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**Leveraging the Role of the Grant Professional in an
Organization for Maximum Success**

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GPC Competencies:**07. Professionalism****Abstract**

Grant pros have an array of responsibilities and roles, regardless of the size of the organization or department where they work. The Grant Professionals Association (GPA) GrantZone, a private, online community forum for members of GPA, reveals that GPA members also face a wide range of organizational conundrums ranging from lack of job clarity to being pigeon-holed as "just the grants person." Grant pros on a development team, regardless of team size, may also deal with clashing priorities, ethical issues, internal politics, and board-related problems. These challenges can impact the success of a grant professional and interfere with effectiveness. This paper provides some initial guidance for emerging grant professionals to maximize their success by assessing their organization's grant operations and the expected and actual roles they have within this structure. This includes considering and leveraging their unique talents, personal inclinations, and work style to demonstrate the value they add to their organization.

Introduction

Formal and informal roles for the grants professional (GP) can be as diverse as the organizations in which they work. A GP may work as the unique professional fundraiser in a small non-profit having some responsibility for grants. A GP might work within a larger organization or development department as a full time grant writer. Often, GPs work in organizations where they might be engaged in filling multiple roles.

During the period of February to June 2018, in GPA's GrantZone, there were several online discussion threads related to roles and responsibilities of the grant professional. Many comments related to bearing grant-related responsibilities that were overlaid with challenges common to many non-profit organizations. Some of these challenges impacted the work and efficiency of the GP. They included ambiguous reporting structures, clashing priorities, and/or interpersonal issues. In this small online community, a gleaning of the many titles of the authors in these threads and the duties they described implied a wide range of roles and functions for the grant professional.

A compilation of these roles and functions was included in an informal analysis of titles from colleagues in the author's professional network and conference attendee lists from other development professional events. The analysis resulted in more than 40 descriptive titles and functions for GPs. It also yielded some possible overarching, but not mutually exclusive, roles for a grant professional in a non-profit organization, regardless of industry. The author loosely clustered these roles and functions (ranging from "scam-sniffer" and "responsible for organization survival" to grant writer and executive director) into four general GP categories: 1) technical grant specialist, 2) development professional, 3) organization-wide leadership, and 4) relationship manager. These overarching roles may provide some insight for GP career development.

Organizational behavior management and human resource management literature is replete with case studies, analyses, and theories about the employer-employee relationship and career management best-practices. Some twenty-first century employment practices in Western culture seem to facilitate individual career success and may be applied to the advantage of the GP (Lawler, 2011). While influenced by organization structure, individual career success may rely largely on employee engagement as well as employee skills. These skills not only consist of strong technical expertise, but also demonstrate additional, more broadly applied "soft" skills and attributes needed for the contemporary workforce. These more generic skills include the ability to work well on a team, possessing interpersonal competencies, being highly ethical, having excellent written and verbal communication skills, demonstrating the ability to think analytically and critically, and showing at least the capability for leadership (Bowditch, Buono, & Stewart, 2008).

In an analysis on career paths, Baruch (2003) also posits that career pipelines in this century are less "linear" and more multidirectional. This is a result of non-profit and for-profit entities alike having to adapt in recent decades to both reflect individual strengths of their employees and to be increasingly accountable to society to ensure ethical and equitable human resources management. Further, as today's work environment has evolved to become more diverse and individualized (Lawler, 2011), it is expected that organizations overtly (and legally) address diversity in the workforce across all parameters, beyond race and gender. Thus, strictly linear, traditional, one-size-fits-all position descriptions or titles in an organization may no longer accurately capture the needed technical and soft skills for the grant professional and successful fundraising.

So, where lies the onus for the role definition and function of the grant professional in a non-profit organization or a development department? It may fall on both the organization/department and the GP, but the GP may bear more responsibility. Due to their training and skills, GPs are uniquely positioned in the fundraising efforts of the organization. The GP is equipped to compile and analyze diverse information, create order out of potential chaos, and produce compelling language to define the "universe" of success. Why not apply these skills to one's own career track?

Understand and Leverage the Setting

As part of a process for advancing their career, the GP may find it helpful to deliberately reflect on the external (organization) and internal (personal) context of their work. The process for reflection can include a simple inventory of the organization's grant operations and structure, goals, metrics, policies, and very importantly, the GPs own skills, talents, personal strengths, and inclinations. For the personal assessment, a GP may choose a more formal route such as *StrengthsFinder 2.0* (Rath, T. 2007), *Myers-Briggs* ("MBTI Basics," 2019), or other commercially available tools. However, beginning with an informal assessment is the suggested strategy here. The task before the GP is to discover how to leverage this information to add value to their role, both in the development department and the organization.

Questions to ask about the organization's grant operations might include: What is the scope and size of the organization and the stated expectations and/or metrics for success? How do these impact productivity? Job satisfaction? The 2018 GPA Salary Survey (Grant Professionals Association, 2018) indicates that among the approximately 360 respondents of their Spring survey, there was an average of 5.5 individuals working in the grants department of the organization. Forty-two percent of respondents, however, reported working in organizations with more than 250 employees. That means the rest of respondents (nearly 59%) work in much smaller organizations and on much smaller grant teams. Many are "flying solo." But beyond staff size, how much does the development department raise annually for the organization? What proportion of this revenue is from grants? What metrics are used to evaluate the success of the GP? Do metrics include: the number of proposals, number of awards (and the associated "win rate"), number of renewable grants, number of new funders? There may be additional development measures around "moves." How do these metrics impact productivity?

