Journal

of the

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Editors' Note

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the 2023 iteration of the *Grant Professionals Association Journal*. As the GPA's primary research publication, the *Journal* provides an engaging outlet for scholarly study of the profession, reviews 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 three articles that explore a variety of topics in the field, ranging from the importance of ethics in grant training to the transferability of skills between different sectors in the grants profession. We value the authors' contributions of time, effort, skill, and care in producing new research and insights that will create a more well-informed professional community.

In addition to scholarly articles, this year's *Journal* also includes GPA *Strategy Papers* published in 2023. *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 2024 *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 play a critical role in 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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GPA Strategy Papers, Volume 10

The Transferability of Skills between Sectors in the Grants Profession

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

Abstract

Grant professionals perform a variety of services for the organizations where they are employed, from grant readiness assessments and prospect research to proposal development and grant management. However, not all grant positions perform the same duties. Given the variety of sectors in which grant professionals work, the authors questioned the transferability of skills from one sector to another (healthcare, human services, government, faith-based, Tribal Nations, and education) as such knowledge would benefit a grant professional when choosing a career path. Through interviews and surveys of representatives from each sector, the authors sought to understand which skills are used the most and the least to establish commonalities and differences between grant professionals in each sector. While more extensive research is needed to definitively answer the question of transferability, the authors found the type of funding source (public versus private) played a significant role in the transferability of skills.

Introduction

The grant profession is a growing career field. Simply put, "a grant professional works for or with an organization to evaluate the organization's grant readiness, identify grant opportunities, secure grant awards, and manage grant projects" (Miller, 2015).

Even so, the job itself can vary depending on the type of organization one works for, and grant professionals work for a multitude of organizations: from hospitals and primary care clinics to K–12 school systems and institutes of higher education. They are embedded in local, state, and federal government agencies. You will find them employed by a variety of nonprofits, from human services work to those which focus on the environment or the care of animals. Some are faith-based, while many are secular. The work of many grant professionals is targeted to a specific demographic, whether a Tribal Nation, veterans, victims of domestic violence, pre-K children, or any other specific segment of the population.

The type of organization where a grant professional is employed (or working as a consultant), the type and number of their grants team, and their role in the organization will all have an effect on the type of work grant professionals perform. The sector may also determine whether a grant professional is working more in the public or private funding arena. The size of an organization may also dictate whether it is a grant office of one or a team of many. And, in that same vein, we posit that the skills used by grant professionals will most likely be dependent on the sector of the grant profession in which they work.

With that thought in mind, the question this article intends to answer is simple: are grant skills transferable between sectors in the grant profession? If so, which ones? Although the question may be simple, the process to find the answer and the answer itself is not.

For this article, the authors examined six sectors: health, human services, education, Tribal Nations, faith-based, and government. While there are additional sectors and many finite details that could differentiate each one, these six groupings encompass the largest fields where grant professionals work.

To determine if skills are transferable, an agreed-upon set of competencies and skills are needed. The Grant Professionals Certification Institute (GPCI) created such a list for the Grant Professional Certified (GPC) exam, and the content of the examination is "validated, in part, through a statistically designed task analysis that canvassed the profession" (*"Certification vs. Certification"*, n.d.).

Using the GPCI's current competencies and skills list (GPCI, 2017) allowed the authors to establish an industry standard by which the frequency of skills used by each grant professional in each sector could be analyzed. The data for this article were collected through an online survey and interviews with seven participants representing two from education (private and public funding) and one each from the remaining five sectors.

According to Sala and Gobet (2016), "Transfer of learning occurs when a set of skills acquired in one domain generalizes to other domains or improves general cognitive abilities" (p. 47). Is this possible in the grant profession? This article seeks to determine the likelihood of grant professionals seamlessly transferring employment from one sector to the

next without having to learn a new set of skills through understanding which skills are used most frequently, infrequently, or not at all.

The Six Sectors

To best determine which skills are used by grant professionals in varying fields, full-time employees of an organization were interviewed for data collection purposes. Consultants often work for a variety of organizations and rarely dedicate their work hours to one type of organization. Therefore, to ensure data were as targeted as possible, consultants were excluded from this process.

Grant work can be very specific, depending on the type of organization, but to fit within the parameters of this article, the authors determined that six overarching sectors would cover most organizations that employ grant professionals. The Grant Professionals Association's *2022 Compensation Survey* (p. 40) noted that grant professionals are employed as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Grant Professionals' Employment by Organization Type

Organization Type	% of Grant Professionals Employed
Nonprofit Agency	25
Consulting Firm	14
Government (local, state, or federal)	11
Nonprofit Agency-Healthcare	8
College/University/Research Institute	8
Arts/Culture	5
K-12 Education (public or private)	4
Hospital	4
Community College	4
Nonprofit Agency-Housing Services	3
Environmental	2
Advocacy (health, youth, or another)	2
For-Profit	2
Faith-Based	2
Other	5

The categories found in the GPA *Compensation Survey* can be summarized as follows:

- **Human Services**. Typically nonprofit organizations with missions to assist the wellbeing of individuals. Examples include organizations

that work to provide housing, food, clothing, safe environments, job security, and other similar care for individuals and families.

- **Healthcare.** This category includes all agencies working to improve the physical and/or mental health of individuals and communities. Both nonprofit and for-profit hospitals, primary care clinics, and dentistry services are examples.
- **Government agencies.** Federal, state, and local governments are included in this category. Local governments include cities, counties, parishes, towns, places, and other quasi-governmental agencies such as Councils of Governments or Regional Development Centers.
- **Education.** This sector includes both private and public pre-K–12 schools, community colleges, colleges, and universities.
- **Faith-based.** This sector includes agencies whose missions are tied to a religious focus, to include schools, nonprofits, and churches.
- **Tribal Nations.** A Tribal Nation serves a specific group of people (American Indian or Alaska Native tribe, band, nation, etc.) and is acknowledged as a federally-recognized tribe by the Secretary of the Interior.

The sector not specifically identified in the GPA *Compensation Survey* that the authors added for this article is Tribal Nations. The federal government's rules and regulations often differ for Tribal Nations due to the uniqueness of their authority, standing, and purpose. For that reason and because Tribal Nations serve a specific people group and have active grant-seeking programs, the authors felt this sector could yield additional insights into grantsmanship.

The authors acknowledge that arts/culture, environmental, advocacy, and for-profit organizations are missing from the six sectors studied. Further study is warranted to determine how these sectors play into the transferability of skills.

Methodology

To determine which skills are used in the varying sectors of the grant profession, two methods were used.

Each representative participated in a one-hour interview. Questions were posed to glean the number of years in the profession, the number of years in their sector, the type and number of proposals submitted annually, and the amount of grant awards (public versus private) received annually. Representatives also shared information relating to the setup of their grants office and the work they do regularly, including which skills they employ best and which ones are used less.

Each representative also completed a survey that listed the nine GPC competencies and the skills under each. They were asked to indicate which skills were used on a weekly (or more frequent) basis and which skills were never or hardly ever used. Representatives were asked to share this information as it relates to their specific work, not the work of their entire team or department. These data helped to determine the skills unique to one or more sectors, as well as those skills generally used across them all.

The results of the interviews and surveys were then analyzed to help answer the question of transferability of skills between the sectors.

Sector Representatives

The Human Services Sector representative has nearly 20 years of grant experience, working for a variety of nonprofits that receive either private or public grant funding, and sometimes both. One nonprofit required knowledge in Department of Justice grant applications and another various funding sources through the Housing and Urban Development Department. She is a GPC. In the last 11 years in her role at a housing nonprofit, she was responsible for leading the agency's comprehensive grant efforts, including writing the government grants, large foundation applications, and corporate applications. In recent years, annual award totals averaged $3 to $4 million in government funding, $1 million from private foundations, and $400,000 through corporations. She was the lone grant professional at this organization, until the last several years when a grant specialist was hired to assist with government grant reporting as well as writing some of the foundation and corporate grant proposals. In addition to proposal development, she managed about 40 grants annually.

The Healthcare Sector representative has more than 40 years of grant experience, working for a variety of nonprofits, and she is a GPC. For the last eight years, she has worked at a nonprofit whose work centers on a wide variety of healthcare needs, from substance abuse and addiction treatment to mental health treatment programs. She leads a team of 11 individuals in securing federal funding for facilities across the United States and throughout several American Territories. A separate branch, consisting of two individuals, handles foundation requests. With an annual budget of $130 million, federal grant awards make up $40 million of the revenue, and foundation grants less than $5 million. Her team typically submits around 290 proposals annually. Her role includes editing grants, writing (when needed), and managing online portals for their facilities.

The Government Sector representative has been employed with a municipality for 23 years, has a total of 31 years' experience in the grant profession, and is a GPC. The grants office was a one-person shop until 14 years ago. Since then, it has grown to a team of four full-time

and one part-time staff. This grant team typically receives $3.9 million in government grants and very few private grant awards with 25–29 proposals submitted annually, although grant awards the past three years have ranged from $6.7–$11.8 million. His role in the grants team includes writing and prospect research. He has also built a partnership program between the local government and its community nonprofit partners to develop joint grant programs and gather support letters for applications.

The Education Sector includes two representatives to get the full picture of grant-seeking for the university. Representative one works for the advancement office, which processes gifts (that include grants). She handles corporate and foundation relations, has a major gift portfolio, and is the only one handing grants in her office. She has four years of grant experience in her current role, but 11 years total with the university, starting with donor relations. She began her grant and fundraising career in 1997 and has her GPC. Representative two is the director of the sponsored programs, agreements, research, and contracts office, which employs four full-time and four part-time employees. They handle any funding that requires risk mitigation (typically federal and state grants, along with larger foundation grants). If there is a specific deliverable, performance period, detailed financial reporting, or if the funds are revocable, her office handles the application and management. She has more than 10 years of grant experience, has a Master's in research administration, and is a certified research administrator (CRA). Representative two's office is currently managing 120 open grants, and they submitted 163 applications last year. Typical annual grant awards include $47 million in federal funding, $10 million in state funding, and $1 million in private funding. Both representatives conduct grant prospect research for the university and often collaborate.

The Faith-Based Sector representative has 20 years of grant experience and is a GPC. He started out working for a faith-based nonprofit, and for the last four years has worked at a faith-based institute for higher education. He is a grant team of one, reporting to the Vice President of Stewardship. Most of the grant funding awarded to his organization is through foundations, including those with an application process and those that give a mission-aligned donation. A lot of that work is relationship-based and includes submitting reports, making phone calls, and keeping the foundations apprised of their work. He typically submits 15–20 proposals a year and manages nearly 50 awards. The annual grant awards are $1.3 million. Because their funding requests are so specific, the pool of funders is limited. This means maintaining funder relationships is crucial.

The Tribal Nation Sector representative has eight years of experience in the grant profession. She joined the tribe's grant office as a technical writer with only four people in the entire department. She is the first person from her Tribal Nation to earn the GPC and is now the supervisor for writing/development with 17 individuals in the department. The

grants office includes six coordinators on the grant development side, one research person, one budget person, and nine on the grant management side. She handles the development side of the grant-seeking process, which includes all pre-award activities: project planning and development, research, coordination and writing of proposals, and grant submissions. The tribe serves 14 counties in their state, as well as all of their tribe's citizens nationwide. A typical year includes the submission of nearly 170 grant proposals, many of which include Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Department of Labor, and Department of Justice funding. This year the grants office is managing 218 active grants, amounting to $498,860,430.

Competencies and Skills (Survey Data)

Using the GPCI's list of Validated Competencies and Skills (2017), we produced a grid of skills grouped by competency and skills (Tables 2–6).

- **Competency 1:** Knowledge of how to research, identify, and match funding resources to meet specific needs (Skills 1–8)
- **Competency 2 :** Knowledge of organizational development as it pertains to grant seeking (Skills 1–8)
- **Competency 3:** Knowledge of strategies for effective program and project design and development (Skills 1–9)
- **Competency 4:** Knowledge of how to craft, construct, and submit an effective grant application (Skills 1–13)
- **Competency 5:** Knowledge of post-award grant management practices sufficient to inform effective grant design and development (Skills 1–5)
- **Competency 6:** Knowledge of nationally recognized standards of ethical practice by grant developers (Skills 1–9)
- **Competency 7:** Knowledge of practices and services that raise the level of professionalism of grant developers (Skills 1–3)
- **Competency 8:** Knowledge of methods and strategies that cultivate and maintain relationships between fund-seeking and recipient organizations and funders (Skills 1–4)
- **Competency 9:** Ability to write a convincing case for funding (Skills 1–6)

While the surveys measured those skills used most frequently (weekly) and least frequently (rarely or never), we found that some respondents used certain skills on a bi-weekly or monthly basis. While this "moderately used" data was interesting, because our purpose was to understand over- and under-developed skills within each sector, we disregarded these data

for this study (though it is included in the tables). Skills used by all seven survey takers on a weekly basis are highlighted on the tables below (in **bold**), as are skills rarely/never used by three more survey takers (in *italics*). Those skills used the most or the least are displayed in the tables below.

