

The Basics of Grant-Writing Slide Script
Massachusetts State Historical Records Advisory Board
2019-06

Slide 1:

Hello and welcome to the Basics of Grant-Writing workshop presented by the Massachusetts State Historical Records Advisory Board (SHRAB for short) supported by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, the NHPRC. The focus of this workshop is grant-writing for cultural heritage organizations, although the underlying principles apply across many disciplines.

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In this workshop, we will cover the following topics: providing an overview of the grant landscape; how to find funding opportunities; conceiving and developing your grant project; understanding the grant writing process and the grant review process as well as grant administration

Slide 3:

As we start our discussion of grant basics, let's take a look at some high-level funding trends. Grant-making agencies are increasingly emphasizing collaborative projects that bring together diverse institutions. Evaluation of your grant's results is a main component of many grants. Grant-funders are looking for a track record of responsible fiscal management. If you are just starting with grant writing, it is often a good idea to start small and build on a history of success. Additionally, have some funds already raised or some other pot of matching seed funds can show granting agencies that you are ready to take on your project. Grant submission processes are primarily conducted via electronic submission and it is important to build in time for technical difficulties. Finally, projects need to be sustainable. How will you keep the good work going once the grant funds go away?

Slide 4:

Grant-making organization can be found in many places whether we are looking at the federal level with agencies like the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the NHPRC or NEH. State level programs also exist. In Massachusetts, regrants programs are available through the SHRAB and the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissions, and other state and municipal agencies and departments also provide grant funding such as the Community Preservation Act. Large and small private foundations as well as corporate entities sponsor a variety of grant funding.

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When approaching the grant process, there are some differences between government and private sector to take into account. Federal grants tend to be longer and more difficult to write and administer, but they also often provide more funding. Foundation grants may be easier to administer. Local grants are usually the easiest to obtain and administer, but conversely, they may not provide the same level of funding.

Slide 6:

Grant projects fall into a few big buckets: planning grants, grants specializing in the support of technology and equipment, and grants supporting activities such as collection processing or digitization.

Slide 7:

Not surprisingly libraries are great places to find out about the grants that are available. And once you have identified a potential funder, the granting agencies and funding agencies can be your best friend in the grant writing process. These grant officers are charged with bringing in worthy projects and getting funds out.

Slide 8:

The Foundation Center is a national aggregator of grant writing funders and resources while Philanthropy Massachusetts. Philanthropy Massachusetts was previously known as Associated Grant Makers of Massachusetts). All links in this presentation are accurate as of this recording in June 2019, but may change over time.

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The Foundation Center also works closely with several libraries in various regions of Massachusetts to provide access to their resources. One such library is the Morse Institute Library in Natick.

Slide 10:

And Worcester and Springfield also serve as Foundation Center hubs.

Slide 11:

As you begin your research of funders, the question sometimes arises of whether you find funding for the project you want to accomplish or if you craft your project to match the types of funding that are available. While you may tweak the parameters of your project to be a better fit for a funding opportunity, you are not writing a grant for the fun of writing of a grant; you are trying to accomplish a specific project and the project needs to come first. Once you have determined the project you can identify likely funders. You will also want to start tracking funding cycles for agencies and foundations that make grants for projects like yours. There is nothing worse than finding the perfect funding match for your project only to find out that you just missed the deadline for application submission. Make contact with the grant managers working at your potential funding agency or foundation. As I said before, they are there to make sure the grant money is distributed, and they are an invaluable resource in helping you understand the grant process and the current priorities of the funder. They can help you find the place where your goals and funders goals overlap and how to build on a proposal that will be successful.

Slide 12:

Don't overlook funders that focus on project located in or about a specific geographic region. Particularly at the local level there may grants that fund projects specific to that location. Small local banks are good for this type of philanthropic support. Philanthropy Massachusetts can be a great resource for this type of grant and they have the advantage of providing a common application form and reporting forms that are used by a large number of grant makers with whom they work.

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There are a variety of foundation types available to you as a grant writing ranging from family foundations that fund projects on a narrow range of topic to company sponsored foundations that are open to a wide range of projects with all sorts of variations in between.

Slide 14:

Maintain a like of “likely suspects” Just because a funder supported cultural heritage grants during one granting cycle doesn’t mean that they will continue to do so forever, so be sure you are looking at the most up to date information and checking back on it on a regular basis.

