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**Enhancing Grant Development
for Inclusive Community Programs**

Lara Zawacki, MPA

VersAbility Resources / Grant Crafters
Hampton Roads, VA

GPCI Competencies

Competency 3: Strategies for Effective Program and Project Design

Abstract

This strategy paper explores best practices in grant development for inclusive community programs. Through a review of literature, case studies, and practical examples, it outlines key strategies for successful grant proposals, effective program implementation, and sustainable funding models, thus providing a brief framework for grant professionals to create impactful programs that meet diverse community needs.

Introduction

Grant development plays a crucial role in funding programs that enhance community inclusion. This paper examines the intersection of grant writing, program design, and collaboration to foster sustainable and effective initiatives. By integrating scholarly research and case studies, we highlight strategies that improve grant success rates and program efficacy.

Background and Context

The demand for inclusive community programs has increased, driven by policy changes and societal recognition of diverse community needs. Research underscores the importance of structured grant development to secure funding for such initiatives. Historical funding trends, legislative policies, and successful models inform the current landscape of grant-seeking efforts.

Methodology

This study draws upon qualitative data, including a case study of a successful grant-funded project, lecture attendance, and a literature review. The methodology emphasizes best practices in proposal writing, stakeholder engagement, and funding diversification.

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Case Study: The Unused Childcare Center

A nonprofit organization launched a capital campaign to build a state-of-the-art childcare center, believing it would better serve families in the community. The campaign successfully raised millions in grant funding, secured land, and constructed a brand-new facility. However, a critical misstep occurred: the parents who used the current childcare center were not involved in the decision-making process.

Despite the new center's modern amenities, parents and caregivers continued using the existing facility, citing familiarity, accessibility, and trust in the original location. The result was a brand-new, but underutilized, childcare center—highlighting the importance of community engagement in grant planning. This case underscores the necessity of involving stakeholders in decision-making to ensure that funded projects meet actual community needs.

To encourage greater usage of the new site, the nonprofit implemented several responsive strategies rooted in participatory planning. First, they conducted a series of parent surveys and focus groups to understand hesitations. The feedback identified key barriers: lack of transportation, concerns about unfamiliar staff, and a desire for more communication and consistency during the transition.

In response, the organization co-developed a transition plan with community input that included:

- **Dual Enrollment Options:** Families could gradually transition by maintaining access to both centers during a trial period.
- **Staff Reassignment:** Familiar and trusted caregivers were moved to the new center to reduce anxiety and build continuity.
- **Cultural Orientation Events:** Open houses, parent-led tours, and family gatherings were hosted to build trust and create a sense of shared ownership.
- **Transportation Solutions:** The nonprofit provided bus vouchers and partnered with a local rideshare provider for discounted access.
- **Visual and Verbal Wayfinding:** Multilingual signage and welcome materials helped new families feel seen and included.

These practical and inclusive actions, combined with continuous feedback loops, gradually increased enrollment and improved trust between the organization and the families it serves.

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Key Findings and Analysis

Key findings indicate that successful grants share common elements: clear objectives, strong community partnerships, and data-driven impact metrics. The case study illustrates how adaptive programming, cross-sector collaboration, and robust evaluation frameworks contribute to sustainable funding and program effectiveness.

Implications for Grant Professionals

Grant professionals can enhance their proposals by integrating evidence-based practices, leveraging cross-sector partnerships, and aligning funding requests with donor priorities. The role of adaptive programming in grant success is emphasized, providing actionable insights for professionals in the field. The case study above reinforces the need for thorough stakeholder engagement in capital campaigns to avoid costly oversights.

Additionally, research from Miller et al. (2023) in their article “Building the Foundation for Equitable and Inclusive Research: Seed Grant Programs to Facilitate Development of Diverse CBPR Community–Academic Research Partnerships” highlights the importance of combining funding with capacity-building mentorship. Their findings emphasize that grant programs incorporating community input and collaboration yield stronger outcomes, reinforcing the need for direct engagement with stakeholders throughout the grant development process.

Further, Coombe et al. (2023) conducted a systematic review on community granting programs, emphasizing that programs with strong community engagement and culturally tailored interventions had significantly better outcomes. Their findings reinforce the importance of stakeholder collaboration in grant-funded projects. Similarly, Fink (2023) explored the role of seed grants in advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education, demonstrating that community transformation is more sustainable when grant strategies prioritize communal goals and inclusive practices.

Strategies for Effective Program Design

Healthy Places by Design and Denver Urban Gardens illustrate how strong program design leads to lasting impact. By following structured planning steps and incorporating cultural competence, grant professionals can align projects with funder priorities and community needs, ensuring sustainability and success. Healthy Places by Design (<https://healthyplacesbydesign.org/>), a consulting firm that aims to advance community-led action and proven, place-based strategies to

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ensure health and wellbeing for all, emphasizes the role of community-driven solutions in project development. Their approach demonstrates how strategic partnerships and stakeholder involvement lead to impactful, lasting change in communities.

Healthy Places by Design illustrates this through initiatives like their work in Durham, North Carolina, where they facilitated a multi-sector coalition to address health disparities by engaging residents in neighborhood-level planning. This led to co-designed interventions such as walkability audits, food access strategies, and community-led beautification—all of which reflected local values and priorities. Their framework ensures that funded projects emerge from, and remain accountable to, the people they serve.

Similarly, Denver Urban Gardens exemplifies effective program design through its “Growing Healthy Communities” program, which transforms vacant lots into vibrant spaces for gardening, education, and cultural exchange. By involving residents from the start in planning, planting, and maintaining gardens, DUG creates a sense of ownership that sustains program participation beyond the funding period. Their emphasis on co-creation, intergenerational learning, and cultural relevance makes their work a powerful model of place-based, community-rooted development.

Conclusion

Effective grant development is essential for sustaining inclusive community programs. This paper highlights key strategies, challenges, and best practices to inform grant professionals in their pursuit of funding impactful initiatives. Future research should explore innovative funding models and policy shifts that influence grant accessibility.

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Biographical Information

Lara Zawacki, MPA, brings a multidisciplinary perspective to grant writing and program development, drawing from her background in occupational therapy, adaptive swimming instruction, and long-standing advocacy for people with disabilities. She focuses on designing inclusive, community-centered initiatives that are both impactful and sustainable. She can be reached at askgrantcrafters@gmail.com. community growth.