

# Journal

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## Editors' Note

Dear Reader,

This issue of the *Journal* features papers on general and specialized topics on the improvement of the grant professional and the profession. The wide variety of paper topics mirrors the diversity of work that members of our profession perform, and this diversity provides a rich variety of experience from which to learn.

We invite you to contribute your valuable experience to the *Journal* in the form of an article. We welcome proposals year-round for article concepts and we will provide feedback to develop your proposal into a *Journal* article. Our priorities are articles that address new ideas in our field, contribute research-based information, provide a case study or best practices, and examine any of the competencies and skills described in the GPCI Table of Validated Competencies and Skills (see page vi of this *Journal*).

We invite your comments on this issue of the *Journal* and we welcome suggestions for future issues.

We thank the authors and the *Journal's* editorial, acquisitions, and peer review management teams for contributing extensive time and effort to this year's *Journal*. We also deeply appreciate the time and effort of the *Journal's* peer reviewers, who, while they remain anonymous, are also critical to ensuring the strong professional caliber of the *Journal*.

David Lindeman and Andy Rawdon  
Co-editors, *Journal of the GPA*

## **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](mailto:journal@grantprofessionals.org). Proposals must be no more than 300 words and follow the guidelines published on the GPA website ([www.grantprofessionals.org/journal](http://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* (6th 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.

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- Serves as a leading authority and resource for the practice of grantsmanship in all sectors of the field
- Advances the field by promoting professional growth and development
- Enhances the public image and recognition of the profession within the greater philanthropic, public, and private funding communities, and
- Promotes positive relationships between grant professionals and their stakeholders.

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# 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](http://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 grants professionals

**GPCI Competency 07:** Knowledge of practices and services that raise the level of professionalism of grant professionals

**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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# Using Scaffolding Approaches in Organizational Decision-Making on Grant Funding

**Bethany Lisi**

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*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 07: Knowledge of practices and services that raise the level of professionalism of grant professionals*

## **Abstract**

Mission drift affects organizational programming and slowly derails an organization's activities away from its mission. Many contributing factors to mission drift are external and related to the goals and objectives of current and potential funders. Before a grant professional puts pen to paper to write the next proposal—which could potentially contribute to mission drift—organizational stakeholders should examine a funding opportunity to see if it falls in line with the organization's vision. One way to lead the group in such a decision-making activity is to use scaffolding approaches. Scaffolds are supports—templates or coaching strategies—put in place to break down complex information. Scaffolding in decision-making activities assists in examining an opportunity from multiple perspectives before a decision is made. This article explores the use of the “Six Thinking Hats” and logic models as two suggested scaffolds to lead organizational stakeholders in comprehensive discussions focused on grant funding.

## Introduction

Consider the following hypothetical scenario: A program officer at a prominent foundation sends an email with the subject line: “Invitation to Apply for a Grant to Support Blended Learning.” Inspired by a project funded by another large foundation, the program officer explains that the foundation wants to explore a similar pilot project and needs a collaboration among smaller colleges to implement the project. Grant professionals at several colleges move quickly to explore potential collaborations and project ideas with the colleges’ respective provosts and faculty. At one college, a senior faculty member immediately raises objections to the project, stating that the college’s pedagogy does not appear to support the delivery of this kind of education. The group of faculty and administrators acknowledges that they neither know how—nor if—blended learning can be implemented on their campuses. Nevertheless, they join in a collaborative proposal from four colleges which is submitted to the foundation.

This scenario demonstrates a continual conflict a grant professional must address: walking the fine line between staying true to the mission of the organization and remaining nimble and receptive to opportunistic ventures. Private foundations historically have played a transformative role in creating organizational change. Foundation boards and program officers will pursue areas for reform if change does not appear to happen organically at the organizational level (Clotfelter, 2007). Change, when thrust upon a nonprofit, can produce creative results, a regrettable disservice, or some muddy in-between result in which neither party is happy with the outcome.

To explore whether a grant opportunity aligns with an organization’s mission and goals, a grant professional must be able to facilitate a dialogue among stakeholders, including organizational staff, board members, and consistent or prominent donors. Too often, stakeholders are quick to jump to an immediate conclusion when considering whether to go after a grant opportunity. “Just write a proposal,” or “Forget it—our activities do not align with the foundation’s priorities,” are two common responses. If a grant professional facilitates a conversation that asks stakeholders to consider all the implications of pursuing funding, there is great potential for creative brainstorming. The educational approach of scaffolding supports a meaningful dialogue among nonprofit stakeholders, while addressing any concerns of mission drift.

## Contributing Factors to Mission Drift

Conforth (2014) defines mission drift as “a process of organisational change, where an organisation diverges from its main purpose or mission” (p. 4). A mission not only expresses the purpose of an organization but also articulates the organization’s goals. An organization measures success by whether it meets its mission-oriented goals (Sawhill & William-

son, 2001). Thus, mission drift or changes in the direction of an organization may also undermine an organization's goals.

Often, external factors prompt mission drift. Two potential reasons for mission drift are resource dependency and institutional isomorphism. *Resource dependency* is not a new topic of concern for nonprofits; in fact, many nonprofit organizations originated from the resources of donors and private foundations. Organizations pursue external funding as a way to develop their mission and goals and in doing so, create new relationships with foundations that have grant funding available to allocate. These relationships, however, yield imbalances as one organization is largely dependent on another to survive (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978).

Another external pressure is to stay competitive for funding in the nonprofit field. As such, many different organizations begin to adopt similar priorities. The mimicking of initiatives of successful organizations is referred to as *institutional isomorphism* (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). In other words, when organizations depend on additional streams of funding in order to carry out their activities, they begin to adopt similar activities to other organizations that have a track record of securing external funding. Resource dependency and isomorphism are both external forces on an organization that have major impact, as both factors create an imbalance of power as it relates to who controls the organization's activities.

Moreover, foundation grantmaking is not a long-term commitment. It is rare for a foundation to continue to support a program beyond three to five years, as foundations typically disperse their money across multiple organizations to increase philanthropic reach (Frumkin, 2000). This philanthropic approach is problematic for organizations that typically develop a new program for external support—sometimes at odds with the organization's mission—and then need to figure out how the operating budget absorbs these new costs over the long term. Thus, the potential for mission drift is both problematic and inevitable. One approach to combat mission drift is to integrate the aims of the foundation and the nonprofit and develop a collaborative agreement between the two entities. Incorporating a scaffolding approach assists in bringing organizational stakeholders together to develop a cooperative solution.

### **Scaffolding: Breaking Down Complex Decision-Making**

Scaffolding is an approach most commonly used by teachers in elementary and secondary education as a means to teach complex concepts. Based on a constructivist philosophy developed by psychologists such as John Dewey, Lev Vygotsky, and Jean Piaget, scaffolding supports task-based learning and the acquisition of new knowledge. The core idea of scaffolding is to break down complex tasks and problems into manageable parts (Hmelo-Silver, Duncan, & Chinn, 2007). In essence, a scaffold is a support that offers guidance. Instructional scaffolding supports a beginner's mastery of a concept

through the use of concrete materials such as guides and templates (Lisi, 2014). Scaffolds also take the form of coaching and modeling. A teacher or facilitator eventually removes the scaffold once the learner is able to work independently (Winstone & Millward, 2012).