Slide 15:

Here is a list of some potential funding opportunities for cultural heritage projects with an emphasis on state and federal agencies to get you started.

Slide 16:

Remember we are trying to find the best match for your needs to the funding agency’s interests and if you find multiple possible matches you may be able to pursue them concurrently although it is a good idea to double check with funders to make sure they allow this. You also want to investigate if you can use one grant as part of your cost-share or making funds for another grant. Some times you can, especially if for example one is a private foundation and one is a federal agency, but there may be cases where this isn’t allowed. Check with your grant officer at each funding institution early on to make sure you are following the rules.

Slide 17:

Let’s delve a little deeper into the differences between public and private funding

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Public funds are set by legislation and tend to follow set application processes and deadlines over time. One factor to keep in mind is that information submitted for these types are grant programs are subject to public records laws although some exceptions may be in place for some types of information. Also, if your grant is not funded, you are likely to receive feedback on why the grant was rejected.

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Private funding sources, as a general rule, are less complex and bureaucratic in their applications and administration. Funding opportunities may change more quickly, making them more difficult to keep track of and they may not provide any feedback on why a grant is rejected.

Slide 20:

As you are getting ready to write your grant, start pulling together the supporting documentation. Having a long-term plan, fact sheet or brochure for your organization can help demonstrate that your goals match the goals of the funding organization.

Slide 21:

As you are conceiving your project, don't just think of one thing you would like to do. If you develop a list of projects that you would like to accomplish you may be able to pivot more nimbly as new funding streams or categories become available. Also start building your relationships for collaboration. As I mentioned at the beginning, collaboration is key component of many grant applications and the demonstrable your relationships are, either being able to point to written agreements or past successful collaborations, the stronger the case you can make.

Slide 22:

Make sure you are clear on the grant application guidelines and that you understand everything you are being asked to provide. It can be helpful to ask for copies of previous successful proposals.

Slide 23:

As you are starting to write your proposal, but sure you are aware of any jargon or acronyms you may be including. It can be helpful to have someone outside your field read your proposal and see if it makes sense to them. If your proposal can be understood by someone with no experience with the topic, you know that you have written a clear grant.

Slide 24:

Again, if you are new to grant writing, consider starting small and building a track record of success. Be sure you have realistic goals and know how you will sustain the project after the grant funding is gone.

Slide 25:

Now that you've decided on a project and found a funder, it's time to start writing.

Slide 26:

This graphic provides an overview of an example grant cycle. As you can see between the two arrows, over half of the cycle is pulling together information that goes into the actual writing, from developing your goals and objectives to determining how you will evaluate your success.

Slide 27:

The function of your proposal is to present your organization and the project you are looking to undertake and the resources you will need to complete the project. It should be thought of as an exercise in persuasive writing.

Slide 28:

While each grant may be structured slightly differently, here are some common pieces you are likely to be asked to provide: some sort of introductory or transmittal document, a title page, the project abstract, a statement of need, the project design, goals, and objectives.

Slide 29:

As well as the methods you will use and activities you are planning, the budget – often both narratively and as a spreadsheet or some other tabulated presentation, how and who will be managing the project,

how you evaluate your success and any collaborations you will be engaged in. You may also include additional documents in an appendix.

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Examples of types of documentation that you might include in the appendix are letters of commitment, maps, collection documentation or finding aids, resumes of staff or job descriptions of proposed staff positions and other supporting materials. Regarding letters of support, go for quality over quantity. Reviewers can stop when an applicant drafted a basic letter for all of their supporters to use. It is more impactful to have 2-3 unique and heart-felt letters of support than it is to have 10 boilerplate form letters.

Slide 31:

Some quick pointers to keep in mind: Consider involving your staff in the grant development process. It is a great way to build buy-in for the project and enthusiasm when the project is hopefully funded. Ensure that you have the resources to support the project you are proposing and that you are presenting a detailed and realistic budget that is justified by your narrative. No reviewer wants to get to the budget and find line-items that they haven't seem mentioned before. Think about the publicity you will do for the project and how you will promote your progress and completion, even before you get started. And finally, remember to use clear, concise language.

Slide 32:

The Statement of Need describes the issue you are looking to address through your grant project and how this relates to the priorities of the funding institution. Anything you say, you want to support; don't assume what is obvious to you will be obvious to everyone who reviews your application.