Key (Tables 2–6) Weekly Sometimes Never

Table 2. GPC Competency Frequency of Use, Competencies 1–2

	Competency 1								Competency 2							
	1	***2***	3	4	5	**6**	**7**	**8**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Education (Rep. 1)																
Healthcare																
Human Services																
Faith-based																
Local Government																
Education (Rep. 2)																
Tribal Nation																
Totals																
Weekly	5	***3***	6	5	6	**7**	**7**	**7**	5	6	6	5	4	6	4	6
Sometimes			1	1								1	1	1	1	1
Never	2	***4***		1	1				2	1	1	1	2		2	

Table 3. GPC Competency Frequency of Use, Competency 3

	Competency 3								
	1	2	3	***4***	5	6	7	***8***	9
Education (Rep. 1)									
Healthcare									
Human Services									
Faith-based									
Local Government									
Education (Rep. 2)									
Tribal Nation									
Totals									
Weekly	4	5	6	***1***	6	3	5	***2***	5
Sometimes	2	1	1	***3***		2	1	***1***	1
Never	1	1		***3***	1	2	1	***4***	1

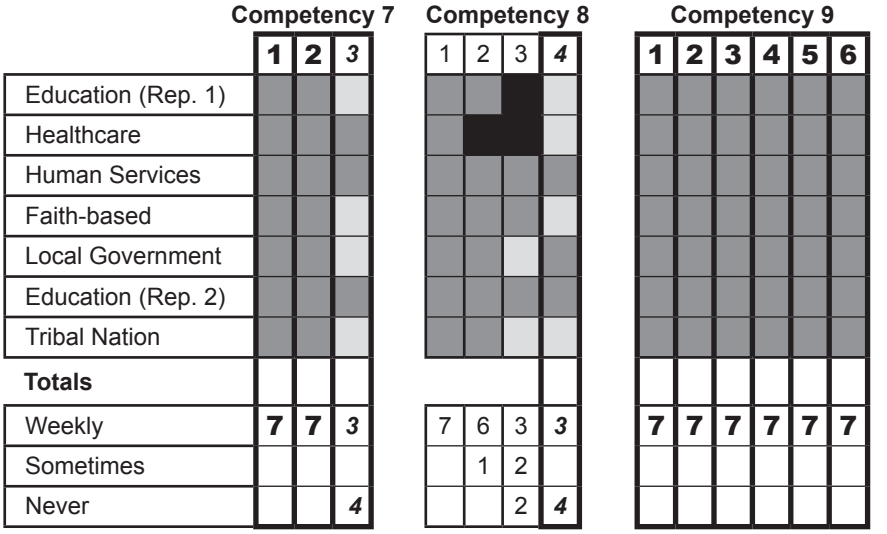
Table 4. GPC Competency Frequency of Use, Competency 4

	Competency 4												
	1	**2**	3	4	**5**	6	7	8	9	10	11	**12**	13
Education (Rep. 1)													
Healthcare													
Human Services													
Faith-based													
Local Government													
Education (Rep. 2)													
Tribal Nation													
Totals													
Weekly	6	**7**	6	4	**7**	6	5	4	4	5	4	**7**	5
Sometimes	1		1	2		1	2	2	2	1	1		
Never				1				1	1	1	2		2

Table 5. GPC Competency Frequency of Use, Competencies 5–6

	Competency 5					Competency 6							
	1	2	***3***	4	***5***	1	2	3	4	5	6	***7***	8
Education (Rep. 1)													
Healthcare													
Human Services													
Faith-based													
Local Government													
Education (Rep. 2)													
Tribal Nation													
Totals													
Weekly	4	6	***3***	4	***3***	4	3	6	5	4	5	***3***	5
Sometimes	3	1	***1***	2		1	2	1	1	2	1	***1***	
Never			***3***	1	***4***	2	2		1	1	1	***3***	2

Table 6. GPC Competency Frequency of Use, Competencies 7–9



Every GPCI validated competency had at least one or more skills that was used by every sector on a weekly basis except Competency #2. "Knowledge of organizational development as it pertains to grant seeking" (GPCI, 2017, p. 1). There were no "rarely or never" used skills in Competency #2 either—indicating that the skills in this competency are not needed in daily/weekly work nor are they never needed but likely deployed on an "as-needed" basis (semi-frequently). Indeed, the skills in this competency relate to organizational capacity for seeking and managing grants (mission alignment, institutional will, culture, etc.). Since grant professionals are not frequently in a position of decision-making connected to the entire organization, it is understandable that many would not be using these skills weekly. At the same time, it is encouraging that the grant professionals surveyed also feel like they can deploy these skills more frequently than "never" or "rarely." These data could indicate that, even in a limited way, they have some regular contributions to and interactions with organizational leadership as it relates to areas of organizational health which affect success in grantsmanship.

While all the competencies are valuable in grant work, to understand the transferability of skills in a practical way, those skills that are most used will also be the most needed and in highest demand between the sectors. Conversely, those skills that are used the least would be less in demand between different sectors.

One competency, Competency #9, "Ability to write a convincing case for funding" (GPCI, 2017, p.3) was used weekly by *every* grant professional surveyed. This was not surprising, as these skills touch the core of our profession and are tied to another absolute in grantsmanship—writing, compiling, and submitting proposals and reports.

There were also several competencies (#3, #5, #6, and #8) that had at least one or more skills that were used rarely or never but none that were used frequently. All the other competencies had skills that were used both weekly and rarely or never.

Those skills used weekly by *all* grant professionals in every sector surveyed include:

- **Competency #1: Knowledge of how to research, identify, and match funding resources to meet specific needs** (GPCI, 2017, p.1)
  - 06. Identify fundable programs and projects for specific organization
  - 07. Determine best matches between funders and specific programs
  - 08. Interpret grant application request for proposal (RFP) guidelines and requirements to accurately assess funder Intent

- **Competency #4: Knowledge of how to craft, construct, and submit an effective grant application** (GPCI, 2017, p.2)
  - 02. Interpret grant application request for proposal (RFP) guidelines and requirements to ensure high quality responses
  - 05. Identify appropriate, sequential, consistent, and logical presentations of grant-narrative elements and ideas among or within proposal components
  - 12. Identify methods for submitting proposals electronically and in hard-copy format

- **Competency #7: Knowledge of practices and services that raise the level of professionalism of grant developers** (GPCI, 2017, p.3)
  - 01. Identify advantages of participating in continuing education and various grant review processes
  - 02. Identify advantages of participating in professional organizations that offer grant developers growth opportunities and advance the profession

- **Competency #8: Knowledge of methods and strategies that cultivate and maintain relationships between fund-seeking and recipient organizations and funders** (GPCI, 2017, p.3)
  - 01. Identify characteristics of mutually beneficial relationships between fund seeker and funders

- **Competency #9: Ability to write a convincing case for funding** (GPCI, 2017, p.3)
  - 01. Make a persuasive argument
  - 02. Organize ideas appropriately
  - 03. Convey ideas clearly
  - 04. Use conventions of standard written English
  - 05. Use information provided
  - 06. Follow formatting guidelines

Analyzing the collective "most used" skills within all sectors, we see very clearly that those skills touch the core elements of executing grant funding at its basic level: finding a fit between program/funder, developing that fit into a proposal, submitting that proposal, and maintaining the relationship between the grantor and grantee. The only skills outside of the core grant-seeking/management activity area touched on professional development and advancing the profession. Given the active participation in the Grant Professionals Association, the importance/use of these skills should not be surprising; however, objectively, we cannot say that these are tied to a particular sector but more than likely tied to active engagement with a professional association (i.e., those who are engaged in a professional association are predisposed to prioritizing professional development). Interviewing grant professionals who do not belong to a professional association would likely show a lower use of these skills.

Those skills used the most infrequently (three or fewer sectors use them weekly *and* three or more sectors use them rarely/never) include:

- **Competency #1: Knowledge of how to research, identify, and match funding resources to meet specific need**s (GPCI, 2017, p.1)
  - 02. Identify major trends in private grant funding

- **Competency #3: Knowledge of strategies for effective program and project design and development** (GPCI, 2017, p.1)
  - 04. Identify structures, values, and applications of logic models as they relate to elements of project design
  - 08. Identify effects of accurate and defensible evaluation designs in program and project success and sustainability

- **Competency #5: Knowledge of post-award grant management practices sufficient to inform effective grant design and development** (GPCI, 2017, p.2)
  - 03. Differentiate roles and responsibilities of project and management staff and other key personnel affiliated with grant projects
  - 05. Identify appropriate records retention for completed grant awards

- **Competency #6: Knowledge of nationally recognized standards of ethical practice by grant developers** (GPCI, 2017, p.2)
  - 07. Distinguish between ethical and unethical methods of payment for the grant-development process

- **Competency #7: Knowledge of practices and services that raise the level of professionalism of grant developers** (GPCI, 2017, p.3)
  - 03. Identify strategies that grant developers use in building social capital to benefit their communities and society at large

- **Competency #8: Knowledge of methods and strategies that cultivate and maintain relationships between fund-seeking and recipient organizations and funders** (GPCI, 2017, p.3)
  - 04. Identify methods for collaborative efforts among the grant manager, program manager, and support staff during funder site visits and site evaluations

Within the skills used the least, we observed that it was not due to lack of interest or importance but more due to a lack of opportunity. Looking at ethical/unethical methods of payment, it is good news that only three of the seven sectors used this skill on a weekly basis. Skills such as building social capital and identifying methods to collaborate with team members during site visits are limited in frequency by whether or not funders are conducting site visits. However, we observed that other infrequently used skills seem to be driven more by internal need. Working with logic models and evaluation design are understandably not used weekly as one would hope that programs which have a logic model and evaluation component are not being changed on a frequent basis but once agreed-upon, they remain in practice for more than a week. Additionally, while some grant professionals must understand the responsibilities of project and management staff and how to manage records retention for completed grant awards, they do not need to deploy these skills frequently.

Analysis of Competencies and Skills (Interviews)

The interviews yielded greater qualitative data related to what we considered "preferred" skills. These are skills that are not only used often but are also skills where the grant professionals felt they were exceptionally gifted and which they enjoyed doing. We also spoke to interviewees about areas where they would not want to work within the grants field and why. Overwhelmingly, the responses were less related to the skills of grantsmanship, but more connected to the nuances and cultures of individual sectors.

We quickly observed that those grant professionals who were seeking and managing federal and state grants were more inclined to use the same language, have the same struggles, and even share the same preferred skills which was often expressed as reading NOFOs (Notice of Funding Opportunities) and RFPs (Requests for Proposals) to find a solid fit with programs in their agency. Some also expressed a desire to avoid private funders as they tended to be more vague and obscure with their granting priorities and programs than government funders. Given that the preferred area of activity was finding mission/programmatic matches, if the funder does not give any details about what they want to fund, it seems natural that grant professionals accustomed to and excited about digesting this type of communication from a funder would be disappointed and frustrated with the realm of private funding. Additionally, a majority of those professionals who worked exclusively

or almost exclusively with federal funding indicated that relationship building with foundations was not a high-priority skill to gain and/or use. Others indicated that medical research or higher education were not areas that they wanted to work in; however, this seemed to stem less from an analysis or impression of the skills required and more due to mission or perceptions of organizational functionality.

Transferability of Skills

According to Snell et al. (2016), "All workers possess transferable skills to some degree, but their awareness and understanding of these skills varies considerably" (p. 7). For instance, a grant professional working for a nonprofit understands how to craft a compelling needs statement and build a budget but may not realize that those same skills are used when working for a local government or institute of higher education.

To explore the possibility of transferring skills across sectors in the grant field, we focused on those skills which were needed weekly versus those which were not used at all—i.e., which skills were used by all or most sectors on an ongoing, regular basis. We first looked at all the sectors and then grouped them according to "most aligned."

When considering all the sectors, we found that the strongest commonalities were among those skills needed to find funders and submit proposals. Through our interviews, which provided more detail and context to the survey, it was also clear that while those skills are deployed across all sectors, they are not always used in the same ways. While on the surface, this variability could be categorized by sector, we noticed that how these skills were used in each sector was determined more by the *type* of funding being sought and received: private foundation funding versus public funding (federal, state, local government grants).

We observed that this difference reached beyond "skill deployment" but also manifested itself in agency organization as well. For example, in higher education, government grants were housed in the Office of Sponsored Projects, whereas the grants officer who worked with private foundations worked under different leadership in Advancement/ Fundraising. Both are doing grant work and bringing in funds for the university, but the skill sets, expertise, and methodology of grant work are different enough to require different support structures and workflow pathways to be successful. This was also the case in healthcare. The difference can also be the case in faith-based grant-seeking, which relies mostly on private foundation funding, versus federal aid. In these cases, despite having some form of application process, foundations are less inclined to require exacting metrics and evaluation from their grantees as giving has an additional filter of spiritual significance and therefore has different expectations on "how to give" according to the organization's faith tradition.

Interestingly, only one of the interviewees mentioned corporate grants. We posit that, despite having grant applications and evaluations, those who engage in corporate fundraising—which is more influenced by marketing and business interests than other types of funding—may not consider themselves grant professionals but fundraisers working alongside grant professionals similar to major gift officers.

When examined through the lens of federal versus private funding, the determining factor of "sector" quickly faded as the culture, requirements, process, and actual work of grant professionals came into focus.

Conclusion

Within the grant profession, there are groupings of skills which are used very frequently across all sectors. However, these skills are only fully transferable in as far as they are deployed to seek public or private funding. The answer to the question "will my skills as a grants professional transfer from one sector to another?" is less dependent on the sector itself than on the type of funding that constitutes most of the grant revenue flowing into the organization.

To really understand the transferability of skills, a more detailed analysis amongst a wider swath of grant professionals is needed. Everyone interviewed for this article had eight to 20 or more years of grant experience, with the majority on the upper end of that range. Even if an individual only works in one sector for their entire career, that amount of time is more than likely to expose them to the full array of the GPC's competencies and skills, as well as increasing confidence in their ability to work amongst the many sectors of the profession.

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Disbursing Charity: What is the Duty of Foundations to the Canadian Nonprofit Sector?