Incorporating a scaffold into stakeholder conversations about funding opportunities has the potential to lead to more productive and pointed discussions. Scaffolding leads the conversation away from quick decision-making and towards a thoughtful analysis that incorporates multiple perspectives. There are a few ways a grant professional can serve in the role of facilitator in the conversations while incorporating a scaffolding approach. The following two scaffolds guide complex but important conversations and can be used together or separately depending on the needs of the grant professional.

### *Scaffolding Strategy 1: Six Thinking Hats*

The first scaffolding coaching strategy is the Six Thinking Hats, developed by de Bono (1995) as a way to conduct problem-solving through multiple perspectives. Each hat has a color and represents a particular perspective. Depending on the size of the group, each stakeholder could be assigned a hat, or, the grant professional can lead a discussion that explores each perspective. The following list defines each hat and a possible way to incorporate it into an organizational stakeholder discussion.

- The White Hat signifies the amount of information the group possesses. In a discussion, the White Hat could include the foundation's grantmaking guidelines, the foundation's historical funding interests, the existing mission of the organization, and the resources needed for organizational programming.
- The Red Hat depicts an emotional response to a decision. A stakeholder discussion could explore how the organization's staff, board members, and constituents might feel if the program, or organization as a whole, pursues an activity outside of its mission.
- The Black Hat represents the risks involved in the decision. The stakeholder discussion may veer towards loss of steady funding from consistent donors aligned with the mission and potentially negative public reaction related to pursuing a funding opportunity outside of the mission.
- The Yellow Hat represents the positive benefits of the decision. New grant opportunities have the potential to expand the scope of an organization in exciting ways and to allow the organization to reach new beneficiaries.
- The Green Hat asks the group to think outside the box for a solution. This could lead to a new, updated organizational identity and creative solutions.

- The Blue Hat is typically worn by a single person who facilitates the conversation. In a stakeholder meeting, this could be the grant professional, executive director, or program director.

What could seem to be an elementary exercise potentially produces meaningful conversations. Often, organizational stakeholders—the grant professional included—will keep the Black Hat or the Yellow Hat on when deciding to pursue an opportunity, while ignoring other important perspectives. For example, the hypothetical scenario earlier in this article reflected the White and Black Hats, while ignoring the potential for positive benefits and creative solutions that may accompany blended learning. By examining an opportunity from all perspectives, an organization has a stronger chance of staying aligned with the mission while seeking an innovative conclusion. If conversations about funding opportunities continue to utilize all six hats, eventually multiple perspectives will intuitively be incorporated into the discussion.

*Scaffolding Strategy 2: Logic Models*

The concept of a logic model is not new to the world of grants and program development. The components of a logic model typically include resources, activities, outputs, and outcomes (which can be specified as short-, mid-, and long-term outcomes, or just overall outcomes) (Figure 1). Each component interconnects with the others and has the potential to

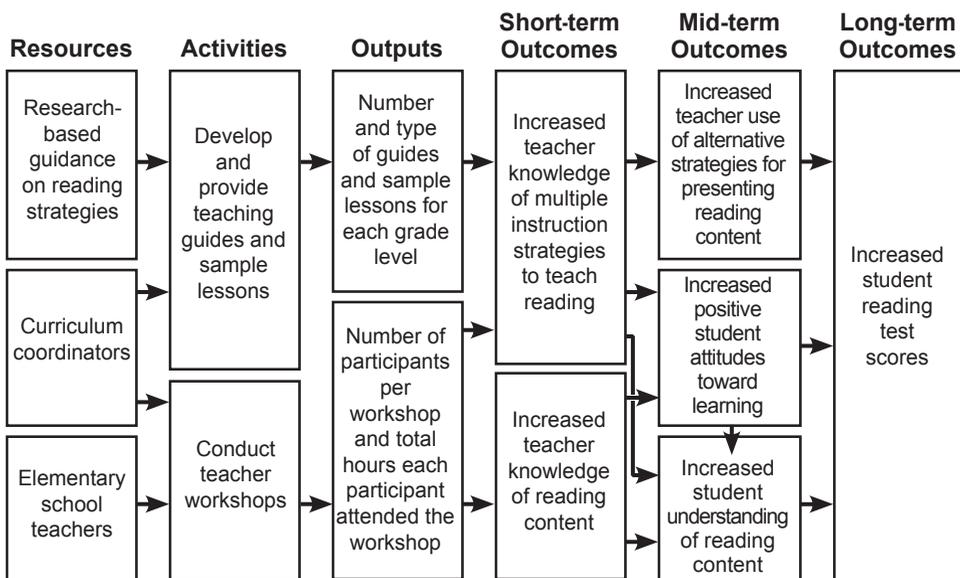


Figure 1. Sample logic model for a teacher training program on alternative reading strategies. Adapted from Logic models: A tool for effective program planning, collaboration, and monitoring (REL 2014-025), by W. Kekahio et al. (2014), Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

influence the content in the other columns (Lawton, Brandon, Cicchinelli, & Kekahio, 2014). Logic models provide an opportunity to be systematic in determining the details of a grant program. Outcomes in the logic model not only connect to the program's goals but are also necessary to demonstrate success and impact (Kekahio, Cicchinelli, Lawton, & Brandon, 2014).

Logic models are structured tools, or scaffolds, to use when determining whether to pursue a grant opportunity, and yet, they are often overlooked or underused. Some nonprofit professionals find logic models to be restrictive (Steele, 2014). Instead of using logic models, some grant professionals focus on just the goals and activities of a program, while other professionals will seek out alternative models that fit the needs of organizations (Steele, 2014).

Logic models, in a scaffolding sense, work well when having stakeholder conversations within an organization about funding opportunities and are adaptable for such purposes. Using logic models as the focus of a brainstorming activity allows stakeholders to voice opinions and ideas, while assisting the grant professional in writing a proposal, if the group decides to go after funding. One way to prepare for such a scaffolding activity is for the grant professional to complete a logic model from the perspective of the funder. In the Resources column is the intended amount of money to be allocated to a particular foundation program priority. In the Activities column are the grant making strategies or approaches identified by the foundation. The Outputs column lists the activities or accomplishments that any previously-awarded organizations achieved through their grants from the foundation (this can commonly be found on a foundation's grants news page). The Outcomes column lists what the foundation seeks in terms of geographic impact, as well as impact on changes in attitude or actions of the intended population.