Understand and Leverage Personal Skills and Inclination

Yet, beyond the organization structure, metrics, policies/practices, and even the physical location of the GP in the organization, GPs may consider what part of their role falls into the general broad categories identified earlier: grant specialist, development professional, leadership, and relationship manager. Considering these overarching roles and including in the "mix" personal experiences and disposition, it is not unreasonable to conclude that an additional key to the GP's effectiveness in their role is a thorough knowledge of oneself. For example, does the GP consider themselves to have weak, moderate, or strong skills associated with this/these function(s)? Is more training needed or simply more practice? Would the GP consider themselves as having more introverted or extroverted tendencies? How does that impact the way work is carried out? Many in the grants profession admit they are more inclined to be introverted. However, depending on the role, demonstrating the value the GP adds to the department or organization, may sometimes require learning some extrovert behaviors.

Two examples may illustrate how engaging in new behaviors could help leverage the GP's role and skills to add value: creating a budget and clarifying priorities.

Creating a budget is an activity common to GPs as part of the grant proposal process. It may be (or feel) more efficient and perhaps more pleasant to sit at the computer to create a budget drawing from inferences about a program, the funder, and other relevant experience. However, consciously leveraging the value the GP brings to the organization may also include recognizing that budget preparation may not only be about producing a well-designed spreadsheet in support of a grant application. It could be an opportunity to demonstrate understanding to others about what goes into a budget. How to do this? One option is to consider convening and running a budget-building meeting with the program managers and finance staff. This not only showcases the GP's expertise, but builds understanding, consensus, and some accountability into the proposed budget to be submitted with a proposal.

Clarifying priorities is another example where the GP may be presented with an opportunity to add value to the organization. At the least, this opportunity helps to identify which funders and grants to pursue. A GP's introverted side may incline them to compile a document listing all funded programs in the prior year and send an email to department leadership. While this is needed research, the added value of the GP role may include proposing, offering structure for, and perhaps running a meeting to discuss this list, elicit immediate feedback from management, and ensure follow-up tasks are completed. These front-and-center roles may feel uncomfortable at first, but eventually can build and inspire self-confidence and strengthen the credibility of the GP in the organization or on the fundraising team as a valuable resource.

The Grant Professional's Response to Organization Challenges

Addressing challenges in the department or organization is another way for the GP to distinguish the value of their role in their department or organization. Simultaneously, an approach a GP takes to address a challenge can also be part of conscious career decision-making. GrantZone discussion threads captured several themes about GP "conundrums" as individual GPs described specific challenges they faced and sought advice from their GPA peers. A few distinct categories of challenges emerged: 1) an organization's *good structure*, but *poor understanding* about its fundraising priorities across the organization; 2) an organization's *poor structure* but *good understanding* of its priorities; 3) internal politics and ethical issues; and 4) organizational issues including how to manage "up" and manage "across." Most of these situations complicated and compromised the efficiency and effectiveness of the GP. These are not unfamiliar challenges in non-profit organizations and GPs can learn to leverage these to grow professionally and personally.

Consulting with others both within and outside the organization, such as through GrantZone or a mentor, is one way to explore potential responses to an organizational challenge. Similar to the examples provided earlier, the GP might explore how applying a skill set outside of an existing role, and perhaps out of one's "comfort zone" might distinguish them as a professional that adds value to the organization. The table provides some potential strategies for addressing each of the four types of challenges described by GPs in GrantZone and could lead to career growth.

Potential Strategies to Address GP Challenges in an Organization

Challenge	Potential Strategy for the Grant Professional
1. Good structure, poor understanding of priorities	- Facilitate strategic planning process - Demonstrate expertise in program development, evaluation, budget building, and storytelling by "cross training" others in the department
2. Poor structure, good understanding of priorities	- Review and discuss the grant professional position description and amend if needed - Participate in creation of an integrated fundraising strategy for the department/organization
3. Internal politics, ethical issues	- Clearly articulate the facts and strategize with superiors, HR - Seek out a mentor or mentor others
4. Managing up and/or across	- Build connections – for oneself, for team members, for others in the organization - Employ widely one of the GP's strongest skills: communication

Conclusion

The Grant Professional (GP) may face many challenges when employed in a non-profit organization and/or a development department. These challenges may include ambiguity of role, organizational operations, relationships, and even conflict within oneself. An informal analysis of robust GrantZone discussion threads during the first half of 2018 identified several roles of GPA members and specific types of challenges. This paper encourages an intentional way for GPs to reflect on organizational characteristics as well as personal attributes that may impact the GP role. Organizational factors include structure, size, and metrics, while personal attributes include technical and soft skills, personal strengths, inclinations, and preferences. It also offers some guidance to help less experienced GPs maximize their value to their organization. Leveraging both organizational and self-knowledge may lead the GP to discover ways to demonstrate the value they add to their organizations in their specific role. This strategy also has the potential to help the grant professional advance in their personal and professional growth.

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Andrea V. Ferreira has been in the non-profit world 36 years, including having had a consulting practice for nearly 15 years. She serves as treasurer of the New England Chapter of GPA, as a GPA Mentor, and is a member of GPA's national Mentor Match Committee. In addition to serving on non-profit boards and teaching college-level health-related courses, she has provided a full range of support to non-profits including program development, evaluation, grant writing, and strategic planning.