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GPCI Competency 01: Identify major trends in public funding and public policy

GPCI Competency 02: Identify major trends in private grant funding

Abstract

During the pandemic, the federal government and Canadian foundations were challenged to increase their financial support for the struggling nonprofit sector. The federal government allocated hundreds of millions of dollars almost immediately after the onset of the pandemic; however, concerns arose that private sector philanthropy was not contributing enough, especially given the burgeoning fortunes of many Canadian foundations in the previous ten years. The federal disbursement quota—the annual amount foundations were required by law to spend each year—became the lightning rod for this debate. Federal government consultations in 2021 and 2022 allowed legal experts, nonprofits, foundations and other interested parties to provide input into how much they believed the disbursement quota should be, as well as whether the funds should flow more broadly to nonprofits that did not have legal charitable status (otherwise known as non-qualified donees). In Canada, many smaller nonprofits as well as many Indigenous-led and Black-led nonprofits have resisted charitable registration, given the cost and onerous administrative requirements placed upon charities by the Canada Revenue Agency. In 2023 the federal government increased the annual disbursement quota for foundations from 3.5% to 5% and permitted

foundations to fund non-qualified donees. While these legislative changes shifted more responsibility onto Canadian foundations to support the charitable sector and may result in better support for Indigenous and Black-led nonprofits in Canada, it has yet to be seen how these changes will play out in practice as a result of stringent bureaucratic interpretations of the law.

Introduction

In Canada, the nonprofit sector includes approximately 86,000 registered charities and another 85,000 nonprofits engaged in 'public benefit activities' and employs more than two million people. The main revenue sources that allow these organizations to do their valuable work include individual donations, corporate sponsorships, sales of goods and services, and grants from foundations and governments. In Canada, these diverse sources of revenue declined significantly as the global Covid-19 pandemic emerged in March 2020. Many charities also saw significant increases in client need as well as heavy volunteer and staff losses. Nonprofits that sold goods and services experienced the same decline in demand as many retail stores, leading to further revenue losses.

In response, the Government of Canada moved rapidly in May 2020 to increase funds available for charitable work, supporting thousands of organizations first through the federal Emergency Community Support Fund and then later through the Community Services Recovery Fund. Some Canadian foundations also enhanced their giving to the sector at the time, with many participating in the Give5 Campaign to donate least 5.0% of their annual assets to charities. However, despite the increase in financial support, many organizations in the sector still struggled to survive. As a result, nonprofit leaders, legal experts, and the media began to question the roles of both the federal government and foundations. Given the expectation that the nonprofit sector would support society's most vulnerable, whose responsibility was it to ensure that the sector itself did not collapse during the pandemic? In response, the annual disbursement quota for foundations quickly became a lightning rod for identifying a response.

History of the Disbursement Quota in Canada

The disbursement quota (DQ) defines the minimum amount that foundations, as charities, must spend every year on their own charitable programs or on gifts to qualified donees. According to Canada's federal Income Tax Act, a qualified donee is an organization that can issue official donation receipts for gifts they receive from individuals and corporations, and includes registered charities, the Government

of Canada, a province, a municipality and the United Nations (among others). Until 2023, foundations were unable to grant directly to non-qualified donees; as a result, nonprofits often partnered with eligible charitable organizations to apply for foundation grants in Canada.

Since the 1950s, the Income Tax Act also mandated that a Canadian registered charity exercise 'full direction and control' over the activities that its donees carried out. The only way that non-qualified donees could receive charitable funding was if a registered charity, the funder, acted in essence as a parent. The charity was required to oversee and monitor the donees' activities and was legally liable for any problems that arose (Pickering, 2022).

Prior to January 1, 2023, the DQ was determined by the average two-year value of a charity's property (real estate or investments) that was not used for charitable activities or administration. When the Canadian government first implemented the DQ in 1976, it expected that the immediate tax benefits realized by foundations would lead directly to increased charitable benefits for society. In 1976, organizations were obliged to spend a minimum amount (80% for charitable organizations and 90% for foundations) of the total amount they had received in official donations in the preceding year. Private foundations were also required to expend at least 5% of the value of non-charitable property.

In 1984, changes to the federal Income Tax Act lowered the DQ from 5% to 4.5%, but the requirement to comply was then extended to public foundations. In 2004, the DQ was reduced further to 3.5%, on the premise that the rate was more aligned with the "historical long-term real rates of return earned on the typical investment portfolio held by a registered charity" (Golombek, 2021).

Further reforms came in 2010 after nonprofits and the Canadian Bar Association argued that the DQ "had become excessively complicated, difficult to understand, and too often required the retention of expensive experts to comply" (Bourgeois, 2010). That year the federal government removed the 80% minimum spending requirement of a charity's previous year's charitable donations, requiring only that they spend a minimum of 3.5% of the charity or foundation's annual assets.

Between 2010 and 2018, there was little discussion of the DQ at the federal level. In 2018, however, a Senate Committee chaired by Senators Terry Mercer and Ratna Omidvar assessed the voluntary sector in Canada as a whole, resulting in public hearings with 160 witnesses and 90 written submissions (Senate of Canada, 2019). After these hearings, the committee's report, *Catalyst for Change: A Roadmap to a Stronger Charitable Sector,* recommended that the federal government study the advantages and disadvantages of amending the DQ (Senate of Canada, 2019, p. 21). Prior to the pandemic, however, only a few individuals were promoting the DQ as a way to effectively address the charitable sector's financial needs.

Pre-Pandemic Canadian Foundation Disbursements

The significant growth and the allocation of foundation assets in the years leading up to the pandemic became an area of concern for a small cohort in the nonprofit sector. John Hallward, President of Sector3Insights and founder of GIV3, conducted a study that found Canadian foundations had accumulated over $80 billion in financial assets by 2020 (Hallward, 2020). Claire Brownell, a reporter at the online news platform *The Logic,* found the total investable assets held by Canadian foundations to be even higher, with significant increases from $59 billion in 2015 to $100 billion in 2019 (Brownell, 2021). However, even with this substantial asset growth, the Philanthropic Foundations of Canada administered a survey and found that, in 2019, only 74% of surveyed foundations were meeting their DQ requirements, while 23% of foundations were failing to do so (Philanthropic Foundations of Canada, 2021, p.11). The report did not indicate whether the remaining 3.0% met their DQ requirements or not.

The impact of so many foundations not meeting their minimum rate of charitable spending resulted in a shortfall of $414 million in funds in 2019 that could have "flowed to frontline charities and into communities" (Brownell, 2021). All but one of those foundations were private; the largest private foundation—the Mastercard Foundation—was responsible for 61% of the $414 million DQ shortfall.[1]

The allocation of pre-pandemic foundation grants also revealed which organizations benefited from these funds and which did not. Gail Picco of The Charity Report conducted a study entitled *Who Gives and Who Gets: The Beneficiaries of Private Foundation Philanthropy.* The study examined five years of disbursement data (2014-2019) from the top 20 private foundations in Canada, which represented 75% of total private foundation giving in the country. The disbursement data revealed that private foundations gave a total of $1.63 billion in grants during the time period, as follows:

- 34.7% of grants were given to benefit institutions outside of Canada, mostly post-secondary institutions such as Oxford University in England and Stanford University in the United States.
- 19.7% of grants went to education charities, 90% of which were well-known Canadian universities.
- 19.3% went to health charities; 32% of that funding went to hospital foundations.

1 To be accurate, however, certain federal exemptions existed at that time which allowed foundations to spend less than their DQ in any one year if they had exceeded their quota at some point in the previous five years. However, upon closer examination of the large private foundations in Brownell's study, she found that even with the exemptions, one in five of those foundations still failed to meet their minimum payout requirements (Brownell, 2021).

- 7.2% of grants went to charities benefiting communities.
- 6.8% went to charities relieving poverty.
- 0.2% went to supporting Indigenous organizations.
- 0.1% went to supporting racialized communities (Picco, 2020, p.29).

Picco's findings illustrate that most private foundations were not addressing many current pressing issues such as the environment, food insecurity, homelessness, or racial inequality. The report's most significant conclusion was that, even with a higher DQ, very little funding would flow to frontline organizations or equity-seeking groups (Picco, 2020). Other reports by Indigenous organizations and organizations representing racialized communities, such as the Foundation for Black Communities and The Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada, echoed this sentiment (Network for the Advancement of Black Communities, 2020; The Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada, 2022).

With the significant asset growth of many foundations in the decade prior to the pandemic, and the fact that approximately 23% of Canadian foundations did not meet their DQ (some of them fell astoundingly short of it), many organizations advocated for increased support from foundations for the charitable sector. It also became clear that, to achieve a more equitable distribution of these funds, simply making changes to the DQ would not be sufficient; the charitable sector required more tools to encourage the flow of money to traditionally underrepresented groups.

The Federal Response to Covid-19 and the Charitable Sector

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, many nonprofits struggled to address massive social challenges such as food insecurity, soaring unemployment rates, mental health emergencies, and a housing crisis. Within the sector there were 63,000 reported job losses in 2020 and 213,000 job losses early in 2021 (Larsby, 2021, p.1). Other impacts included higher client demand for programs and services, decreased revenues and donations, and significant losses of both paid staff members and volunteers (Larsby, 2021, pp.1–5).

In light of these difficulties, the Canadian government acted quickly to support the charitable sector. In April 2020, the government launched the Emergency Community Support Fund, which provided $350 million to charities and nonprofits that offered essential services to vulnerable populations. Many nonprofits and charities also accessed federal wage and rent subsidies to support their organizations throughout 2020 and 2021. In 2021, the federal government also announced the Community Services Recovery Fund to provide an additional $400 million to help charities and nonprofits adapt to the impacts of Covid-19 and modernize their work. The federal government offered targeted support for other organizations providing wraparound support services (i.e. food banks,

senior support centers, women's shelters, arts and sports organizations, etc.) (Barr & Johnson, 2021, p. 93). A number of public and private foundations followed the federal government's model for supporting the charitable sector during the pandemic, as demonstrated below.

Foundation Responses to Covid-19 and the Charitable Sector

Many Canadian foundations re-evaluated their role within the charitable sector during the once-in-a-century crisis. In the early days, numerous foundations in Canada responded swiftly and began the GIVE5 Campaign to encourage other foundations to donate at least 5% of their annual assets to charities struggling during the pandemic. Organizers publicly asked "If not now, then when?" would the time be right to support the most vulnerable populations in Canada, including those serving Indigenous and Black communities (GIVE5, 2020). Supporters of the GIVE5 Campaign noted that while donations to the charitable sector had declined by $4.2B–$6.2B overall as a result of the pandemic, many Canadian foundations could afford to better assist the struggling nonprofit sector because they had enjoyed significant investment growth during the previous ten years (GIVE5, 2020).

The Campaign joined a global movement that designated May 4, 2020, as a Giving Tuesday designed to raise funds for struggling charities. While the intention was to have 100 Canadian foundations (of the more than 10,000 foundations in Canada) pledge to donate 5% of their annual assets, only 69 foundations across Canada did so. Even so, the campaign secured an additional $21.5 million in funds for the charitable sector (Sidorovska, 2020, p.6). Through the initiative, many philanthropic organizations attempted to balance out the nonprofit sector's significant losses in revenue by increasing their charitable spending (Sidorovska, 2020, p.2).

Not all organizations agreed, however, with how much financial support foundations should be providing to the nonprofit sector. Philanthropic Foundations Canada, the largest member association of public, private, and corporate grantmakers in the country, argued that "foundations cannot replace governments in their central mandate to respond to public emergencies... [we] can, however, play a critical and complementary role in emergency response" (Mangin, 2021). Nevertheless, the growing wealth of foundations, combined with the deepening inequality that emerged from the pandemic, led to new calls for examining the DQ as a tool for addressing these issues.

Finance Canada's Disbursement Quota Consultations—Divisions Within the Nonprofit Sector

In response to the impact of Covid-19, as well as the broader debates about the role of foundations in the charitable sector, Finance Canada

launched public consultations on the DQ on August 6, 2021. The consultations provided opportunities for organizations and individuals to comment on the annual DQ requirements and the potential means of government enforcement. In particular, Finance Canada encouraged respondents to comment on whether or not the DQ should be raised from 3.5% to 5% of a charity's annual assets. A diversity of opinions from within the sector emerged in response.

Some of the sector's most powerful organizations, such as the federally-appointed Advisory Committee to the Charitable Sector, did not outright support an increase in the DQ, arguing that raising the DQ alone would only benefit registered charities, not non-qualified donees in the nonprofit sector (Advisory Committee to the Charitable Sector, 2021b, p.3). Other submissions opposed the DQ increase (Canadian Association of Gift Planners, 2021) while some recommended a meaningful increase in the DQ without mentioning a specific percentage (Community Foundations of Canada, 2021). Others recommended developing a 'sliding scale' DQ based on asset size (Imagine Canada, 2021a), and increasing the DQ to at least 5%, with a transition period provided to make the increase feasible. Many organizations recommended employing a wider variety of tools and approaches in addition to the DQ to support the broader nonprofit sector, ensure that funds were reaching historically disenfranchised populations, and increase equity in Canadian charitable giving (Equitable Recovery Collective, 2021).

Numerous organizations also commented on the policy tools needed to ensure funding would reach traditionally unfunded organizations. In Canada, many Indigenous and Black-led/Black-serving nonprofit organizations are not registered for charitable status and are instead considered non-qualified donees. Yasin Kiraga Misago, founder and Executive Director of the African Descent Society in British Columbia, explains the barriers that prevent many organizations from registering:

> The current [Income Tax] act and CRA [Canada Revenue Agency] interpretation(s) are immense barriers to funds going to Black communities and Black-led organizations. Due to the cost and complexity of getting and maintaining charitable status, the vast majority of grassroots BIPOC organizations aren't eligible to receive transfers from charities [foundations] (as cited in Falk & Rans, 2021).

To address this inequity, many respondents argued for legislative changes to allow foundations to fund non-qualified donees, in order to provide better support for Indigenous and Black-led organizations in Canada.