Of course, this foundation logic model will be created using the limited public knowledge available. Nevertheless, the model serves as a promising springboard for a brainstorming discussion among stakeholders in an organization that is considering seeking funding from the foundation. With a copy of the foundation logic model in hand, the group can then begin to brainstorm information to input into their own logic model. Once a draft of the organization's model is complete, a simple compare and contrast process can occur. How do the foundation's outcomes compare to the organization's intended outcomes? Do the activities in each model align with one another? Are the suggested foundation outputs realistic and feasible for the organization to produce? This activity provides a simple checks and balances comparison between the two organizational bodies and has the potential to address any concerns about mission drift.

## Conclusion

Incorporating scaffolding approaches into group decision-making about grantseeking may appear to be too simple or demeaning of a process, given that professionals in an organization should be able to reach a conclusion in a straightforward manner. Yet, frequently, nonprofit professionals do not take into account all of their options, due to the lack of time to reflect on all of the issues that could accompany a grant proposal and a resulting grant award. Scaffolding asks organizational stakeholders to take a step back and look at an issue from all angles. Thus, scaffolding approaches help the grant professional develop a comprehensive decision-making process to use with stakeholders to ensure sound and thorough decisions about grantseeking.

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# The Grant Divide: Bridging the Gap Between the Grant and Accounting Worlds

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*GPCI Competency 04: Knowledge of how to craft,  
construct, and submit an effective grant application*

*GPCI Competency 5: Knowledge of post-award grant  
management practices sufficient to inform effective  
grant design and development*

## **Abstract**

There is a divide in understanding between accounting and grant professionals in nonprofit organizations. This divide can cost an organization human as well as financial resources. This article details a study of accounting and grant professionals conducted by the authors from January 15 to February 28, 2015. The result is the identification of five issues leading to a better understanding of the divide. From these issues, best practice ideas are presented to strengthen the relationship between accounting and grant professionals.

## **Introduction**

A disparity exists between grant professionals and nonprofit accountants in many areas, including communication, substantive knowledge, and contextual understanding. For example, grant professionals often complain that accounting staff do not understand the grant project; that they fail to understand that reallocation of funds from one purpose to another is not an acceptable practice; and they do not see why the remaining project balance is smaller than expected.

Accounting staff often complain that grant professionals do not understand account coding or the details of IRS circulars; the need to secure approved purchase orders prior to expending grant funds; how fringe-benefit costs can increase, causing the modification of budget line items elsewhere; and the need for revision approval before spending on previously unbudgeted items.

A search of literature, scholarly reviews, and articles yielded little information on this subject. Grant professionals and accountants approach grant applications and budgets differently. The subject of the budgeting process and accounting within nonprofits has a wide range of explanations and understandings. For example, in one nonprofit text, the budget is described as, "...an instant lottery ticket—expend a bit of effort and the number is magically revealed" (McLaughlin, 2009, p. 157). Juxtaposed to this view, Bryce (2000) believes that the budget is the most important tool for the direction of the nonprofit in setting financial and business direction.

The subject of nonprofit financial accounting is not without controversy, as indicated in the *Nonprofit Quarterly* editorial regarding the Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University study, *Financial Literacy and Knowledge in the Nonprofit Sector*:

It appears that the researchers knew precious little about the terminology or practices of nonprofit financial management. The headliner finding of the study is that 76% of financial managers at mid-size nonprofits reported that they consider themselves to be knowledgeable about financial principles, but only a third correctly answered all three basic financial literacy questions (2012, February 29).

Experienced on both sides of the "divide," the authors conducted a survey of grant professionals and accounting professionals to develop an understanding of the disconnection between the two. The survey examined the knowledge, communication and practice of each professional. The authors conclude with specific suggestions to bridge the divide that exists between a grant professional and an accounting professional.

### **Understanding the Grant Divide from Anecdotal Evidence**

The topic of a "divide" between grant and accounting professionals was introduced at the 2014 Grant Professionals Association conference during the Grant Management Special Interest Group meeting. Of particular concern were the changes to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) circulars that became effective on December 31, 2014.

During the conversation, comments surfaced about either the grant professional or the accounting staff member being up-to-date and able to work through issues under the new federal guidelines. These concerns lead to the question of how pervasive is the divide between grant and accounting professionals as it relates to grant management.

## **Methodology for Data Collection**

The authors developed a survey to collect data from both grant and accounting professionals. Survey questions focused on grant and accounting professionals' knowledge of the grant application process, budgets and grant management protocol. Areas of particular interest focused on those with the potential of misunderstanding between professionals: appropriate expenditures, budget processes, changes in federal rules, and how to account for fringe benefits. Table 1, on the following pages, summarizes the survey questions.

After self-identifying as a grant management or accounting/finance professional, each participant answered the corresponding set of questions. Notwithstanding the fact that mail surveys have a higher response rate in nonprofit research (Lin & Van Ryzin, 2011), time constraints mandated the use of a web-based tool—Survey Monkey—in this research. A colleague in the nonprofit profession, but of neither a grant nor an accounting background, agreed to test the survey and provide feedback on readability. Some clarification changes resulted. The final survey link was available for data collection from January 15 to February 28, 2015.

To recruit participants, professional contacts in each industry distributed a link to the online survey to members of grant and accounting groups, including Facebook and LinkedIn. The link and a brief description of the work appeared on the authors' personal feeds using Facebook; in the Grant Professional Certification Institute (GPCI) group; and in the Accounting & Financial Women's Alliance (AFWA) Friends group. The link also appeared on LinkedIn through an article posted to LinkedIn's Pulse news stream, the Grant Professionals Association (GPA) group, Alliance for Nonprofit Management group, 'For Grant Writers Only' group, and through the personal LinkedIn feeds of the authors.

Open for 25 days for data collection, the survey received 53 responses. The goal was 75 participants. Of the 53 respondents, 48 self-identified as grant professionals and 5 self-identified as accounting/finance professionals. It is possible that lower participation among accounting and finance professionals was the result of the survey being conducted during the initial period of income tax season from January through April.

Table 1. Survey Questions

Grant Management Professional	Accounting/Finance Professional
<p>With which of the following are you familiar?</p> <p>A-87 A-133 Single Audit EDGAR OMB Super circular</p>	<p>How many grant-funded Program Coordinators do you work with during the average year:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1-3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4-6 <input type="checkbox"/> 7 or more</p>
<p>What kind of funding do you manage?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Federal <input type="checkbox"/> State <input type="checkbox"/> Local <input type="checkbox"/> Private or community foundation <input type="checkbox"/> Corporate <input type="checkbox"/> Other:</p>	<p>What kind of grant funding do you manage?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Federal <input type="checkbox"/> State <input type="checkbox"/> Local <input type="checkbox"/> Private or community foundation <input type="checkbox"/> Corporate</p>
<p>What is the typical amount of funding for which you are responsible in the average year?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Under \$50,000 <input type="checkbox"/> \$50,001-100,000 <input type="checkbox"/> \$100,001-500,000 <input type="checkbox"/> \$500,001-1million <input type="checkbox"/> \$1million-5million <input type="checkbox"/> \$5million-10million <input type="checkbox"/> \$10million+</p>	<p>What is the typical amount of funding for which you are responsible in the average year?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Under \$50,000 <input type="checkbox"/> \$50,001-100,000 <input type="checkbox"/> \$100,001-500,000 <input type="checkbox"/> \$500,001-1million <input type="checkbox"/> \$1million-5million <input type="checkbox"/> \$5million-10million <input type="checkbox"/> \$10million+</p>
<p>My organization requires the following for purchases made for a grant funded project:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Purchase orders <input type="checkbox"/> Reimburses for receipts <input type="checkbox"/> Other</p>	<p>Your role in grant fund accounting includes:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Budget set-up <input type="checkbox"/> Approving budget prior to submission <input type="checkbox"/> Completing a grant application submission <input type="checkbox"/> Monitoring expenses <input type="checkbox"/> Revising and sending amendments for approval <input type="checkbox"/> Final report submissions <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Please specify)</p>

