted to be supportive; however, they needed time to identify the needs of the program and to adjust to them. Culture change is not instantaneous; initially, the seas will be rough, but, with effort, it is possible to navigate to a safe harbor.

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Organizational Culture: Not Just a Buzzword

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Abstract

Organizational culture impacts all businesses, from the largest corporation to the smallest nonprofit. Four distinct internal cultures exist, and each one, or a combination, can be found within all organizations. Cultures are rigid; therefore, only top leadership with board support can change them. Organizational culture is a criterion for grant professionals to evaluate a potential employer, work place, or funder.

Introduction

In 1985, my professor introduced the term *organizational culture*. As an undergraduate, the term was just another theory to memorize. The concept remained dormant until 30 years later when I worked in an organization where I was continually frustrated and unhappy. Despite my high energy level, my work never advanced. Although I embraced the agency's mission, I remained discouraged and disillusioned. Eventually, I left.

What happened? I learned corporate culture is not "just" a buzzword. According to Forbes Magazine, 89% of hiring failures are due to a poor cultural fit (Andersen, 2012, p.1). Furthermore, hiring someone who is a poor culture fit can cost an organization 50–60% of the person's annual salary in turnover (The Society for Human Resource Management 2015, in Boutin, 2015, p.1).

An organization's culture is its basic personality and how it evaluates and responds to people and situations. Corporate culture is not free lunches, flex time, or even ping-pong tables—those are job perks and retention strategies. Instead, corporate culture is established over a long period and described as the organization's "comfort zone."

Four dominant organizational cultures exist (Quinn and Cameron, 2011, p.1):

1. The Clan Culture: family-like, focusing on mentoring, nurturing, and 'doing things together.'

2. The Adhocracy Culture: dynamic and entrepreneurial, focusing on risk-taking, innovation, and 'doing things first.'
3. The Market Culture: results-oriented, focusing on competition, achievement, and 'getting the job done.'
4. The Hierarchy Culture: structured and controlled, focusing on efficiency, stability, and 'doing things right.'

In my case, I learned I was more aligned with a market-based culture. The organization I left adhered to a more restrained hierarchical culture and a more suitable climate for someone else.

Profit or Nonprofit

Organizational cultures exist in both profit and nonprofit industries. Additionally, organizations may align with one culture but reflect elements of others.

Understanding culture and aligning projects to fit are critical to success. For example, clan-oriented cultures would embrace funding projects around training. Alternatively, a funded pilot project would intrigue a risk-taking adhocracy culture but could unnerve a hierarchal culture if it puts stability at risk.

Grant professionals who acknowledge the culture within every organization will avoid laboring over projects destined to fail. The practitioner should ensure a match between a proposed project and the workplace culture.

Practitioners should assess a potential funder's organizational culture also. For example, a clan-based family foundation's interests and decision-making process will vary from an adhocracy tech-based foundation.

Employees whose personality and temperament fit the culture are an inherent match; those who differ will struggle. Keep in mind that this is not about competency. People can be good at their job even if they hate the office culture, but "they will be exhausted," according to executive coach Chris Edmonds, founder of The Purposeful Culture Group (Edmonds, 2018, in Buck, 2018).

Recently, there has been some stated opposition about how cultural fit can lead to discrimination against candidates and a lack of diversity. It's important to understand that hiring for culture fit doesn't mean hiring people who only reflect the culture. The values and attributes that make up an organizational culture can and should reflect in a richly diverse workforce (Boutin, 2015).

A grant professional's role is to work with people at all levels of the organization. Therefore, a proposal's success hinges on the level of cooperation, feedback, and personal accountability the grantwriter receives from top leadership and subject matter experts.

Maintaining a strong and positive corporate culture helps employees feel valued and motivated, leads to collaboration, increases operational efficiency, and drives revenue. As revenue drivers, grant professionals need cultures that include teamwork, communication, and accountability.

Unfortunately, an employee cannot change the organizational culture. Many experts insist that culture change by one person is virtually impossible unless that person is the boss—and even then, it is not easy.

According to Edmonds, "an employee does not have the ability or power to change the team or company culture. Only senior leaders can change company culture—and most do not pay attention to culture, much less know how to refine a bent or broken culture." (Edmonds 2018, in Buck, 2018).

A Case Study: Ford Motor Company

When Alan Mulally took over as CEO of the Ford Motor Company in 2006, the company suffered from regionalism and fiefdoms, low-quality products, and a culture that stifled change or innovation. When asked to describe the culture at Ford Motor Company, Henry Ford's great-grandson Bill Ford replied, "the Kremlin" (Mulally, 2011).

If Mulally were to point Ford Motor Company toward profitability, he needed to transform its hierarchal culture.