At the end of the consultation period, the Department of Finance reported that approximately 120 charities had responded with written submissions which were evenly split between supporting and opposing

an increase in the DQ (Muttart, 2021, p.2). The opposing foundations were mainly private foundations concerned about their ability to exist in perpetuity. The foundations supportive of raising the DQ cited the urgency of the current need and pointed to the overall increase in investment returns in foundations' assets (Muttart, 2021, p.2). Many respondents were also cautious, identifying a lack of data as a reason to take a careful approach to adjusting the DQ (Muttart, 2021).

At a roundtable of foundations held by the Muttart Foundation in October 2021, a Department of Finance representative informally indicated that in response to the submissions received, the federal government would try to address both competing objectives from the sector—making more funding available to charities immediately and identifying a DQ rate that would allow foundations to maintain their resources in the future (Muttart, 2021, pp.2–3). The representative did not comment on how the government would respond to the funding of non-qualified donees (Muttart, 2021, pp.2–3).

Federal Budget 2022—Moving the Needle on the Disbursement Quota

On April 7, 2022, the Government of Canada responded to the findings of the DQ consultations when Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Chrystia Freeland, tabled the federal budget in the House of Commons. The government announced it would raise the DQ from 3.5% to 5%, starting in January 2023. To mitigate the impact of the increase on smaller foundations, the increase would only apply to charities with over $1 million in invested assets (Government of Canada, 2022). Another proposed change permitted charities/foundations to fund non-qualified donees providing that certain accountability requirements were implemented.

For the most part, sector reactions to the DQ announcement were positive, although some organizations argued that the government had not enacted a large enough increase (Jaques, 2022; Bloomberg & Mersky, 2022) while others argued that the DQ was now too high (McMillan, 2022). In general, however, the increased DQ represented a shift in accountability for funding the nonprofit sector, with foundations now expected to shoulder a larger responsibility.

Budget Implementation Act 2022

Many saw Budget 2022 as a progressive step forward for enhancing financial support for the nonprofit sector in Canada. However, when Finance Canada released the draft Income Tax Act legislative changes in May 2022, many nonprofit sector leaders were shocked. While the draft legislation—the Budget Implementation Act or BIA—increased the DQ to 5%, it also reinforced the tradition of 'direction and control'

that characterized previous legal requirements when foundations funded non-qualified donees. Charities that did not exert direction and control over their donees faced the possibility of being stripped of their charitable status by the Canada Revenue Agency. Instead of making it easier to support non-qualified donees, the language in the BIA would remove the flexibility for accountability that foundations already exercised. Legislation now required very specific regulation of charities and foundations regarding their funding of non-qualified donees, including a due diligence review of the grantee; written agreements between the funder and the grantee with respect to the use of the funds; reporting and financial recordkeeping requirements; ongoing monitoring of the grantee organization; reviewing and approving the final report of the grantee organization; and withholding further disbursements and the recovery of funds if an agreement was not being followed according to previously specified guidelines (Finance Canada, 2022, p.65).

The new bill would enshrine these requirements in legislation and give the CRA stronger oversight powers of the nonprofit sector while also reducing the amount of flexibility that charities/foundations had to build relationships with and fund nonprofit partners. There was widespread concern that with strengthened requirements for direction and control in the language of the BIA, grantmakers would be hesitant to collaborate with non-qualified donees for fear of not being able to enforce all of the requirements (Oatley, 2022b). Similarly, grantmakers thought many non-qualified donees would be less likely to engage with them due to such stringent requirements (Oatley, 2022b). As a result, while an increase in the DQ would assist eligible charities, the increase in funds might not reach the most marginalized groups such as Black organizations, Indigenous organizations and many grassroots international organizations. Liban Abakor, co-founder of the Foundation for Black Communities, argued that, without changes, the legislation may divert "resources away from where they are needed most" (as cited in Oatley, 2022c, p.3). Bruce Lawson of the Counselling Foundation of Canada and Wanda Brascoupé of the Indigenous Peoples Resilience Fund, an organization that provided over $7.5 million to Indigenous communities and organizations during the pandemic, also wrote a letter outlining their apprehensions, stating:

> It is our deep concern that that…the BIA will make working with Indigenous communities and Indigenous-led organizations that are not qualified donees even more difficult than it already is—and perpetuate and worsen the colonial mentality and conditions that have been imposed on our peoples for generations […] (as cited in Harper, 2022, p.3).

Due to these concerns, several nonprofits united and intensely lobbied the federal government to change the wording of the proposed legislation. Imagine Canada, with support from the McConnell Foundation, convened a delegation of representatives from 12 charitable and nonprofit groups, including the Ontario Nonprofit Network, Philanthropic Foundations Canada, Samaritan's Purse, Imagine Canada, The Circle on Philanthropy, Foundation for Black Communities, McConnell Foundation, Cooperation Canada, the Network for the Advancement of Black Communities, and others to engage in 25 meetings with Cabinet Ministers, other parliamentarians and senior officials. A briefing note written by Imagine Canada outlined the coalitions' main issues:

> Our proposed amendments to the BIA intend to mitigate the potential harm and capacity overload in our communities, which remains a risk under the current language. If the language were to stay as-is in the BIA, it would perpetuate a colonial dynamic with Indigenous and equity-deserving partners, undo the progress made on public equity initiatives and prior consultation, and cultivate a high level of risk-aversion to projects that would otherwise improve and support our society, creating a "chilling effect" on vital work (Imagine Canada, 2022, p.1).

Cooperation Canada, along with 70 other Canadian humanitarian and international development organizations also wrote a letter urging the Government of Canada to amend the Budget Implementation Act (BIA) to reflect the spirit of 'resource accountability' rather than 'direction and control' (Cooperation Canada, 2023).The concept for resource accountability had come from the 2019 report *Catalyst for Change: A Roadmap to a Stronger Charitable Sector,* which proposed replacing the wording "charitable activities carried out by itself" with simply "charitable activities", requiring less funder oversight and more non-qualified donee autonomy over their work. The proposed changes would still give the funder financial control but would not require the ongoing operational control currently required. Instead, the funder would need to ensure that the donee had the capacity to carry out the activity before it provided funding (Pickering, 2022, p.3).

In response to the cross-partisan lobbying efforts of the nonprofit coalition, the House of Commons Finance Committee successfully passed two amendments to the BIA. These amendments removed the requirements for grantees to share their financials with funders on demand, as well as the requirement for annual written reports. Instead, new language noted that a charity must maintain ''documentation sufficient to demonstrate the purpose of the donation and that the money is spent on nothing but charitable activities aligned with the

funder's own charitable purposes" (Oatley, 2022a). These changes gave foundations more autonomy to self-identify how they would fund and maintain accountability for supporting non-qualified donees.

While the amendments did not address all of the sectors' concerns, many in the sector still celebrated the achieved wins. Carelle Mang-Benza of Cooperation Canada stated that "The current language in the Budget Implementation Act bill is a testament to compelling and coordinated advocacy by the Canadian charitable sector, and the government's willingness to listen and attend to the sector's concerns" (as cited in Oatley, 2022a).

'Clearer' Government Guidance on Funding Non-Qualified Donees

While the legislative amendments concerning accountability appeared to provide more flexibility to charity/foundations' funding of non-qualified donees, that was not the case when the government posted the draft legislative guidelines in November 2022. The draft guidelines—the document that instructs a federal department how to interpret a law—outlined in significant detail how the CRA would regulate charities to ensure they were meeting their disbursement fund obligations, as well as accountability requirements for funding non-qualified donees. The tight government oversight that sector leaders had been trying to reduce in legislation re-emerged en force in the guidance documents, as mitigating risk became the main bureaucratic concern for the charitable funding of non-qualified donees.

For some the new guidelines represented an "exciting new era of charities working with…important civil society actors," while for others, the lengthy 26-page document created confusion and hindered the ability of charities and foundations to create meaningful partnerships with non-qualified donees (Krynitzki, 2023). During a two-month feedback period, more than 60 nonprofits provided significant critiques of the guidelines to gain more flexibility in the funding of non-qualified donees (Oatley, 2023). According to Sharmila Khare, the Director General of the CRA Charities Directorate responsible for implementing the new legislation, the majority of those organizations that responded during the feedback period encouraged the CRA to reduce the focus on risk, shorten the length of the guideline document, and increase the granting amounts that would be considered 'high risk' (as cited in Krynitzki, 2023). Philanthropic lawyer Terrence Carter, for example, identified that in the draft guidelines the word 'risk' was mentioned 62 times and 'accountability' was mentioned 46 times, while neither term was mentioned in the relevant sections of the Income Tax Act (Carter, 2023). The draft's risk guidelines also identified $5,000 grants as 'low risk,' $5,000–$25,000 as 'moderate risk,' and grants above $25,000 as 'high risk.' In their response to the draft guidance document, law firm Miller Thomson indicated that

the levels of risk associated with such low amounts of funding were out of touch with modern grantmaking (Miller Thomson, 2023). The draft also outlined a proposed 'risk framework,' identifying the risk factors that should impact a funder's grantmaking decisions, including the charity's experience, the grantee's experience, grant activity location, grant amount, private benefit concerns, the nature of risks granted, and the duration of the grant (Canada Revenue Agency, 2022b).

As a counterpoint to the focus on risk, Philanthropic Foundations Canada instead recommended a balanced approach based on trust:

> The reality is that there can be great benefits from a reasonable embrace of risk within a responsible granting portfolio. And philanthropy and the nonprofit and charitable sector as a whole are expected by the government and the public to take risks in addressing all sorts of social challenges. But charities range in their own risk tolerance, and they should be encouraged to consider this in all of their activities, including granting to NQDs [non-qualified donees] (Philanthropic Foundations of Canada, 2022, p.3).

As of late August 2023, the final guidelines had not yet been released and are expected in fall 2023 at the earliest (Denton, 2023). In the meanwhile, tax specialists have recommended that foundations granting to non-qualified donees should exercise caution until the CRA provides more clarity through the final guidelines (Denton, 2023). As a result, the extent to which charities and foundations will possess the flexibility to provide grants to non-qualified donees, and consequently promote the growth of Indigenous and Black-led organizations, as well as other grassroots groups in Canada and worldwide, remains uncertain.

Conclusion

The question 'What is the duty of foundations to support the charitable sector in Canada?' was raised in the public sphere during the global pandemic of 2020–2023. At a time of unprecedented social upheaval, expectations of foundation giving increased, especially in light of their significant asset growth. These expectations were heightened by the fact that a large percentage of foundations were not fulfilling their responsibilities to re-allocate a portion of those gains to charity. In a sense, many foundations had broken the social contract that governs their ability to accumulate and protect their capital, wherein philanthropists and their foundations receive significant tax breaks in return for redistributing a portion of their wealth. However, despite the extraordinary capital gains made in the ten years prior to the pandemic, a good proportion of Canadian foundations still did not abide by these

societal and legal expectations. The impact of this negligence has been severe for charities, and for equity-deserving organizations in particular, all of which continue to struggle in the aftermath of the pandemic.

The legislated disbursement quota increase will benefit charities in Canada by providing larger public access to such gains in tax-sheltered wealth. It is possible that the legislative changes allowing foundations to fund non-qualified donees will also benefit previously unfunded Indigenous nonprofits, Black-led nonprofits, and other nonprofits in Canada and around the globe. It will likely be necessary, however, for nonprofit organizations and their allies to further advocate for changes in the regulatory guidelines to ensure foundations can effectively provide additional support.

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Biographical Information

After decades of involvement with nonprofits and charities, and years of successful grantwriting, **Laura Bonnett** started YellowTree Grant Services in 2018 to help organizations find their funding. She and her team of four Associates work with national, provincial and front-line charities in Canada throughout the grant cycle, as well as with foundations to improve their granting systems and make them more equitable. She is passionate about social justice and generally making the world a better place—on a small or large scale. Laura draws upon almost a decade of experience working in the federal government to help clients understand government granting processes, as well as grant performance measurement and reporting requirements. Her numerous years in academia provide confidence to her clients that their grant applications will be meticulously researched, edited and prepared. Laura is a member of the Association of Fundraising Professionals and the Grant Professionals Association. She is a founding member and currently President of the Canadian Chapter of the Grant Professionals Association. She was the IDEA representative on the Ottawa AFP Chapter Board (2019–2021) and has sat on numerous nonprofit boards nationally and locally. She can be reached at lbonnett@yellowtreegrants.com.

The Need to Connect the GPCI Competencies and GPA Code of Ethics in Grant Training

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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 Professionals

Abstract

When Scot Scala started a career writing grants in 1987, the Grant Professionals Association (GPA) was yet to be conceived and few formalized training organizations, such as The Grantsmanship Center, Inc. (TGCI) and the National Grants Management Association (NGMA), were dedicated to the grant professional. When Cyndi MacKenzie started managing a federal grant in 2003, the American Association of Grant Professionals (later becoming the GPA) was in its infancy with only 481 members. Both authors recognize that early in their careers there was little professional development offered in the sector, and most of what they learned about the grant profession and ethical practices was from their life experiences and respective workplaces. This history has influenced the way Cyndi and Scot, both now Grant Professionals Certified and GPA Approved Trainers, manage their consulting businesses, with an eye on advancing the grant profession and providing mentoring to early-career grant pros. This was the impetus to creating a Next Level Training in collaboration with GPA in 2020, where each of the program's monthly sessions

aligns with the GPA Code of Ethics and addresses Grant Professionals Certification Institute (GPCI) Validated Competencies and Skills. This article is written three years after the inception of the Next Level Training.

Introduction

Professional development is defined as gaining new skills through continuing education and career training after entering the workforce. It can include taking classes or workshops, attending professional or industry conferences, or earning a certificate to expand your knowledge in your chosen field. It is important because it has the potential to open opportunities for career advancement, such as promotions. It can assist any employee in honing existing skills and in learning new ones.