Table 1. Survey Questions (continued)

<p>After the accounting department sets up the budget for your program, the budget:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Looks very different from my original budget</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Looks somewhat different from my original budget</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Looks exactly as I expected for the budget</p>	<p>Regarding federal/state/local legal requirements for grants (such as the OMB circulars, EDGAR, the A-133 audit), I find the Grant Program Coordinator:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Highly knowledgeable</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat knowledgeable</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat unknowledgeable</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Highly unknowledgeable</p>
<p>I feel I have a good understanding of my program budget and the budgeting process.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	<p>I meet with my colleague working with a grant to review expenditures and revise the budget as necessary.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No</p>
<p>I meet with my colleague in accounting regularly to review expenditures and revise the budget as necessary.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	<p>Sometimes I think my program coordination colleagues and I are speaking different languages.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> True</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> False</p>
<p>I am aware of changes in federal/state requirements for the financial accounting for my grant-funded program.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	
<p>Sometimes I think my accounting colleagues and I are speaking different languages.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> True</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> False</p>	

## Issues Identified

Our analysis of survey responses generated the following issues.

### *Lack of Standards*

Survey results clearly indicate that there is not one universal standard for documentation of grant-funded project expenses. This issue is recognized at the federal level, resulting in the creation of the OMB

Supercircular to codify regulations for all agencies in one location. Released in December 2013, the reform of OMB Guidance, as stated in the *Federal Register*:

...will improve the integrity of the financial management and operation of federal programs and strengthen accountability for federal dollars by improving policies that protect against waste, fraud, and abuse...[and] increase the impact and accessibility of programs by minimizing time spent complying with unnecessarily burdensome administrative requirements (p. 78590).

The accounting profession may provide expertise based on practices in their respective organizations to create better systems for expense tracking, especially for organizations that do not receive federal funds and are not accountable to OMB standards. Best practices are in line with the Cost Accounting Standards Board (CASB) when working with government grants and contracts. But capacity to create and use a complex system for cost accounting will vary based on the size of an organization. Smaller nonprofits may have to rely on receipts and invoices alone, while larger organizations will have a comprehensive accounting software system for tracking expenses.

### *Budget Modifications*

More than half, 52.8%, of grant professionals reported that their budget looks 'different' or 'very different' from their original budget following the accounting department's review. Accounting software systems are increasingly sophisticated. As a result, software requirements, item coding, and terminology are very specific and typically inflexible.

Grant professionals who develop the project, write the proposal, and manage the program post-award, find that their grant budget bears little resemblance to the original project budget after accounting professionals enter it into their system. For example, in some systems, the budgeted item for "food" is split into two different codes and dollar amounts depending on whether the food is contracted, provided by a vendor, or purchased at a grocery. One respondent stated, "It seems like there are three different methods of budgeting for grants—that used by the accounting department, that used by the program director (which only includes hard costs), and that used by the development office (which includes staff time, a portion of overhead, and in-kind)."

### *Compliance with Changing Requirements*

Nearly 20% of respondents indicated that they were not aware of changes in federal/state requirements for financial accounting for their grant-

funded program. This is alarming given the ever-increasing stringency with which organizations are scrutinized for compliance. Respondents recognized that updating does take a significant amount of their time. One respondent even noted he reviews the Federal Register on a daily basis.

### *Intra-Office Communication*

Nearly three out of five respondents, 58%, noted that they meet with their counterpart in program management or the finance office 'as necessary.' Nearly one out of four do not meet regularly. As noted by one respondent:

After reimbursements are posted, should it be the responsibility of the finance people to inform me of reclassified expenditures or denied claims? I want the grant program reports and the financial reports to match. Shouldn't finance want the same thing?

Other respondents noted the heavy use of e-mail communication versus in-person meetings. This is especially true for smaller organizations that outsource their accounting function.

### *Do We Speak the Same Language?*

More than one-third of the grant professionals responding, 36%, agreed that, "sometimes I think my accounting colleagues and I are speaking different languages."

Prior to this survey, anecdotal evidence and remarks from grant professionals suggested a high percentage suspected that the accountants spoke a completely different language. However, only a little more than one in three grant professionals' responses supported this assumption. As grant professionals learn more about accounting and fiscal grant management, their understanding of accounting language improves. Accounting professionals participating in the survey noted that they do not expect grant professionals to fully understand cost accounting and Financial Accounting Standards Board (FASB) rules. From survey comments, it appears that accounting professionals believe that grant professionals' expertise is in non-accounting areas such as program development.

## **Best Practices**

Our analysis of survey responses generated the following best practices:

- *Develop consistent procedures.* Within organizations and industry-wide, collaboration between grant and accounting professionals will identify consistent policies and procedures and provide regular training opportunities.

- *Use templates.* Development and consistent use of templates will increase organizational structure and provide nonprofit organizations with more internal controls (Edwards, 1994).
- *Conduct regular meetings.* With increasing focus on compliance and clean audits, both program and accounting staff must communicate regularly in meetings—either virtually or in person. Meetings facilitate effective communication.
- *Stay current.* Best practice for any grantee includes reading carefully and diligently through the grant award information, connecting with the grantor’s program officer and signing up for any alerts or updates. Professional organizations, such as the Grant Professionals Association, National Grants Management Association, and the Accounting & Financial Women’s Alliance provide updates on the industry to assist grant and accounting professionals.
- *Encourage professional development.* Ongoing professional development is essential. Nonprofit leaders should support internal and external training options for grant and accounting professionals. Leadership should encourage membership in professional associations as a source of training opportunities. Training opportunities can be combined with formal education such as undergraduate and graduate programs to further understanding of service delivery, program development, administration and leadership (Harper-Dorton, 2012).

## Conclusion

The authors expected to find a large divide between grant professionals—those who develop and write grant proposals and manage the grant upon award—and those who provide the grant accounting function. Although there is some evidence of a divide among those surveyed, the divide does not appear to affect a majority of respondents. Nor is the divide particularly deep, given the close results of respondents’ answers. A larger sample size might yield more definitive answers.

Developing and maintaining avenues of communication, opportunities for professional development, and consistent policies and procedures are methods by which the divide between grant and accounting professionals is minimized.