One of Mulally's core principles was bringing transparency to data and projects, using charts flowing from red (incomplete), yellow (in progress), and green (completed). In the beginning, Mulally noted all the charts reflected affirmative project-completed greens and in-progress yellows, despite the company's projected $17 billion loss (Mulally, 2011).

Mulally needed to create an atmosphere where it was safe to make mistakes while also reversing ineffective leadership behaviors. Mulally felt achievement came when managers started turning up for meetings with evidence of failures and asking for help, rather than pretending they did not exist (Leggett, 2014, p.1.).

It was difficult; two board members likened the culture to "boy scout stuff" and departed (Vakil, 2019). Two years later, the remaining board members watched Ford Motor Company's successful participation in the 2008 bailout hearings. The company triumphed as the only national automaker that did not require federal funding to maintain profitability.

Conclusion

An organization's culture is its basic personality and how it evaluates and responds to people and situations. Four distinct internal cultures exist and each one, or a combination, resides within all organizations.

An organization's culture is rigid and inflexible. Employees whose personality and temperament fit the culture are an inherent match; those who differ will struggle. The power to change organizational

culture resides within the top board and executive leadership; a single employee cannot do so. The grant professional should acknowledge and understand the limitations and benefits of organizational culture; it is a presence often overlooked during program planning and proposal writing efforts.

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Continuous Quality Improvement with the Plan-Do-Study-Act Model

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Abstract

Continuous quality improvement (CQI) is the idea that projects should constantly go through a cycle of evaluation and incremental change to produce better outcomes following each cycle. The Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) method is one such approach that has grown in popularity, especially among several federal funding agencies. The PDSA includes four phases: planning an activity, conducting that activity and collecting data, studying that data and comparing it to expectations, and acting on that data by making changes. The four phases are further contextualized through an example of a small training program in a rural area. The PDSA works best when implemented collaboratively with a committed project team and a process focused on improving program outcomes. With these in place, the PDSA will build a continuous cycle of feedback to facilitate team learning and positive outcomes over the lifespan of a project.

Introduction

Continuous quality improvement (CQI) is the idea that projects should constantly go through a cycle of evaluation and incremental change to produce better outcomes following each cycle. Several methodologies such as Lean, Six Sigma, and Agile have been developed around this idea and adapted across a wide variety of industries including grantwriting and management. The strength of CQI in the grants field is that it succinctly clarifies the evaluation process for funders and grantees and provides a framework to evaluate and improve programs.

PDSA

One particular CQI methodology required by several federal agencies in their notice of funding opportunities is the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) Model. Originally developed by W.H. Deming in the 1950s for the manufacturing industry in Japan, it was later reintroduced to the U.S. by Deming in 1986 and has been implemented in additional settings from healthcare to powerplant management (Deming, 1986). Also known as the Shewhart Cycle, Deming Cycle, the PDCA model, and the IHI Model for Improvement, the PDSA model as shown in Figure 1 consists of four phases: plan, do, study, and act.

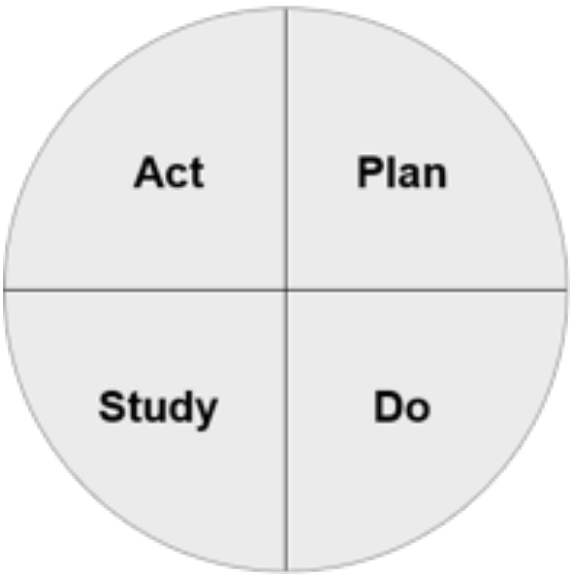

Figure 1: PDSA Model

Each phase of the PDSA cycle represents a different action a project team should take with multiple cycles occurring over the lifespan of a project. The Plan phase consists of reviewing the current format of the project, establishing expectations for the results of the Do phase, and identifying data to measure changes in outcomes. In the Do phase, the team conducts the activities outlined in the Plan phase and collects data for the Study phase. The Study phase is where the project team compares expectations outlined in the Plan phase to the data collected by the team during the Do phase. Here the team decides if additional changes need to be made to the project, either because it did not meet expectations or that higher expectations for the project can be set. The Act phase is where any changes are implemented based on the analysis. The cycle then starts over with another Plan phase (Gorenflo & Moran, 2010). However, many PDSA cycles are needed for the lifespan of the project.