Professional development can also help one stand out in a deep pool of applicants and/or demonstrate expertise in a given field. Employees who show initiative in independent learning can signal to employers that they are open to new experiences and are enthusiastic about continuing to grow (Parsons, 2022).

In 2019, Cyndi MacKenzie and Scot Scala, both Grant Professionals Certified, and with 55 years' combined experience, attended the same conference and were able to talk one afternoon over lunch. While the authors recognized that a variety of training existed, they shared that they had attended many conferences and webinars where presenters did not once mention the GPA Code of Ethics nor the GPCI Core Competencies. This seemed odd given that GPA started as a membership organization with a focus on ethics in the field, and that GPCI and others had spent years prioritizing the development of standards for the profession.

Between 2000 and 2006, the American Association of Grant Professionals (AAGP), the GPCI, and the University of South Florida Institute for Instructional Research and Practice (Institute) undertook a series of activities designed to identify and validate a slate of professional competencies and skills for the field of grantsmanship. The validated competencies and skills now serve as content for a grants-related professional certification test and establish professional standards for the field and are reviewed periodically. In fact, a 2020 *Journal* article titled "Maintaining GPC Validity, Reliability, and Legal Defensibility Through Analysis of the Grant Profession" describes the function of a Job Analysis in credentialing, which Cyndi had participated in.

In 2019, the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA) granted accreditation to the GPCI and the GPC credential for demonstrating compliance with the NCCA Standards for the Accreditation of Certification Programs. NCCA is the accrediting body of the Institute for Credentialing Excellence (ICE).

Cyndi and Scot had also observed the lack of understanding of the GPA Code of Ethics and the inconsistent reference to the GPCI competencies at some training courses, conferences, webinars, and during interactions with early, mid-level and advanced career grant professionals. This is inconsistent with the fact that, according to GPA Headquarters, GPA has been requesting the GPC Competencies information on the workshop proposal application as far back as at least 2012.

In addition, both authors were struck by the fact that in 2018, only 12% of GPA members had earned the GPC credential. In addition, the authors had been mentors to other grant professionals, not officially as part of the GPA Mentorship Program, but on their own, and knew from the GPCI that there was, and still is, a call for 30–40 GPA Members to work with 1–2 grant professionals as mentors. These two facts concerned the authors.

When the authors analyzed the percentage of GPCs to GPA Members for this article, data from the annual reports of both GPA and GPCI revealed the following:

Table 1. Percentage of GPCs Among GPA Members, By Year

Year	GPA Members	GPCs	Percentage
2018	2843	351	12%
2019*	3080	370	12%
2020	2801	360	12.8%
2021	3012	402	13.3%
2022	3314	439	13.2%

** GPCI received accreditation of the GPC credential from the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA.*

In late 2022, the GPA presenter agreement was updated to include a statement that all presenters agree to abide by the GPA Code of Ethics. To be transparent, readers should know that Cyndi MacKenzie was Co-Chair of the Ethics Committee at that time and has knowledge that the Ethics Committee initiated this change by submitting a formal request to the Professional Education Committee.

Since starting their careers as grant professionals, the authors have been aware of the magnitude of fraud, waste, and abuse with grant funds. This is reinforced by the latest Government Accountability Office report that since fiscal year 2003, cumulative executive agency improper payment estimates have totaled almost $2.4 trillion, including $247 billion for fiscal year 2022 (U.S. GAO, 2023, p. 1). The authors recognize that the GPA Code of Ethics and the GPCI Competencies, once realized, is a way to decrease that significant waste and abuse.

Cyndi and Scot saw a tremendous need for comprehensive, strategic, and targeted training for early career professionals with a targeted focus on the GPA Code of Ethics and the GPCI Core Competencies. As experienced trainers and professionals who are active in various aspects of the grant field, the authors decided to approach GPA to achieve a collective goal of imparting quality professional development with the underlying tenet of the GPA Code of Ethics and by fully covering all GPCI Core Competencies. They also aimed to increase GPA's revenue streams and the number of grant professionals who earn their GPC certifications to enhance the grant field as a whole.

GPA Next Level Training

The GPA Next Level Training program objective was to offer an "Early Career Grant Professionals" virtual course to increase participants' knowledge, skills, and ethical practices of grant-related communication, research, writing, project management, stewardship, ethics, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and professional development. The virtual course includes:

- A training program with monthly sessions for a full year
- Each session highlights the GPCI competency being addressed, and all nine (9) are covered over the 12-session series
- Each session states the GPA Code of Ethics relative to any appropriate situations, and all 20 codes are covered over the year
- Instruction for 50 minutes per session with a 10-minute Question & Answer opportunity for free expert advice and mentoring
- Each session is recorded, so that GPA can archive the course, for ongoing professional development.

The authors anticipated that by the conclusion of the courses, the early grant professional would have a more comprehensive understanding of the principles and methodologies that guide a successful grant professional's career. In addition, the participant would gain greater interest in the GPC exam, and that learned knowledge and skills would be in line with the competencies set by GPCI and the GPA Code of Ethics.

With further goal discussion, both Mike Chamberlain, GPA Chief Executive, and Barb Boggs, GPA Events and Governance Manager, worked with the authors to begin presenting the GPA Next Level Training in 2020, for which Cyndi and Scot would be compensated as presenters. The emphasis on the GPCI Competencies and the GPA Code of Ethics was appealing to GPA. After the first year, the authors and the GPA surveyed participants to see if the content met their expectations, if the time of day worked, if the sessions were the right amount of time, and if there

was anything that was not covered that was of interest to them. Taking the feedback to heart, the authors adapted the course by combining two of the sessions and adding one that addressed federal grantwriting. Throughout the history of this course, changes have been made to address current trends and environmental factors, such as emphasis on Inclusion and Equity in the SMART Outcomes Model, COVID-19 and American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, and the increased use of Artificial Intelligence in grant work.

Attendance for this training has increased annually from 44 to 90 to 94 in 2020, 2021, and 2022 respectively.

Curriculum

The curriculum for the Next Level Training in 2023 is:

1. *Think Like a CEO and Lead your Grant Professionals Career*
   (Competency #2 and #7; Ethics #1, #7, #8, #9)
2. *Create a Roadmap for Your Organization*
   (Competency #2; Ethics #8, #9)
3. *Ethics—In All Things Grants*
   (Competency #6, #7; Ethics #1- #20)
4. *Research Prospecting*
   (Competency #1; Ethics #4, #5, #6, #10)
5. *Best Practices for Developing the Competitive Edge in Your Grant Writing*
   (Competency #2, #4, #6, #9; Ethics #1, #4, #5, #6)
6. *Aspects of the Proposal—Outlines, Collaboration, Community Need, and Program Creation*
   (Competency #3, #4, #6, #9; Ethics #2, #10, #11, #12, #13, #14, #15, #16)
7. *Preparation is Everything…How to Demonstrate Program Impact in Grant Reporting*
   (Competency #3, #4; Ethics #1, #3, #4, #5)
8. *Comprehensive Budget Creation for Federal, State and Foundation Grants*
   (Competency #6; Ethics #10, #11, #12, #16, #17, #18, #19, #20)
9. *You Won…Now the Real Work Begins*
   (Competency #5; Ethics #2, #10, #11, #12, #20)
10. *Policies and Procedures—Reduce your Risk*
    (Competency #5; Ethics #2, #16- #20)
11. *Grant Funder Stewardship is all About Relationships: But with an Eye on DEI*
    (Competency #8; GPA Ethics #1, #6, #9)

12. *Federal Grants: Consider the Pros and Cons of Federal Grant Applications BEFORE YOU APPLY*
(Competency #2, #4; GPA Ethics #2, #6, #7)

Because Scot and Cyndi are grant professionals who rely heavily on data, a pre- and post-test with the same 16 open-ended questions was implemented in 2020, at the start and end of the course and every year thereafter. In 2021, two more questions were added to accommodate the new session on federal grants.

Outcome Data Analysis

With data from registration, pre- and post-tests from 2020–2022, and from records kept at the GPA Headquarters regarding GPA and GPC status, the authors are pleased to report that seven participants received their GPC during or after the Next Level course was completed, and that five people who were non-member participants at the start of the course became GPA members during or after the course. Detailed results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Next Level Training Outcomes

Year	# of Registrants	GPCs at start of course	GPCs during course	GPCs after course	GPA members at start of course	GPA members after course
2020	44	4	0	0 to date	34	36
2021	90	9	+3	+3	77	80
2022	94	5	+1	0 to date	77	77
2023	62	5	Not available yet	Not available yet	39	Not available yet

Response rates varied from year to year, but consistent across years was that many more (see Table 3 below) registrants completed the pre-test than the post-test. In addition, the sample size over three years for matched surveys was less than 20 answers making it statistically invalid to determine outcomes.

According to Barb Boggs, the GPA staff facilitator for the majority of the Next Level sessions, "the return rate for a GPA survey is usually closer to 10–15%" (personal communication, January 23, 2023). In researching the national response rates, Rachel Kohn, Senior Consultant at JSI Research & Training Institute, stated, "The general rule of thumb is to have a minimum of 25–30 pre- and post-matched surveys to be able

to assess changes with any statistical validity" (personal communication, March 18, 2023). Therefore, the pre-test rate for the Next Level Training was significantly higher than GPA rates, but the matched surveys were too small to ethically evaluate outcomes.

Table 3. Pre- and Post-Test Responses

Year and Time of Test	Number of Responses	Percentage of Participants
Pre-test 2020	27	61.4
Post-test 2020	4	0.09
Pre-test 2021	38	42.2
Post-test 2021	11	12.2
Pre-test 2022	50	53.2
Post-test 2022	10	10.6
Pre-test 2023	21	45.7

The low matched pre-to-post test analysis failed to prove increased knowledge in a scientifically valid way. Research demonstrates that there is an intrinsic value in anecdotal quotes from participants in training. "Presenting authentic citations of what informants have uttered has become the "gold standard" in qualitative studies, and most people who read such papers and reports expect that there will be a number of such quotations" (Brown, 2010). Therefore, comments made by participants regarding the course quoted below, while anecdotal, significantly reflect the value of the course content.

> "Over the course of the program, you instruct the class on what parts of the Code of Ethics and what competencies and skills are covered. Of course, your session "Ethics in All Things Grants" is monumental in discussing the need for ethics and how we apply those ethics in our work, in our agreements, our practice, the use of funds, our compensation, and our obligations."
>
> "The Next Level Grant Training program has informed and deepened my knowledge and understanding of the GPA Code of Ethics and GPCI Competencies and Skills…You both have a thorough understanding of the Code of Ethics, and I really value your perspectives on how to be in alignment with them. I do have my GPC

> and I find it very helpful to be reminded each session about how the topics relate to the competencies and skills."
>
> "The workbooks, templates, tools, and additional resources from your years of experience in the profession are valuable! I am now incorporating many of them in my work. Thank you immensely for them!"
>
> "I am a seasoned grant writer but decided to take this program anyway. I'm so glad I did. Hearing from other seasoned grant writers opens the door to new ideas and methods. And going back to basics is always a valuable refresher. Treat yourself!"

Best practices informs the authors that "the interpretation of participant responses involves attaching meaning and significance to data" (CDC, 2018). Again, anecdotally, what Scot and Cyndi noticed during the question-and-answer phase of each training and from reviewing the pre-tests was the following:

- Registrants still struggle with fully understanding why it is unethical for a grant professional to be paid on commission or based on the outcome of a grant (wholly or partly).
- Registrants appreciated the more than 40 handouts that accompanied the 12 sessions such as examples of actual budgets, logic models, in-kind tracking forms, time tracking forms, self-assessments, reading recommendations, grant readiness lists, strategic plans, collaborative grant-writing task lists, decision-making rubrics, timelines, work plans, risk assessment tools, and more.
- Registrants responded in more detail in the post-test with words like "integrity," "dignity,""respect," "impact," "capacity," "decision-making," "process," "SMART objectives," "indicators," and "specific policies."

It appeared that the course had succeeded in connecting the GPCI Core Competencies and the GPA Code of Ethics for attendees.

Lessons Learned

The 2023 course is underway, with 62 registrants at the time of the writing of this *Journa*l article, five of whom were GPCs at the start of the course. Due to the lack of post-test responses and small sample sizes of the past, the course in 2024 will be changed in the following ways:

- The Ethics session will include more time to discuss compensation and the rationale that supports reasons GPA Members and GPCs cannot work on commission.
- The pre-test will not be implemented and instead a multiple-choice survey will be conducted at the completion of the 12th session, which will be conducted in the 12th class in 2023 and will be mandatory in future years in order to release the GPA or Association of Fundraising Professionals CFRE continuing education credits. This shift in eliminating the pre- and post-test will allow the authors to better analyze the program outcomes.
- The authors must continue to pivot and amend their course material to align with the latest trends and environmental factors as they did with COVID-19, in order to best meet the changing needs of attendees.
- The authors recognize that qualitative data and themes can help interpret data and demonstrate the value of the Next Level training. As research indicates, "qualitative data are collected through direct or participant observation, interviews, focus groups, and case studies and from written documents. Analyses of qualitative data include examining, comparing and contrasting, and interpreting patterns" (Patton, 2002, as cited in CC, 2015).
- According to GPA Headquarters, with the onboarding of a new Marketing Manager in the past year, GPA has plans for more intentional and timely marketing strategies for this course.

Moving forward, it will be essential to review each theme that arose during the training process and identify similarities and differences in responses from participants. The authors will also consider the relationships between themes to determine how they may be connected to the GPCI Core Competencies and GPA Code of Ethics. Due to the fact that sessions are recorded and archived, the authors can accomplish this by reviewing participant feedback, Chat Box comments, and recommendations that are captured.