Recommended best practices include: develop consistent procedures; use templates; conduct regular meetings; stay current on industry knowledge; and promote professional development. It is important that grant professionals and accounting professionals work together for a greater understanding of each other’s role and an improved working relationship.

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# The Impact of Cultural Barriers on Successful Funding Partnerships: A Case Study of SKIP

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*GPCI Competency 02: Knowledge of organizational development as it pertains to grant seeking*

*GPCI Competency 03: Knowledge of strategies for effective program and project design and development*

*GPCI Competency 08: Knowledge of methods and strategies that cultivate and maintain relationships between fund-seeking and recipient organizations and funders*

## **Abstract**

Nonprofits and foundations work hand-in-hand to implement transformative programs. They often focus their efforts on improving the quality of life in marginalized communities. Despite good intentions, foundations and many nonprofit leaders are not attuned to the realities of life in these communities. Programs are designed through the lens of middle-class values. Consequently, programs sometimes lack legitimacy in the view of the individuals who are served. This paper highlights the failure of a street-level actor to function within the parameters of funders. The program had great appeal because of the authenticity of the leader, but he lacked sophistication and could not meet the formal requirements of funders and nonprofit executives. This paper explores the barriers facing nonprofits in designing authentic programs and offers several suggestions for strengthening the relationship between formal organizations and informal actors.

## Introduction and Overview

Nonprofits provide needed services to marginalized communities and individuals. In many cases, reaching target populations is difficult. How do nonprofits design, implement, and evaluate programs that are deemed legitimate by community members while simultaneously meeting the formal expectations of funders? This article is a case study that analyzes *Saving Kids, Instilling Pride* (SKIP), a program targeting at-risk adults and gang-affiliated young men who sought GED training in Chattanooga, TN. The leader of SKIP, a former gang member and ex-convict named Skip<sup>1</sup>, has strong ties with gang members. He speaks their language and can engage with them in ways that formal nonprofits cannot.

However, Skip lacks the formal business and leadership skills mandated by foundations to secure funds. Skip speaks in street vernacular, which is critical to his outreach success. This authenticity, though, undermines his ability to communicate and network with funders. The purpose of this case study is to highlight the barriers faced by street-level nonprofit organizations that attempt to raise money from local sources. The case is important because it identifies obstacles that are rooted in formal expectations of funding agencies that are not always adequately addressed by existing social networks. The paper concludes with recommendations on how to overcome the disparities that exist between street-level nonprofit organizations and formal philanthropic leaders.

## The Mismatch Between Formal and Informal Actors

The nonprofit sector in the United States is diverse, ever-expanding, and stretched for funding. Frequently, funding is concentrated at the top where professionally-managed large nonprofits (nationally and locally) meet the demands of funders and speak the business-oriented language (Bell & Cornelius, 2013; Johnson, 2013). Despite this funding concentration, the share of smaller nonprofits in the sector continues to grow.

There are over 1.5 million nonprofits in the United States. Of those, three-quarters (almost 1.2 million) have annual budgets under \$1 million, and most are even smaller. These “small” organizations respond to localized needs and are staffed by people with deep knowledge and caring for the communities where they live and work. They are small in budget size only. Their impact and community engagement are crucial to building just and vibrant neighborhoods and cities (Francis & Talansky, 2012, p. 2).

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<sup>1</sup> For this paper, the director is always referred to as “Skip” (lower case) and the program is referred to as “SKIP.” (upper case)

There is no shortage of community needs. There is a shortage of organizations that truly understand these needs and the unique “street level” challenges facing individual communities and neighborhoods (Ostlie, K, 2012.; Roelofs, 2005). These smaller, grassroots street-level nonprofit organizations face several barriers in the complex, increasingly competitive world of foundation funding. These barriers include funders’ resistance to operations funding, cumbersome grant development processes, organizational knowledge gaps (program management and finances), and lack of multiyear giving opportunities (Burd, 2009).

While nonprofits adjust their performance to adhere to the demands of the funding world—including emphases on evaluation, data collection, data analysis, records management, report writing, and outcomes management—street-level groups face additional barriers that impact the development of skills and knowledge. This results in many of these organizations and groups being labeled as “risky” by potential funders (Roelofs, 2005). These additional barriers include issues of class, race, culture, and language. Street-level organizations often have the benefit of operating within the communities they serve by hiring residents and/or former residents as employees. They speak the same language as those the organizations serve. These organizations understand the complexities of local neighborhoods—their histories, political environments, and change agents/local leaders. This understanding, however, can actually be a barrier in the world of foundation funding (Rose Foundation, 2010).

Foundations operate in a world of trained formality. Street-level organizations operate in a world of learned informality. Knowing the right language, the correct presentation style, the appropriate way in which to network can, and often does, serve as a distinct barrier between the two. An additional language barrier facing many street-level organizations is the changing concept of efficiency and effectiveness related to making change. Many street-level organizations adhere to the strategies of community organizing, protests, informal service delivery, and direct-action advocacy while foundations have shifted to a focus not on inspiring collective “rebellion,” but on improving individual choices and behavior (Lawrence, 2005).

Foundations require proof that their funding helped to improve the lives of those the grantee organization serves. To prove individual changes, nonprofits need to keep records, manage and analyze data, and show performance measures directly related to improved outcomes. Maintaining detailed records presents a challenge to many street-level organizations. Grant accounting is complex and many smaller organizations lack the sophistication to account for funding in a manner required by foundations. Many street-level organizations resent what they perceive as “bean counting” oversight required by foundations. They believe that foundations are not “on the ground” helping the community, and the restrictions placed on funding and the accountability expected

prevents good work from being accomplished. (Lara-Cinimosi & Steinberg, 2006).

In addition, the time required to conduct recordkeeping takes away from time that could be spent on front-line, direct service, further restricting the ability of the organization to achieve real-world accomplishments. Francis and Talansky (2012, p. 8) say, “[Some small nonprofits face] a ‘compliance only’ mindset [which] prevents organizations from using finance effectively to make rapid and strategic decisions, let alone adapt or grow.” Innovative organizations may have great ideas and even a dynamic leader, but a funder’s emphasis on compliance creates a funding deficit, because if an organization cannot comply, they face funder resistance.

The issues of race and class and their impact on funding cannot be ignored. “Critics argue that foundation grants are unevenly distributed across organizations, with a paucity of grants awarded to minority-led or minority-supporting organizations...” (Johnson, 2013, p. 2). Moreover, the societal stigma facing minorities, vis-à-vis lack of professionalism, contributes to negative perceptions. For example, minority men in military dress were only offered free bus rides at a rate equal to white men in casual dress. In other words, minorities have to be “better” to receive equal service (Pinsker, 2015). This reality impacts the funding world. Garrow (2014) found that organizations are less likely to receive government funding as the rate of minority residents in the geographic area they serve increases. “In neighborhoods with a low percentage of African-Americans, greater poverty increases the likelihood that the organization will receive government funding. As the percentage of African-Americans increases, however, the relationship between government funding and poverty is reversed” (Garrow, 2014, p. 381). Garrow’s findings coupled with the enhanced challenges minorities face with respect to customs, language, and dress, create significant barriers for minority-serving and minority-operated street level groups.