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Once you have defined the issue, you want to show how you plan to address it and the timeframe in which the activities will be accomplished. Support what you are planning with documentation and commitment from others; Be logical and systematic in what is being proposed and develop a program that you will be able to evaluate at the end of the grant

Slide 34:

When it comes to evaluation, you are likely to encounter two words: Outputs and outcomes. Outputs are the things that are created during the course of the grant; stuff you can count; Outcomes are still measurable, but refer to changes in attitudes, knowledge or skills levels or behaviors.

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The goals section is a place that you can be aspirational. Here you can describe where you see your institution moving in the long term and how dealing with the issue raised in the statement of need will help you achieve these goals.

Slide 36:

If goals are aspirational, the objective section is specific and concrete. For your grant project, you want to state who will do what over what timeframe and how will you know that it has been successful.

Slide 37:

Again, your objectives should be free of jargon and address specific outcomes

Slide 38:

Objects can be grouped in two categories: Management or Process and Performance or Product. The first group is easier to write since they are milestones towards completion of a task. The second category shows behavior changes within a target group.

Slide 39:

Criteria for measuring your objectives can be in time units, frequency rates or percentages of change. And for the next few slides we'll look at some examples of objectives.

Slide 40:

For this examples, a specific, countable number of photographs and negatives will have specific action performed on them. It is a management/process objective.

Slide 41:

For this objective, they are measuring a percentage change in use of the collection materials compared to a baseline number they describe.

Slide 42:

Now this objective is demonstrating a change in level of knowledge that they are trying to bring about that will be measured by a change in behavior as more students consult the digitized and cataloged images.

Slide 43:

Since writing objective can be tricky, we are going to highlight several more examples that you can use to model your own objective on. Here we see a change in behavior that is measured in multiple ways.

Slide 44:

Here will have not only the specific number of items being worked with, the specific activity being undertaken, but also the timeframe in which the action will occur.

Slide 45:

Here is a measurable number with inclusive activities that will occur.

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Here we have a measurable activity and a timeframe for evaluation. One thing to consider with these examples is that they are from grants written several years ago. Today if you are conducting a digitization project, the issues of preservation and sustainability of the digital objects would absolutely need to be addressed as well.

Slide 47:

Moving on the Methods section, you want to present a reasonable scope of activities within the timeframe you have available. Also describe what resources are being put towards the activity.

Slide 48:

When it comes to the budget, make sure you are providing a clear picture of why the funds are needed and how exactly they will be used. Don't just guess at the cost of goods and services – get bids and quotes; they may change somewhat between the grant submission and approval or implementation, but you are likely to have a much more realistic picture of the true costs of your project. And make sure that you aren't asking for funds for something that your funder doesn't cover. For example some grants might support the purchase of capital equipment, but others might not.

Slide 49:

Salaries are another area that can have different budget parameters depending on the funder. Most funders will support new positions, but they are less likely to cover the salaries and benefits of existing staff. They may be open to supporting a staff member going from part-time to full-time. You want to include whatever supplies you will need and be to check what equipment can or can't be purchased. Other typical budget items include trainings, travel, and services for outside consultants. Be sure to budget for whatever activities you will undertake to evaluate the program like traveling to a conference to make a presentation. If you are going to be receiving any donations or in-kind services or supplies, but sure to outline what those are and what their value is. They can help with your cost share if one is required. Cost share can be confusing – a funder may require that a percentage of the total cost of the project be covered by the applicant institution. Note that is a percentage of the total cost of the project, so the total cost needs to be more than just what you are asking the funder to provide. Here is a place that staff salary and benefits can come in handy. If the grant funder isn't paying for them, they can be used as cost share. Volunteer time can also count and volunteer rate in Massachusetts is comparatively high. You can check out the [Independent Sector.org](http://IndependentSector.org) website for more information on the current rate.

Now indirect costs can also be one of the more confusing parts of grant budgeting, especially if you are new to the process. Indirect costs reflect funds that some institutions take out of grant funds to support basic operations like keeping the electricity on or providing heat in the winter. It is usually a percentage of the total award amount and especially in a university setting it can be very significant – at times over 50% of the total grant award. Some grants allow you to budget in indirect costs as part of the grant requests, but others don't, so you either need to work with your institution to wave the indirect cost or figure out a way to cover the amount being taken out.

Remember there shouldn't be anything in your budget that isn't mentioned and justified in the narrative of your project.