Conclusion

The GPA Next Level Grant Training has demonstrated that including the tenets of the GPA Code of Ethics and the GPCI Core Competencies increases awareness and understanding of best practices for grant professionals. It is critical for GPA to continue partnering with presenters who prioritize best practices in the field. Grounding the GPCI competencies and GPA Code of Ethics within Next Level Training educates attendees on a wide range of core principles in the grants sector and sets the stage for prioritizing these standards. Although there is little

need to alter the method or content of the instruction of the Next Level Training, the authors realize a need to amend the approach to assessing participant outcomes. Starting with post-assessment of the 2023 program, the authors will implement a multiple-choice survey rather than a post-test with an opportunity for participants to note anecdotal responses. The shift from matched pre- and post-tests will allow for a more accurate analysis of data outcomes, which in turn will help to guide the advancement of the Next Level program for years to come.

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Biographical Information

Cyndi MacKenzie, GPC has won over $42 million in resources in partnership with her clients. With 20 years in the field, Cyndi offers ethical services to non-profits of all sizes, including prospect research, board development, strategic plan development, grantwriting and management, budget creation and post-award consultation. Cyndi has clients all over the United States, and enjoys the diversity and passion of her clients, with a special focus on social service agencies. She is the recipient of the 2003 Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault "Make a Difference Award," the 2020 Grant Professional Certification Institute Pauline G. Annarino Award, and the 2022 Boys & Girls Club of Greater Salem, NH, Richard P. McCoy Service Award. Cyndi can be reached at cyndimackenzie@outlook.com.

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GPA Strategy Papers Volume 10, Issue 1

Transformational Grant Writing through DEI

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Abstract

In this era of self-reflection and increased social awareness, a new and emerging conversation around Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) dominates conversations across various disciplines, including grantwriting.

DEI will be a crucial factor in the approach used by grant professionals to present a heightened and profound level of cultural awareness in their proposals. This strategy espouses a call to action, entitled *Transformational Grant Writing,* to increase sensitivity to race, ethnicity, and culture. Undertaking such action will lay the foundation for grant professionals to think more broadly and profoundly about how to cultivate proposals that more accurately portray the people to be served and demonstrate a deeper understanding of community needs. This newfound awareness by grant professionals aligns well with the philanthropic community's desire to embrace DEI, and to be thoughtful and intentional in incorporating DEI in their grantmaking literature and processes.

Introduction

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) were at the heart of the 1960s civil rights movement. The most famous leader of the early civil rights movement was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and with his assassination in 1968, civil rights work continued, but the movement lost momentum. Today, new leaders are confronted with addressing existing and emerging civil rights issues. The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement began in 2014 and ushered in a resurgence of focused attention on DEI. Sara Dong, a Senior Advisor with Global Research and Consulting Group, explains that BLM "compels Americans to reflect on social injustices in our country today" (Dong, 2021, p.1). Further, in a state of reflection, Alexandria Love, in her 2020 article on diversity, states that "through integrating diversity

in American vernacular and curriculum and demonstrating the lasting importance of diversity, marginalized Americans were finally saying, we're here, get used to it'" (Love, 2020, p.1).

From a personal perspective, I understand and can relate to Ms. Love's bold declaration, as she merely asks for her community to be heard, seen, and acknowledged. Throughout my life as an African-American woman, I have had to demonstrate and prove that I am worthy of "a place at the table" and sought to be seen, heard, and respected for who I am as a human being. As my career in the grant field blossomed, I recognized that my personal experience mirrored that of my professional work.

Throughout the years, as an experienced grant writer, I noticed that information presented in applicants' proposals often centered on describing communities based on race/ethnicity instead of referencing the underlying "root causes" associated with social ills, such as homelessness, illiteracy, and underemployment, that negatively impact communities. Additionally, I contend that focusing the proposal narrative on referencing specific social issues affecting the residents better represents the "community needs." At the same time, race/ethnicity should be a peripheral factor in describing a community.

This strategy paper intends to present a meaningful and thought-provoking message about the importance and relevance of DEI in the grant world with the intent of creating engaging dialogue that will encourage grant professionals and grant makers to scrutinize their grant materials for the presence of DEI.

Transforming Grant Writing Through DEI

When examining DEI and its impact on grant writing, the conversation is centered around marginalized populations and how to ensure that minority populations are appropriately described in proposals—without stigmatization, demonization, or stereotypes, and with a spotlight on the "real" social issues impacting the population. More and more philanthropic organizations are beginning to understand and value the importance of DEI in the grant landscape. For instance, the Ford Foundation's website states that it is essential that diversity, equity, and inclusion infuse all its work, which translates into ensuring that funders have a diverse team and incorporate DEI into their grantmaking staffing and project design (Ford Foundation, 2023).

Examining representation of race/ethnicity and culture in proposals

The past few years have presented defining moments of unprecedented change for the nation and the world, from the COVID-19 pandemic to a galvanized human justice movement addressing inequalities among people of color. In a research report by Perry, Aronson, and Pescosolido

(2020), the researchers state that the disparities in the COVID-19 pandemic openly showed the glaring inequality that characterized American society and reinforced and exacerbated a catastrophic societal event. As a result, the voices of marginalized groups morphed into a singular expression demanding change that has deepened the awareness of many in understanding and valuing DEI on positively transforming communities.

In this era of change, a new and emerging discourse centered around the issue of DEI has evolved. Today, proponents of DEI contend that including everyone in the conversation is essential and must include the provision of spaces for sharing, listening, and being tolerant and respectful of everyone's beliefs and culture. Lindsey Lunsford, National Association of Benefits and Insurance Professionals DEI Fellow, writes: "Like a string of beads, our unique differences and intricacies make us so appealing and attractive. We would not be as beautiful if we were all the same. Instead, it's the contrast and asymmetry that makes us worthwhile" (2022, p.5).

DEI definitions are often used interchangeably and are synonymous with the civil rights movement, where people of color peacefully exercised their rights to protest racial discrimination peacefully.

DEI is complex in its definition. However, to better understand DEI, a more simplified version helps put the overall meaning into a digestible context. *Diversity* is how people differ; *Equity* is fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all people; and *Inclusion* is a variety of people of power, voice, and decision-making authority (Gensler, 2019).

A transformation in our thinking and being must occur to embrace DEI. Further, transformation represents a change that allows for deep introspection, leading to the outward manifestation of new learned and adopted experiences. This transformational conversation has entered the world of grant writing. There are several writings on DEI in the grant making and grant writing arena. For instance, in a 2021 article published in *The Non-Profit Times,* Barbara Floersch, the author of *You Have a Hammer: Building Grant Proposals for Social Changes,* emphasizes the importance of grant writers infusing the DEI elements in their proposals: "A grant proposal is more than a response to funder requirements. It represents your organization's requirements and ethical bearings" (Floersch, 2021, p.1).

Recommendations

A Call to Action: Rethinking and Reframing Race/Ethnicity and Culture in Proposals

Transformational Grant Writing in concert with DEI will help to enhance grant-related program design and implementation to better serve diverse and disenfranchised communities.

Presented below are five key points for creating an organizational culture that embraces DEI in *Transformational Grant Writing.*

1. *Become a student of DEI.* Consider investing time in learning the key tenets of DEI and its relevance in transformational grant writing.
2. *Embrace change and help others to do the same.* Transformation cannot occur without shifting mindsets and taking risks.
3. *Pivot and lean in.* Out with the Old and In with the New. Trust the process and engage in dialogue around innovative practices.
4. *Take action to incorporate change in grant writing processes and procedures that address DEI.* Ask these fundamental questions:
   - Who needs to be added to the program development and grant development planning process?
   - Have we created a safe space that supports engaging community representatives in designing the proposed program/project?
   - Do we fully understand and have we addressed the cultural relevance of the proposed program/project?
5. *Expand your thinking to create lasting change*. Re-program how you view funders. Grant writers often view philanthropic groups as unreachable and solely as a provider of resources. Instead, grant writers should consider the funder as an investor and partner interested in realizing a Return on Investment (ROI) and using DEI to make a systemic and long-lasting community impact.

Conclusion

Until the world becomes a place of equal opportunity for all, DEI will remain the inflection point where individuals, communities, businesses, governments, and philanthropic groups work to consciously understand and engage minorities and disenfranchised groups to ensure they are fully supported. Additionally, grant writing professionals' understanding of DEI will help improve their presentation of minority groups in their proposals, thereby creating a program representative of the community to be served.

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Biographical Information

Andrea Bedenbaugh is a Grant Professionals Association (GPA) member and has her Grant Professional Certification (GPC). As a successful African-American female grant professional in a white-dominated space, Ms. Bedenbaugh has more than 30 years of experience in grants development, management, and program development. She worked as a consultant for prominent national and local nonprofit organizations and acted as a Reviewer for Health Services and Resource Administration (HRSA). She also served as a Program Officer with a federal agency providing compliance oversight to tribal and nontribal grantees. Andrea is currently a Supervisor of Strategic Grants Development and Management for Prince George's County Public Schools, the second largest school district in Maryland. She can be reached at Andrea.Bedenbaugh@pgcps.org.

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Building Capacity in the Rural Environment: Strategies to Capitalize on the Changing Funding Landscape

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Abstract

The onset of the opioid crisis, as well as the COVID pandemic and multiple changes in presidential administrations in the last 15 years, has resulted in an unprecedented windfall of rural-focused grant dollars. While additional dollars are welcome in rural communities across the country, the capacity of these regions to leverage the resources continues to be inadequate, resulting in limited impact to critical community needs. To mitigate this issue, new planning and development programs are continuing to emerge to bridge this gap in capacity. Rural communities now have more options to secure the support necessary in navigating this new landscape. By assessing capacity, taking advantage of new technical assistance opportunities, learning about the new funding landscape, and leaning into strategic partnership building, rural communities can capitalize on the increased funding and achieve their community development goals.

Rural Grant Funding Landscape

Grant funding has long been a critical element to community development. This is especially true for rural communities across the country where grants are often one of the only options available to fund critical community infrastructure projects. These areas of the country have the least amount of tax and economic base necessary to attract new business, interest in revitalization and historic preservation, as well as future-looking projects that support environmental sustainability (Pender, 2015).

The lack of more rural-specific grant programs forced rural communities for many years to compete with urban communities that held more expertise in grant development and management. There is a long history of rural communities being underfunded, even though the need in these areas is greater. A 2010 report by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service estimated that the value of U.S. foundation grants to benefit rural areas was 6–7% of total domestic grants (Pender, 2015). This correlated with research findings that large foundations awarded $88 per capita (2010 dollars) in rural areas, compared to $167 per capita in metropolitan counties. Reports highlighting these unjust discrepancies led to more rural-specific grants from government agencies over the next 10 years.

A fast-forward to FY 2022, there are now more than 400 federal programs designed for rural communities (Bustillo, 2023). This includes more than $7.5 billion in funding to rural communities as part of the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund, part of the American Rescue Plan Act. The Health Resources and Services Administration has also invested more than $500 million across 1,500 communities in 35 states since FY 2018 to address prevention, treatment, and recovery solutions for substance use disorder. In addition, in FY 2022, Congress created a new influx of funding through the trillion-dollar infrastructure law and climate incentives of the Inflation Reduction Act. These dollars are to support rural communities in their investment in sustainable energy solutions, lowering healthcare costs, etc.

In 2022, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law budgeted the investment of billions of dollars in rural communities across the country (Mohr & Whitcomb, 2022). The focus of these grants is delivering high-speed internet, road improvements, bridge and wastewater infrastructure, and economic development. An estimated 60% of funds designated are for areas through state-specific formulas and the remaining funds made available are through competitive funding opportunities.

Capacity Building in Rural Communities

This windfall of funding is a long awaited and welcomed resource to rural communities. No longer having to compete with larger urban organizations with more experience and capacity to plan, write, and develop complex grant applications can seemingly level the playing field. However, there is still much more to consider, particularly for grant opportunities that offer a larger award amount. For example, determining the most appropriate funding opportunities for a project, coordinating the necessary collaboration required as part of a larger grant application, as well as developing a solid proposal, requires expertise that is not often readily available in many rural communities. In addition, the project management and sustainability planning also require specific expertise to ensure appropriate and timely use of funds. This poses a threat to small

communities trying to leverage new pots of money that may support much needed infrastructure and development.

According to data aggregated by the Rural Capacity Index (Headwaters Economics, 2022), there are 10 large portions of the U.S. with limited capacity. The index includes 10 indicators that measure local government capacity, such as planning, institutional capacity, the presence of a college or university, economic opportunity, income stability, and poverty prevalence. Education, voting and education rates are also considered.

Approximately 75% of Midwest communities have low community capacity index scores. More than 50% of the Gulf Coast, West, and Southeast regions have low index scores, while 22% to 43% of Northeast, Pacific Coast, and Great Lakes regions have low scores. These large portions of the U.S. require additional support in developing and sustaining grants compared to more affluent metropolitan areas.

President Biden, like his three immediate predecessors, recognized limited rural capacity, particularly as it related to climate change and emergency preparedness, and sought to mitigate it (Headwaters Economics, 2022). According to the Government Accountability Office (GAO), federal grant recipients in five states reported, "Hiring and workload issues, as well as challenges due to the limited capacity of local partners, which constrained efforts to allocate and use funds" (GAO, 2023, p. 8). A pilot program, the Rural Partners Network pilot, was coordinated to provide technical assistance for rural communities to alleviate reported burdens in writing and managing federal grants. The hope was this initiative would build capacity for future development.

Not unlike the Clinton-era empowerment zones and the Obama-era promise zones that also sought to accomplish some of these same goals, the Rural Partners Network targeted relevant impact, as well as staying power, as primary goals—something previous administrations had not done. Often, administrations are looking for shovel-ready projects, which is difficult for rural communities to realize given their limited resources to develop them. However, building planning and resource capacity can be the differentiator in success of future programs.