For many street-level organizations, escaping the funding deficit is unachievable. As funded organizations enhance their capacity—additional equipment (software for recordkeeping), more professional staff (grant writers, finance officers)—they gain additional advantages while street-level organizations fall further behind. Many observers note that the nonprofit sector is too big and duplicative. Therefore, the restrictions funders put in place help to streamline the sector and weed out ineffective organizations. This, however, ignores the realities and biases of the funders themselves and the potential and realized disparate impacts of the funding environment (Garrow, 2012, p. 381). Some foundations have addressed the funding deficit cycle by forming community review boards. Johnson (2013) discovered that foundations forming community review boards (boards comprised of persons working in and with local neighborhoods) as part of the grantee selection process

funded grassroots organizations as a total proportion of grantees at 58 percent versus the traditional-style foundation review board at 5 percent.

Another response is the creation of targeted, capacity-building grants aimed at eliminating the language and recordkeeping barriers. For example, the Nonprofit Finance Fund created the Capital and Capacity for Economic Recovery Program in Philadelphia. Through the fund, 22 street-level organizations received assistance. A template for funders to use when assessing street level organizations was developed (Francis & Talansky, 2013).

Finally, several foundations created consistent grantwriting processes for a particular geographic area. These processes include common application forms designed to reduce duplication, coordination of requirements and creation of different levels of grant management reporting depending on the size and scope of the grant (Burd, 2009).

The effectiveness of any of these responses depends upon the willingness of the street-level organization to accept assistance and devote the time to improving processes (Lara-Cinimosi & Steinberg, 2006).

## **Case Study**

This is a participant observation case-study analysis. The details of SKIP's experience were observed by an author who worked with SKIP to build program recognition and legitimacy. Skip was a valuable resource used to get input from gang-affiliated youth as part of the Chattanooga Comprehensive Gang Assessment (CGA). The author had a unique vantage point in the evolution of the SKIP GED training program. These data also come from interviews with Skip, foundation leaders and other civic leaders involved in the project. Community socioeconomic data is from the American Community Survey and used only for descriptive purposes.

## **Socioeconomic Context**

The Chattanooga Comprehensive Gang Assessment (CGA) codified what leaders in Chattanooga already knew—that high-crime areas have high rates of concentrated poverty and low levels of human capital. Neighborhoods with high levels of crime and violence suffer from poverty, low levels of educational attainment, and racial isolation. Children in these communities attend 90/90 schools where at least 90% of the students receive free and reduced price lunches, and at least 90% of the students are African-American.

The CGA highlighted many of the problems expressed in community forums and focus groups about urban poverty and crime. One major theme of the report was distrust. African-Americans in these communities resented law enforcement, were skeptical of elected officials, and were angry about the lack of economic progress in their communities. They viewed the CGA as another “study” that would make

bold promises and deliver few benefits. Given the heavy involvement of criminal justice officials (e.g., the police chief, the county sheriff, judges, and prosecutors), some community activists would not endorse the gang project. The anger and distrust stemmed from decades of perceived neglect. As one prominent activist proclaimed at a community forum, “Why should we trust you?”

### **The Role of SKIP**

Given this socioeconomic context, Skip’s appeal was multi-faceted. He was an outsider who was trusted by some gang-affiliated and marginalized youth. Skip could speak to kids in a way that social workers and traditional program directors could not. In a word, he was *real*. After he was featured in several local newspaper stories, Skip met with some local leaders. He spoke in the same street vernacular that he does with kids. He did not wear suits or engage in small talk.

For a mid-sized city, Chattanooga has a large nonprofit community that includes several foundations that participate in the redevelopment of Chattanooga’s riverfront, the renaissance of downtown, and the gentrification of core urban neighborhoods. They have invested millions in urban schools and are addressing the problems of urban poverty. They work seamlessly with elected officials in a process referred to as the “Chattanooga Way” (Eichenthal & Windeknecht, 2008). The public policy focus on reducing gang violence does not fit well with the traditional focus of local foundations. SKIP represented a program that merged with foundation interests in education and enhancing the local quality of life. The convergence of the gang task force, the CGA, and the genuine desire to see Chattanooga’s rising tide lift all boats made Skip and his program an appealing investment.

### **Legitimacy**

Throughout the short-lived Gang Task Force, the effort suffered from legitimacy issues. Residents in high-crime neighborhoods are mostly African-American, yet most of the architects of the task force were “the same old faces.” In this milieu, a former gang member and drug dealer emerged. Skip established a program called Saving Kids Instilling Pride (SKIP) the stated goal of which was to help gang members get their GEDs. As a former street hustler, Skip knew how to build networks and sell his ideas. Despite his limited formal education, Skip was featured in dozens of stories about gang members and their needs. He worked with nonprofit leaders who assisted him in developing a business plan. He appeared on local public television. He built a network of professionals to provide GED training for disadvantaged youth. He received funding from local philanthropists who were impressed by his authenticity.

## **Language Registers and Their Application to Nonprofits**

The term “Language Register” refers to the level of formality between individuals. For example, formal language is often used in business settings and academic presentations. In interviews, Skip pointed out that his street vernacular was both understood and appreciated by young black males in ways that nonprofit leaders did not understand.

Research suggests that impoverished students do not speak the formal language register (Payne, 2005). Instead, they speak at the informal register colloquially referred to as “street” language. Lack of awareness of these communication differences leads to conflict between teachers and students in schools. Similarly, foundations typically lack staff members who know and understand these communication differences. Funders want formal business plans, evaluation metrics, documentation, and certainty. Skip lacked the capacity to meet these formal requirements despite his authenticity and appeal.

## **Mismatch Between Street Credibility and Formal Expectations**

Ironically, Skip’s authenticity also was a disadvantage in attracting and sustaining funding. Throughout the short duration of SKIP, there was constant tension between Skip and his nonprofit handler. Skip complained that, “I’m not trying to make a dime on this but they were always in my business.” The former gang coordinator boasted about Skip’s program: “Everybody in Chattanooga can look and see what Skip is doing and see exactly what needs to be done on a larger scale. He’s not getting paid to do this.”

These kinds of accolades provided good press, but they did not address fundamental shortcomings of SKIP. Namely, Skip had no experience in formal accounting, public relations, compliance, project management, program evaluation, or marketing. These skills are expected by funders who invest philanthropic dollars. Given his lack of sophistication, Skip could not comply with the strictures of formal funding.

Throughout the brief existence of SKIP, managerial oversight was a constant concern. Skip did not provide receipts for expenses, and he clashed with foundation leaders who controlled the funds. He saw the imposition of formal accountability protocols as “meddlesome.” As a final effort to build SKIP into a viable program, a seasoned nonprofit leader was assigned by a funder to support Skip. The combination of Skip’s authenticity and the new handler’s professional experience working with local foundations could have yielded substantial funding, but within weeks the partnership failed. Skip met with his funders to plead his case, but the gap between the foundation boardroom and the streets was too great. The groups spoke different languages. The funders fully comprehended the need for SKIP, but their formal accountability and liability requirements forced them to cut off funding to SKIP.