PDSA in Practice

While understanding the theoretical structure of the PDSA process is important, the real-life example below will further illustrate the PDSA in action. A rural city applied for and received a federal training grant with a goal to train rural residents about how to respond to physical trauma and opioid overdose until medical help arrives. The training also served as a recruitment tool for EMT training funded by the grant. The expected outcomes for the training outline in the proposal were:

1. Increase participants' knowledge of how to respond to physical trauma and opioid overdose;
2. Increase participant's confidence in their abilities to respond to physical trauma and opioid overdose;
3. Convert 30% of training participants to grant-funded EMT trainees.

Additionally, the evaluation section of the grant outlined the PDSA process taken to evaluate and improve the quality of the training. This outline, which included the expectations above, was explained to be the first Plan phase for our project. The proposal predicted what the team expected to happen as a result of the training and identified how they would collect the outcomes data needed to evaluate those predictions through a post-survey. The proposal then outlined that the Do phase of the grant would consist of the first training planned for Month 2 of the grant. After that training was completed, the project team would review the data collected through the post-training surveys as part of the Study phase, and identify recommendations for improvement for the next training. The results from this first Study phase would then be implemented by the project director and other grant partners. Figure 2 shows this first PDSA cycle as outlined in the proposal.

Figure 2: Training Project—Cycle 1

In the first study phase, the research team noticed a problem based on their outcomes data predictions. Participants failed to correctly answer several content knowledge questions on physical trauma. Further study showed that students were misunderstanding the order in which they should respond to an emergency. As a result, the team recommended that the trainer emphasize this more in the next training.

Additionally, the Study phase in another PDSA cycle identified a problem with the format of the post-training survey. Several participants wrote comments on an image expressing their confusion about what the image was communicating. As shown in Figure 3, students were confused about the placement of line 1 at the elbow. The question was asking if and where a tourniquet should be placed with options being line 1, 2, both, or neither. The training covers tourniquet placement and explicitly teaches participants that a tourniquet should never be placed at the elbow. This had been missed during the survey development process but was easily corrected by editing the image to move the line down.

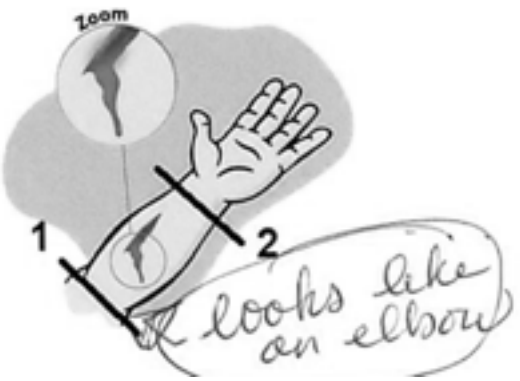

Figure 3: Post-training survey responses identified an unclear image.

As a result of the PDSA process, not only was the team able to monitor for potential corrections to the training, but they were also able to see real-time progress on the program's goals. Through the PDSA process, the team observed each trainee's knowledge and comprehension improve as issues with the curriculum were addressed. The team was also able to identify participants interested in becoming an EMT and connected them to training. The PDSA produced improvements in outcomes through a structure where the team was able to quickly analyze post-training data for problems, develop and implement solutions to those problems, and determine if those problems are corrected through additional analysis.

Conclusion

The PDSA system is most effective if the entire project team is committed to using the PDSA. Even if a funder requires that the PDSA be used, the

best practice is for the team to take steps during the grantwriting process to get buy-in from all project partners, and to illustrate that the PDSA is a valid approach to produce the quality outcomes and change addressed through the proposal. If anyone on the team has not "bought into" the PDSA, gaps may occur in the outcomes data collected for a Study phase, and the team may not implement the changes identified through the PDSA. The PDSA works best when the entire team is actively engaged in the project's activities, analysis, and problem-solving.

Another consideration is to make sure the data collected through the PDSA process are outcome-focused. The PDSA process is designed around producing positive changes in the behaviors of the project's population. Data like frequency counts are important to collect to show that the work occurred, but data should also be collected that answer the question, "What change do we expect to see as a result of what we did?". The data that answer this question should then be analyzed in the Study phase. This data could be quantitative, qualitative, or both, but it should be collected in a way that the team can use the data to compare to the expectations established in the planning phase.

Finally, the example above represents just one possible implementation of the PDSA. Every project is different, with diverse organizational settings, activities, and expectations. The project may not require the team to meet after every activity to analyze data as was done in the above example. The budget or program structure may not allow for data to be collected with the same frequency as the example. The aspect of the PDSA which must be preserved is its cyclical structure. If phases are skipped or omitted from the PDSA, the cycle of informed feedback that leads to better outcomes for the target population will not be built. Continuous quality improvement only works if the process is continuous.

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