Strategies to Build Rural Capacity

Rural communities must look to bridge the gaps in capacity for resource and project development. This includes their ability to evaluate grant and community development opportunities, as well as successfully coordinate proposals. In addition, securing expertise in project/program operations, evaluation, and sustainability is also necessary. The following strategies can assist rural communities in understanding where gaps in development capacities are, and clarify where support from technical assistance resources are most needed.

Assessing Organizational Capacity

The first step in a strategic funding strategy is to assess the organization's strengths and weaknesses in the area of funding resources. First, consider what level of expertise from readily available resources or connections the organization has available to evaluate grant and community development opportunities. Then consider what expertise and resources are available to plan and develop solid proposals, as well as manage them once secured. Using a grants capacity assessment matrix, such as the one developed using the Nevada Grant Lab's Federal Grant Readiness Rubric (2019), Foundant Technologies' assessment (Pearce, 2019), and Grantmakers for Effective Organizations Due Diligence Tool (Culick, Godard & Terk, 2018), will help determine gaps and the need for technical assistance. This specific matrix asks organizations to assess their capacity in terms of political and social capital; ability to identify appropriate funding opportunities; proposal development; grant management; and sustainability. Understanding specific expertise and/or resource gaps that need to be bridged for strong proposal development, grant management, and sustainability planning will provide a starting point for rural organizations in terms of grantseeking activities.

If an organization determines that it has strong or adequate resources in these areas, the next recommendation is to educate their team on the current rural funding landscape. If they have limited capacity and readiness in any of the categories identified above (i.e. limited grant management expertise or limited social capital), it may make more sense for them to investigate technical assistance opportunities first.

These opportunities may look different across different sectors, as there are many local, state, and federal agencies that provide some resources. However, some primary options to consider include:

- *Experienced grants professionals.* These professionals will guide organizations through the entire process of identifying funding opportunities, submitting an application, and managing a grant. If independent consultants are not an option due to limited financial resources, consider reaching out to larger organizations, such as colleges and universities that have grant professionals who may be willing to volunteer their time to guide the organization.

- *Local, state, and federal agencies with technical assistance programs.* Whether it is an economic development agency, a rural extension agency, or a federal agency with a rural office, such as Health Resources and Services Administration (Office of Rural Health), consider contacting these organizations for information on grant opportunities available and connecting to their resources to develop proposals.

- If a grant opportunity is identified, consider building *technical assistance* into the proposals. Planning grants offer this assistance to support rural organizations with limited project management experience, limited grants management experience, or limited knowledge of sustainability planning. Accessing this support will not only increase likelihood of positive outcomes, but will also offer education opportunities on how to build strong grants management skills, which furthers future capacity.

Learn About the New Funding Landscape

There has been great investment in recent years into rural-specific grants, as well as technical assistance to develop plans and proposals. These include increased rural-specific funding that eliminates competition with urban areas that have more resources and experience developing and managing grants. There are many online resources to look for funding options.

Starting with a higher-level strategy and focusing on key elements can make the process easier. These include:

- Reaching out to local, state, and federal agencies that align with the type of work or project the rural organization seeks to support. Ask for time to meet about potential grant opportunities that are currently available, eligibility requirements, etc. For example, if the rural organization is located in Appalachia, consider starting at the federal level with the Appalachian Regional Commission and its state and local offices where education is provided. If the rural agency is located in one of the 10 states supported by the Rural Partners Network, reach out to this organization directly.

- Considering other options for funding projects, particularly those that require capital dollars. These include opportunities like tax credits and government appropriations. Tax credits are usually applied in rural areas from state agencies that hold these dollars for specific opportunities such as downtown revitalization and historic preservation projects. Appropriations from the federal and state government require a knowledge of the request process and representatives with whom to work. Reach out to government relations representatives available at local and state associations or non-profits to learn about this process.

Strategic Partnership Building

Collaborating with organizations that have more experience and resources can assist rural entities in accessing larger funding opportunities. Reach out to local development agencies, nonprofits, and government representatives. These contacts can make introductions to larger agencies that have more knowledge of what is available and more

capacity to develop and manage grant projects. Key organizations for rural organizations to consider include:

- Colleges and universities, especially those with rural extension programs, often have large grant and project portfolios, as well as sponsored programs offices, which possibly can share funding opportunities and assistance in developing projects and partnerships. Another possibility to learn about effective grants management is to collaborate with an institution of higher education on a project as a sub-grantee, where guidance and support is offered at a detailed level.
- Medium to large health systems often have considerable grants portfolios and expertise to provide guidance and education on grant project development. In addition, if they are the primary healthcare system in a region, they have close relationships with government representatives, economic development, and state and federal agencies. Rural organizations can leverage these resources to grow a partnership network and access larger funding opportunities through collaborative projects or as a sub-grantee.
- Local and regional economic development agencies are also valuable partners for rural organizations. These entities have connections to funding as well as potential strategic partnerships that align with state and regional development goals. Developing relationships with these local offices can yield rural organizations with multiple capacity building resources.

Conclusion

Addressing the root problems that limit the capacity of rural communities to develop funding streams for critical community infrastructure and growth will make it easier for these communities to capture newly available grant dollars in these areas. Assisting rural communities in understanding where they need to build their development capacity and providing technical assistance to identify appropriate funding pathways and strategic partnerships will encourage success in project and proposal development. In addition, building capacity and accessing funding streams will naturally promote community development within rural locales. These processes, in turn, create a foundation which supports the financial and human resources that rural communities need to revitalize themselves today and thrive tomorrow.

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Biographical Information

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GPA Strategy Papers Volume 10, Issue 3

A Dashboard that Injects Measurable Impact Into Project Design

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Abstract

A 'Dashboard' tool and methodology can address a challenge commonly faced by grant professionals: translating a new or existing service into a measurable, impactful, fundable, and universally understood project. The Dashboard is an accessible way to inject strategic planning into grantwriting that promotes evaluation and straightforward, executive decision-making.

Introduction

Organizations earn nonprofit status by demonstrating public benefit. Evaluation documents provide valuable feedback to maximize public benefit. However, impact measurement can mystify, burden, and even annoy service providers who are already juggling numerous tasks. To complete this work, grant professionals must often ask coworkers to help envision and report on quantitative and qualitative positive change from organization efforts. A Dashboard spreadsheet avoids this complication by translating *services*—activities provided for client benefit—into *projects*—bundled services viewed as impactful and worthy of investment. This enables the grant professional and service provider staff to mutually create project objectives, outcomes, and budgets that are clear to grantmakers.

Need, Rationale, and Early Development

The author has nearly a decade of firsthand experience as an agency employee and 23 years of consulting experience working with more than 100 organizations. During that time, he has gained insight into grant challenges common to charitable organizations of all types, sizes, and stages of growth. One of the most confounding is the compilation and creation of specific information required for application submissions.

Creating such a case for support is complex and many employees of nonprofits lack the motivation or time to do so. Obstacles include lack of written strategic plans, delays in executive decision-making, weak comprehension of evaluation and its terminology, insufficient investment in agency tools and human resources, and low prioritization of outcome measurement. The creation of a case requires skills far beyond good writing, a fact that few organizations recognize. There must be analysis of root causes, data research on challenges and solutions, creation of evaluation tools, lobbying to have leaders approve strategies, and more.

Grant professionals with little or no strategic orientation struggle in this endeavor. It is not simple to guide proposal reviewers through the logic of problems' root causes, documentation, measurement, and eradication. It often requires taking a current or envisioned service and converting it into a compelling, detailed argument. Grant applications lacking specificity can be stressful for grant professionals who may determine their best alternative is to "just abandon the proposal entirely" (Conn, 2013, p. 967).

The question for the author became, *"Is there an easier way to get details needed to write a strong proposal?"* A rigorous literature review could not identify a widely regarded method.

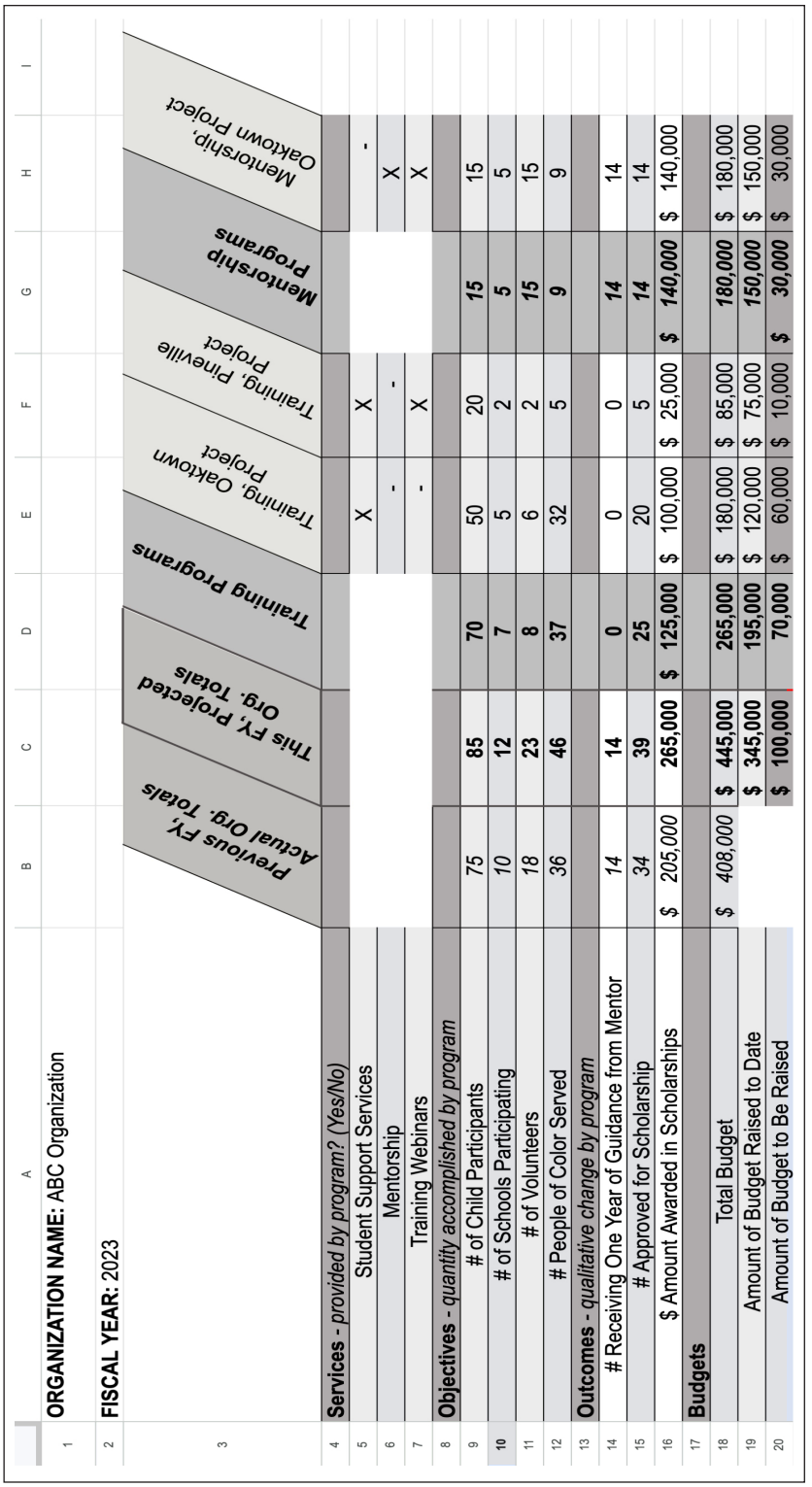
Dashboard Tool Creation

The development of the Dashboard to simplify compilation of details began with several factors in mind. Its function and language would be easily understood and appreciated by organization decision-makers and grant professionals alike. It would display key details required by grantmakers, but in a simple format, to be practical for broader use. It would provide a 'single point of truth' for organization personnel to view, approve, and visualize grant application content, avoiding the pitfalls of needing to sift through a variety of past proposals and reports. Finally, it would utilize software that most nonprofits already use and understand.

To easily work with numerical measures in a familiar milieu, a relatively concise grid was designed in a shareable spreadsheet. The consultant author field-tested the Dashboard with his clients and the current format was developed (See Figure 1 for an abridged version). The full template can be downloaded at link.communicationmark.com/dashboard.

Lists of *Services, Objectives,* and *Outcomes* appear in rows down the left-hand side of the Dashboard.

Services—the activities provided for client benefit—concisely remind users of the features each proposed project provides, for description in the project methods portion of a grant application. Services listed for a workforce development nonprofit might include skills training, mentorship, job placement, and so on. The director of a small nonprofit shared with this author that having the Dashboard helped immeasurably



	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
1	**ORGANIZATION NAME:** ABC Organization								
2	**FISCAL YEAR:** 2023								
3		Previous FY, Actual Org. Totals	This FY, Projected Org. Totals	Training Programs	Training, Oaktown Project	Training, Pineville Project	Mentorship Programs	Mentorship, Oaktown Project	
4	**Services** - *provided by program? (Yes/No)*								
5	Student Support Services				X	X		-	
6	Mentorship				-	-		X	
7	Training Webinars				-	X		X	
8	**Objectives** - *quantity accomplished by program*								
9	# of Child Participants	*75*	**85**	**70**	50	20	***15***	15	
10	# of Schools Participating	*10*	**12**	**7**	5	2	***5***	5	
11	# of Volunteers	*18*	**23**	**8**	6	2	***15***	15	
12	# People of Color Served	*36*	**46**	**37**	32	5	***9***	9	
13	**Outcomes** - *qualitative change by program*								
14	# Receiving One Year of Guidance from Mentor	*14*	**14**	**0**	0	0	***14***	14	
15	# Approved for Scholarship	*34*	**39**	**25**	20	5	***14***	14	
16	$ Amount Awarded in Scholarships	*$ 205,000*	**265,000**	**$ 125,000**	$ 100,000	$ 25,000	***$ 140,000***	$ 140,000	
17	**Budgets**								
18	Total Budget	*$ 408,000*	**$ 445,000**	**265,000**	$ 180,000	$ 85,000	***180,000***	$ 180,000	
19	Amount of Budget Raised to Date		**$ 345,000**	**195,000**	$ 120,000	$ 75,000	***150,000***	$ 150,000	
20	Amount of Budget to Be Raised		**$ 100,000**	**70,000**	$ 60,000	$ 10,000	***$ 30,000***	$ 30,000	

Figure 1: Milestone Dashboard

on a site visit by a program officer from a foundation. The Dashboard provided a clear picture of objective measures of the project on which the director and the program officer could both converge.