## Overcoming Obstacles to Street Level CEOs

The language register example used earlier is a good starting point for understanding the communication differences between formal philanthropists and informal grassroots actors. As one funder explained, foundations support organizations that follow protocols. This builds security and trust and enables a foundation director to meet fiduciary requirements enforced by the foundation board. One foundation leader stated, "It's not the amount of money. I believe the problems he's trying to address are good, but I can't play his game." Skip simply played by the rules of the street. He was the leader and his vision was all that mattered. Following protocols enforced by formal institutions did not matter, and he never realized the importance of this mandate.

Another shortcoming of Skip in the eyes of funders was his lack of relationships with established nonprofits and the philanthropic community. "Foundations think of themselves as risk-takers within an environment of limited risk," explained a foundation director. When making funding decisions, he looks for the following attributes:

- Good history of delivering programs
- Insurance & Compliance protocols
- Accreditation, when possible
- Legal certainty

SKIP had no history of delivering any programs. Prior to implementation of the Chattanooga Comprehensive Gang Assessment, he was unknown outside of law-enforcement circles. In Skip's world, concerns about insurance, measuring program impact, or legal liability were nonexistent. He did not report to a board. His insistence that he did not want any money was a great attribute, but it did not protect him from external review. Skip had trouble dealing with oversight, because the sums of money he received were so small and, in his opinion, his motives were pure. "I was willing to do it without pay.... The more honest I was, the more I got turned down."

In reality, he was turned down because he was too risky. In fact, the legal risk was the most troubling obstacle to funders. If Skip were driving without insurance, the legal liability and the potential bad press for funders was not acceptable. It was not about the dollar amount. It was about the risk exposure to the foundations, their boards and their other constituencies.

The foundation director further explained that foundations typically view the world through the lens of "middle class values." Unfortunately, most street-level operatives do not operate under the same rules. Liaisons used by funders to bridge the credibility gap must be adept at communicating across social and language registers. Failure to do that, as is the case with SKIP, kills budding social entrepreneurs.

The fiduciary requirements of foundations create a bias in favor of funding more secure organizations, considered conservative investments.

Consequently, the effectiveness of those investments is limited if the secure organizations lack street authenticity. SKIP failed because it lacked sophistication. The idea was good. The timing was excellent. But the administration was beyond the risk tolerance of foundation leaders who wanted to support the program.

## **Conclusion and Implications**

The SKIP case study highlights the “disconnect” between street-level advocates and both nonprofit leaders and funders. Nearly everyone involved in the SKIP story thought the program and its goals were worthwhile. The authenticity of Skip in motivating an at-risk population was in high demand. However, the formal expectations of funders were too cumbersome for Skip. Attempts to professionalize SKIP with respected project managers met resistance from Skip. He never learned to appreciate the formal legal, communication, and compliance demands that come with grant money.

To avoid this disappointing outcome, there exist many nonprofit support organizations that train and assist motivated individuals with good ideas, but who lack business skills. For example, the Center for Nonprofits provides training and mentoring, but even this type of program is unattractive to grassroots organizers such as Skip. As with those he serves, Skip does not feel comfortable with the constrictions associated with these services.

How can the nonprofit community assist advocates like Skip? The African-American church plays an important role in managing programs and implementing community initiatives in low income communities. Skip was placed under the auspices of a church. The relationship between Skip and the pastor was not professional. The pastor was a conduit for foundation money, and Skip saw the relationship as an unnecessary burden. At no point did anyone train Skip to be more conventional. He was simply told that he needed to submit receipts for reimbursement and get approval for expenses. To Skip, these seemed like needless layers of bureaucracy because he was “doing it for free.” Training might not have helped. Skip was summoned to his funder’s offices on multiple occasions to discuss the importance of proper accounting procedures. These admonitions to comply with protocols were perceived by Skip as authoritarian.

Another potential factor that complicates relationships between funders and street-level actors is middle-class values. The composition of foundation staff and boards is overwhelmingly white and over the age of 30 (Cohen, 2012). The lack of racial diversity may contribute to a language register problem. Foundations and nonprofits must focus on increasing the diversity within their organizations, especially their boards. They should create community advisory boards to provide context on issues that organizational leaders might not fully understand.

Although higher-education institutions offer degrees or certificates in nonprofit management, literature on the role of university nonprofit programs and community action contains little information on the capacity of universities to provide actual community-based leadership training. Courses in strategic planning, resource development, marketing, and finance are needed. However, university incentive structures tend to reward research about nonprofits over community-based nonprofit service. This disincentive needs to be addressed in order to leverage university resources for the common good. Future research needs to examine how the academy can better prepare street-level leaders to interact productively with formal institutions.

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# Artistic Assessment: Strategies for Grant Professionals in Documenting Learning in the Arts

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*GPCI Competency 04: Knowledge of how to craft, construct, and submit an effective grant application*

*GPCI Competency 09: Ability to write a convincing case for funding*

## Abstract

The arts are an important part of our lives. Arts organizations and their programs support communities through outreach with schools, initiatives for families, and opportunities for engagement at local community centers. External funding is important for developing programming, balancing administrative costs, and supporting visiting artists. Grant development in the arts is unique as arts organizations must simultaneously justify their need for funding and a broader need for the arts. Additionally, applying for funding is challenging as funding agencies often request more quantitative than qualitative data in evaluation and assessments. To address this growing but unique challenge, this article provides suggestions for collecting data from a variety of sources to support funding for arts initiatives with strategies for maintaining the integrity and value of artistic experiences.

## Introduction

The arts are an important facet of everyday life. People listen to music on iPods, watch movies in the theater, or dance with loved ones. Some argue that the arts are an innate part of being human, creative, and individually unique. The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) states that the arts create jobs, generate revenues, and strengthen education (NASAA, 2013). Through its funding and programs, the NEA estimates that over 18 million children have experienced the arts in school and community settings.

Arts organizations and school partnerships comprise a large portion of the collaborations that rely heavily on external funding to support programs (Rajan, 2014). These partnerships typically involve several different stakeholders, including the administration at arts organizations (managing and artistic directors), the artists, the individuals benefiting from these programs (including but not limited to families and students), and the external evaluators who assess programs and help document the evaluation process.

Yet, amongst a plethora of federal and private funding opportunities, arts programs and arts organizations often have the smallest budgets. Grant development for arts organizations may require justifying two types of needs: the need for funding for the organization, and the broader need for the arts. This becomes more apparent as the arts and humanities need to be continually justified as worthwhile initiatives (Cohen, 2009). For example, the budget for the NEA continues to be significantly lower than the budgets for other government agencies. Consider that the budget of the NEA represents only 0.012% (or \$146 million) of federal spending in comparison to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) with its budget of \$30.7 billion (OMB, 2013, p. 52).