Slide 50:

When it comes to showing how you will evaluate your project, you want to show that your objects will all be met and the methods that you will use to met them. Some examples of methods include surveys, focus groups or data analysis. If you are planning on bringing in outside evaluator be sure to mention this. Also include any reports or publications that you will be generating.

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Evaluation can examine how the work proceeded – did things go according to plan or did you have to deviate, and if so, how did you recover (or not); you can also evaluate the effectiveness of the project showing whether you achieved the objectives and answering the question of “how did we do?”

Slide 52:

Your management plan is a place where you can share any useful information on your management structure and collaborators. Also, will you utilize a board of advisors or volunteers in your project?

Slide 53:

For several years the concept of sustainability has become more and more important to funding organizations. No one wants to throw money at a project or program that does some great work, but then disappears in a few years. If you are seeking a multi-year grant, it can be helpful to start building sustainability in as you go. For instance, a new processing archivist might be paid 100% out of grant fund in the first year, but in years 2 and 3 the institution starts to pick up a percentage of the salary and benefits so that by the end of the grant the position becomes permanent and institutionally funded.

Slide 54:

Writing your grant proposal can be daunting, especially when it is seen as just another duty as assigned to be added on to all of the other issues you deal with on a daily basis. Set a writing schedule, starting with the due date and working backwards and make sure everyone involved is aware and committed to the schedule. If you do need to mail in the proposal, make sure to account for mundane tasks like copying, binding and mail delivery and don't leave a grants.gov submission to the last minute.

Slide 55:

Now the new few slides are a litany of writing tips. I'm just going to highlight a few. Be sure to use active verbs, there are more engaging; be sure to bring in an outside reader to make sure you stay away from jargon and a bulleted list can be your friend when you only have a limited number of pages to convey your point.

Slide 56:

Make sure your support letters are substantive and that your budget is accurate

Slide 57:

Stay on point and concise with sentences that don't ramble on forever and be mindful of the maximum number of pages you can submit.

Slide 58:

Show that you have buy-in from your institution, your staff and your collaborators and don't ask for more money than the funder allows.

Slide 59:

Some problems that come up with grant applications include not following current grant guidelines or not checking in with the grant officer to make sure that you are on the right track. Many grant officers

will read drafts for you up to a certain point before of the application date. Also, be clear about what you are working with and that your institution has the needed permissions to work with the materials.

Slide 60:

A vague work plan can kill an application and be sure you double (or triple) check your math in the budget. Some forms auto-calculate for you, but I have definitely seen them not update correctly, so don't rely on the form to do the math for you.

Slide 61:

Grants.gov is the primary portal for submitting grants to the federal government. You will want to make sure your institution is registered with grants.gov well in advance of the grant deadline and if possible, submit your grant a few days before the final due date. Grants.gov has definitely improved over the past few years, but it can still experience traffic issues when too many are trying to all submit their grants at the last minute. Also you want to have time to make correctly or modifications if you miss submitting a document or something goes wrong with the transmission.

You will also want to register for a Duns and Bradstreet Data Universal Numbering System number, more commonly referred to as a DUNS number and you will need to register on the system for award management at sam.gov

Slide 62:

The review process for most government grants involves review by a panel of experts in the field while a private grant may be reviewed by a single reviewer. The basic question reviewers are trying to answer is "Is this project worth spending this amount of money on?" Is there a need? Will it help this one institution, or does it have greater relevance? Does the applicant institution know what they are doing? Can they measure result and justify the cost?

Slide 63:

If your proposal is rejected, try again. For federal and most state grants you can get reviewer comments that can help you craft a stronger proposal next time. And remember that reviewers change frequently, so you might have a really strong proposal already but just had a very competitive year or a batch of reviewers that didn't click with your application. The first grant can be the hardest to get, but as you build a track record of successful grant administration, it gets easier.

Slide 64:

If your proposal is funded, Congratulations! The hard work has just started though, be sure you are following the guidelines for reporting and administering the grant exactly and keep in touch with your grant officer, especially if it looking like things may take longer than you expected or you need to change the budget due to an unexpected delay or cost. Make sure you include the granting agency in all publicity of the project. For example, this webinar is brought to you through the grant support of the National Historical Publications and Records Commission.

Slide 65:

Thank you! The Massachusetts State Historical Records Advisory Board is available to help review grant proposals and answer questions about grant writing. Send your inquiries to SHRAB@sec.state.ma.