- *Objectives* follow, listing quantitative measures (e.g., number of child participants, schools participating, or people of color served) to share with grantmakers.

- *Outcomes* are next, with those rows listing qualitative improvements such as how many clients will receive one-year mentorships or scholarships. A Dashboard user shared with this author that they "should know everything, but there is no way I can have all of these numbers in mind" (Urdiales, personal conversation, March 20, 2023).

- *Budgets* appear across the bottom rows of the Dashboard to track anticipated one-year income and expenses. Determining these figures can surface another level of challenge for an organization: *Is it implementing fund accounting to keep its promises regarding grant allocation?* The uncomfortable truth is that many nonprofits, particularly smaller or newer ones, struggle in this area. Such organizations should realize that this struggle is actually a growth opportunity. One group using the Dashboard initiated a series of conversations with its accounting contractor to remedy its budgeting.

Across the top of the Dashboard, columns list each stand-alone project for the year. An 'X' typed in each column indicates a Service provided to a project, and numbers or percentages estimate objectives and outcomes. Part of the exercise of breaking out each project into columns is to make sure there is no overlap between projects. For instance, the organizations completing the Dashboard frequently amended the number of people receiving services for each project because the side-by-side numerical comparisons made faulty guesses harder to miss. Similarly, totals for projects' combined number of service recipients frequently differed from agencies' overall projections of total individuals served. A column at the far left of the Dashboard lists previous-year *actual* totals which further serves as a cross-reference point in case estimates vary more than anticipated from previous results.

Dashboard Method

This work proves its value as Dashboard users experience "aha" moments when measurable projects materialize. Most of the work occurs up front—in years that follow, the Dashboard can be updated prior to each fiscal year, or as needed. In the spirit of transparency embraced by its users, the author notes that the Dashboard typically takes several focused planning sessions to complete.

The typical method of introducing the Dashboard concept is for the grant professional to share an example of the template and discuss it with other team members. The grant professional will explain the Dashboard concept and terminology, along with the rationale for using it as a planning tool. The team will discuss grant-related and organizational challenges, then identify potential solutions by using the Dashboard tool. From there, the team will review how much time it will take to complete the Dashboard, as well as what organizational support different team members will need to complete their relevant sections of it.

The process of filling in the Dashboard typically begins with the grant professional completing as much as possible based on personal experience, past grant proposals, or currently known outcomes and objectives. During that process, the grant professional inserts comments on any unknowns or uncertainties that colleagues must help resolve.

When the grant professional can go no further, the Dashboard draft is distributed to team members with the knowledge to advance it. Meetings may be scheduled to work together on the Dashboard and facilitate this process. A complete list of Services is subjectively identified, with enough details to be instructive to the grant professional (usually 10 or so), but not so many as to mire the process in minutiae. Next, Objectives are listed (often about 15–25). Next listed are Outcomes (sometimes just a handful, other times more if the organization is large or complex).

During meetings with co-workers, the grant professional highlights feedback needed and reinforces the benefits of the Dashboard. The idea is to capture data that must appear in a grant application, while designing measurements with consideration for team members who require, gather, and report on data (Cunningham, 2020, p. 50). Questions or issues often arise. For instance, team members may debate whether to list certain services individually or to bunch them together. Some Objectives may require clarification—for example, if a service is intended for children, the grant professional may ask colleagues to define which ages will be served. The grant professional ends each meeting by reviewing tasks colleagues pledged to complete by the next meeting. The Dashboard ideally resides in a shared drive (i.e., the cloud), enabling the team to easily share and also communicate about edits.

The author encourages the addition of project Budget data to the Dashboard after other rows are complete. The budget rows allow a grant professional to work with finance personnel to forecast accurate line items and per-client costs, increasing efficiency. The Dashboard can track the amount raised toward each project as the year progresses.

Case Studies

While it is still new and its Budget feature needs further testing, the Dashboard resolves many problems. Services, previously explained as

continuing endlessly, are timely and compelling, understood by grant reviewers, and logically address a relevant challenge. Two case studies follow that illustrate the Dashboard's effectiveness.

- Before using the Dashboard, a California organization requested support to raise an undefined amount for scholarships to graduate medical students with a goal of ameliorating the county's shortage of health professionals. In using the Dashboard, the organization recognized that it could arrive at a quantifiable number of scholarships needed to address the health professional shortage. Its staff agreed that this was more compelling than asking for funds with a random goal or with no end in sight.

- A grassroots organization in North Carolina began to more fully appreciate evaluation as it conceived of objectives and outcomes. In this case, however, even its completion of the Dashboard did not explain how to implement measurement. To address that need, the grant professional added more columns to the right of the Dashboard so that for each Objective and Outcome, specifying the tool used to capture data, the software the data would be entered into, the person responsible for evaluation, and how frequently the data would be reported. This organization is still working with the author to put evaluation systems into practice, and the organization is now illustrating to funders that it needs more capacity to truly measure impact. The organization's Program Director presented the Dashboard during a foundation site visit, without a grant professional present, and had resounding success. She relayed that the Dashboard was "a translator" allowing her to communicate in the funder's language. The program officer was impressed and told the Program Director, "I like the way you think!" (Urdiales, personal conversation, March 20, 2023).

Recommendations

In field testing, the author and his colleagues have used the Dashboard sufficiently to show its efficacy in turning vague or ongoing services into compelling, time-specific projects. With razor-sharp precision, the Dashboard helps personnel clarify and document project measurement, helping nonprofit organizations visualize what project expansions can bring. The author recommends further development to increase ease of use, such as more easily adjustable formatting, and creation of a concise user guide. A more consistent timeline for completing the Dashboard is recommended. At present, the process has mostly been implemented at a casual pace which reduces the stress of the planning process, but jeopardizes timely Dashboard completion.

Conclusion

The Dashboard has helped grant professionals with the challenge of translating services into fundable projects and holds great potential for broader use. For this to occur, it should be shared more widely, improving its effectiveness as it is tested more broadly and rigorously.

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Biographical Information

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Keeping Your Grant Professional: Updating Your Talent Retention Strategy

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Abstract

Since the Great Resignation, retaining talent has never been more important for nonprofit organizations and development teams. Organizations, managers, and supervisors must have resilience-building as an important component of the strategy for retaining grant professionals. Resiliency can lower resignation rates and prevent burnout. Supervisors must use skills that build resiliency, specifically for grant professionals, to retain team members. By using these techniques, grant professionals will burn out less often, and organizations will experience decreased employee turnover.

Introduction

The Covid pandemic changed work in a multitude of ways. In the United States, the pandemic led to a restructuring of priorities and the Great Resignation in 2021. "'The Great Resignation' refers to the decisions of millions of workers to quit their jobs during the pandemic" (Kellett, 2022, para. 5). In 2019, the retention rate of grant professionals was less than 50 percent (Bachman et al., 2020).

While it was a struggle to retain grant professionals before the pandemic, it became an increasingly challenging task with the Great Resignation, as the nonprofit sector experienced high employee turnover. In May 2021, job openings in the U.S. surpassed 9.5 million for the first time since at least 2000. Since then, that number has fluctuated between 9.5 and 12.5 million open jobs each month. (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, n.d.). The nonprofit sector represents approximately 500,000 open jobs (Greer, 2021). This number includes grant professionals, and retaining grant professionals is crucial for sustainable fundraising operations.

In the last two years, organizations have become more focused on retaining talent (Schuster, 2022). There are a variety of helpful

tips and resources to help managers keep employees. To retain grant professionals, managers need a robust retention strategy that includes resilience-building skills.

The Grant Professional's Struggle

Grant professionals face specific challenges which relate to their high turnover rate. The speed of the grant cycle and the constant need to write grants is a regular concern of fundraising teams and grant professionals. They constantly look for new grants to write, spend hours and even weeks writing grants, wait months to hear back, and, if the grant is declined, face the stress of needing to start the process over to fund the same need. This process leads to high stress levels and burnout.

Burnout in the Grants Profession: An Initial Analysis demonstrates that work stress was the main reason for grant professionals to leave the profession: "70% of those who left…report they did so because of chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors of the job" (Bachman et al., 2020, para. 9). Additionally, the authors' analysis shows that individuals were more stressed from grant-related work than other aspects of their life, such as family, or finances (Bachman et al., 2020). Improving grant professionals' ability to handle stress will increase their health and retention. Building resilience is an essential component of managing stress.

Why Resiliency Is Key

Incorporating resilience-building into the organization and manager's retention strategy will address stress and combat the low retention rate. The American Psychological Association defines resilience as "the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress—such as family and relationship problems, or workplace and financial stressors" (American Psychological Association., 2020, para. 4). Supporting the growth of resilience in grant professionals will help address workplace stress. Fortunately, supervisors and organizations can support resilience building.

A study on workplace resilience programs shows that such programs improve health, well-being, and performance (Vanhove et al., 2016). Furthermore, the same study explains that one-on-one delivery formats were the best method of success for workplace resilience-building programs (Vanhove et al., 2016). This study demonstrates the crucial role supervisors play in building employee resilience. In addition to better resiliency, the individual will gain improved health, well-being, and performance.

Resiliency Tips

There are a variety of tools available to supervisors to build employee resiliency, including ideas below adapted from the Mayo Clinic and tailored to grant professionals (Mayo Clinic Staff, 2022). Organizations and managers who employ these tactics to implement actionable steps with their grant professionals will retain them longer.

- *Get connected.* Relationships with others will provide "support, guidance and acceptance in good and bad times" (Mayo Clinic Staff, 2022, para. 6). Grantwriting can be a very isolated activity. It is easy when writing to want the application to be perfect and polish it for hours. Supervisors help grant professionals step away by working with them to establish boundaries on their time to ensure they take breaks during the day and include grant professionals in team activities. Additionally, it is worth moving the grant professional's workspace location to ensure they are not physically isolated. Their office space needs to be close to the team to facilitate building relationships with coworkers.

- *Learn from experience.* Receiving notice of a funding denial is never easy, and no grant professional is always successful with applications. When funders decline a grant award, supervisors support grant professionals by focusing on the denial as a learning opportunity and not letting professionals wallow in self-defeatism. Managers must schedule a debrief meeting and guide the conversation to focus on positives, growth opportunities, and any feedback on the application. At the end of the meeting, supervisors reorient professionals to upcoming opportunities so they are hopeful.

- *Remain hopeful.* It can be easy for the declinations of applications to weigh heavily on grant professionals. However, they must remain hopeful about their work and the organization's mission. For that purpose, supervisors need to reassure professionals throughout the application process, especially after debriefing meetings. The reassurance helps grant professionals maintain a sense of purpose, stay connected to the organization's mission, and build resiliency—all of which keep grant professionals confident.

- *Be proactive.* If there is an issue that the grant professional is facing, managers need to help them address it. Supervisors must not ignore the problem or let grant professionals avoid the issue. Knowing that grant professionals can improve and fix the problem will build their resiliency. Proactivity also connects to *learn from experience*. Managers and organizations that work with their grant professionals

to address issues and make grantwriting a learning process will reap the benefits. Supervisors have an opportunity to provide instruction on a variety of topics for different challenges. For example, if the grant professional struggles with pulling numbers from the budget, the manager offers training on reading a budget.

- *Make every day meaningful.* Grant professionals occasionally spend weeks working on one grant. During this process, it is not uncommon for professionals to become frustrated with the monotony of the daily routine, especially if other team members are securing significant gifts during this time. Grant professionals need to remember that their work is meaningful. Teams and organizations benefit when managers remind and congratulate grant professionals on small accomplishments, like completing the narrative or budget sections in an application. This process will make days more meaningful for grant professionals and help organizations retain grant professionals.

Putting Resilience Into Your Retention Strategy

These tips lay the groundwork for supervisors and organizations to incorporate resilience training into the retention strategy for grant professionals. While many resources on employee retention are also applicable to grant professionals, such as positive work environment, promoting work-life balance, supporting mental health, investing in their careers, recognizing their contributions, and increasing pay and benefits, organizations should also tailor retention strategies to address the unique challenges of a grant professional's job (Shuster, 2022).

Benefits

There are a variety of benefits for organizations and development teams for focusing on retention and incorporating resiliency training into the retention strategy. Individuals with a higher resilience will succeed longer in grantwriting roles as their skills allow them to handle denials and the grant application process.

Retaining employees saves organizations money as they do not incur the costs of recruiting and hiring individuals (Shuster, 2022). Grant professionals who stay in their jobs for a long time will have strong relationships with coworkers and funders. Additionally, when grant professionals stay, organizations will retain institutional knowledge and have the opportunity to develop deep relationships with funders.

Conclusion

The Great Resignation transformed the working environment. Organizations must create a comprehensive retention strategy to combat

the high number of people resigning, and resilience training must be part of that strategy. Resiliency will lead to grant professionals with higher job satisfaction and help organizations retain talent longer.

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