Agencies that support arts organizations often announce specialized RFPs or award funding that requires inclusion of an artistic component with a broader topic (e.g., education, technology). These connections are even more ubiquitous in an environment that places a heavy emphasis on STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) in all facets of education. This has led artists, arts educators, and grant professionals within these sectors to try to broaden the concept of STEM into STEAM—to find a permanent place for the arts within funding agencies and to try to continuously document why the arts are important and meaningful in our lives.

The innovative and creative arts organizations around the nation mirror these challenges. Artistic directors are quick to share their struggles to find the resources to present fascinating and groundbreaking productions, but they struggle to provide documentation to funders of something more than just arts appreciation and performance. A majority of funders require that quantitative data be included in the final report, something that is not always accounted for when planning an artistic performance. This article addresses these challenges by acknowledging limitations in funding available for the arts and by providing suggestions for how to use data to effectively report on arts programming.

## **Assessing the Arts**

There is a fine line between writing a proposal and performing evaluation. While many individuals see these as two separate professions, others quickly argue that a strong grant professional needs to have an equally solid grasp of evaluation. One cannot be successful without the

other. While general evaluative methods are easily applied to the final reporting sections of grants, evaluation methods in the arts are more challenging. The challenge continues to be how to effectively document the complexities of artistic engagement and capture the pathways that influence learning and engagement.

Many artistic organizations recognize this challenge and have taken appropriate steps to actively pursue, document, and research arts learning. For example, the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts has an established office for research and evaluation. Similarly, the NEA recently developed a funding strand for research within their *Art Works* funding opportunities. Previously, the NEA primarily funded performances, artists, or arts education initiatives.

In one of the largest studies to examine assessment and learning in the arts, the NEA and WestEd sought to document current practices related to assessing K-12 student learning in the arts and to identifying any challenges (Herpin, Washington, & Li, 2012). Some of their main findings include: 1) a lack of publicly available assessment tools, 2) a general lack of understanding of rubrics and how to use them as evaluative instruments, and 3) the use of inappropriate tools for measuring arts learning and engagement (i.e., paper and pencil tests). The findings of this report are important to the field as it reiterates the importance and value of quality assessment in grant development for the arts.

### **Quality versus Quantity**

Federal funding agencies now require that final reports include a significant amount of quantitative data. However, arts learning is not as easily measured with numbers. Is it possible to use statistics to document how a shy child loves being on stage? Probably not. What one *can* evaluate is how often the child participates in arts activities in school, out of school, and within other community settings. Further possibilities for analyzing school-based activities include documenting specific days and hours of arts engagement. These numbers, while they constitute basic quantitative data, provide valuable information on arts enrichment and the frequency with which students experience the arts on a daily basis.

Perhaps more important is finding ways to capture the essence of the arts. An effective mixed-methods approach includes the use of both quantitative and qualitative measures. Consider the following example: A small, nonprofit organization has the goals of providing musical activities to economically disadvantaged children within the local community, collaborating with schools, and engaging families in artistic experiences through programming at its performing arts center. While this nonprofit might be fortunate to have individuals who give small gifts or donations to support these initiatives, any federal or private funding will require some type of final reporting, with documentation of the use of funds and what type of learning or outcomes occurred. Specifically, the nonprofit

wants to show that attendance at performances supported through the education outreach program fuels general membership at the performing arts center. Analyzing and crunching numbers, sale of admission tickets, membership fees, and the relationship among these variables is one component of meeting this goal. The musicians and educators involved with this project supported the collection of statistical data. However, adding qualitative data to this process strengthens the final reporting and provides rich descriptive examples of how the arts are meaningful in the lives of the people attending these performances.

Some examples of qualitative data could include after-performance interviews, focus-group discussions of families involved in the education outreach program, and follow-up interviews or surveys (e.g., after six months) to see if individuals pursue artistic activities within the community beyond the programs at this nonprofit organization. Rather than simply focusing on statistical data to demonstrate growth, by including qualitative data, the nonprofit shows how their programming augments membership, supported with specific examples, quotations, and stories of how the organization shapes people's lives.

### **More than Just Numbers**

For years, arts specialists (in music, theater, dance, and the visual arts) turned to using a variety of techniques to document learning, including portfolios of student work, presentations, exhibitions, and performances. Now, grant professionals and artistic directors in larger arts organizations are modifying and implementing these techniques in order to balance the push between qualitative and quantitative data. The following section outlines some ideas for data collection to systemically document learning and engagement through the arts:

- *Interviews:* Identify the individuals who are the stakeholders (those managing or funding programs) and those who are participants. Many times, the stakeholders do not have any background or training in the arts. Contrastingly, the individuals benefitting from the program are often families, students, or seniors within the community. Interviews provide rich data on these juxtapositions through perceptions, examples, and the stated value of a program.
- *Observations:* One of the unique facets of the arts is that participant observation is as important as the art work itself. Consider how often people go to the museum, attend an arts exhibition, or see a musical or play. Their observations of the arts translate into their understanding and appreciation of these art forms. Documenting observations throughout a grant-funded project provide valuable data useful when reporting to funders.

- *Focus Groups:* Many arts organizations rely on focus groups for data collection and evaluation, because focus groups articulate what works and what does not. Importantly, arts organizations can invite participants who have diverse experiences in the arts. These direct quotes, suggestions, and examples further support the strength of their initiatives.
- *Surveys:* Perhaps the most widely used evaluative instrument, surveys can be implemented before a performance, after an artistic activity, or months after a collaborative experience with a professional artist. Surveys are also a bridge between qualitative and quantitative data collection; the results provide data for either category of research, depending on how the survey is designed.
- *Portfolios and Artistic Work:* Unique to arts assessment is the evidence of creation of artistic material. After engaging in an artistic activity, an individual will most likely have a piece of work to demonstrate their learning and engagement, beyond a pencil-paper test. This could be a recorded performance, a musical composition recorded on the computer, a choreographed dance, an improvised theatrical scene, a clay sculpture, or a painting.

While these strategies for collecting data are relatively common within grant development and evaluation, gearing assessment instruments towards the arts is the challenge. Grant professionals may wish to develop survey or interview questions that focus on understanding the arts but should not lead responses. For example, if the goal of a program is to document sustained engagement with arts activities, some Likert-scale survey questions (i.e., ordered scale) might include responses to the following questions: *The arts are important to me, I attend arts events every month, or The arts are valuable to student learning.*

Grant professionals may wish to supplement questions focused on frequency with open-ended sections that ask participants to describe *how they feel* when they are in the audience of a live, theatrical show, to elaborate on their background in the arts (e.g., training, education), or to identify specific areas within the community in which they are involved with artistic activities. Balancing the qualitative and quantitative data gives funders what they require (the quantitative data) and supplements that information with rich narratives, portraits, and excerpts (the qualitative data) that more fully capture the essence of the arts.

Finally, a large component of artistic experiences is the actual exhibition or performance. Many funders have an interest in both the experiences of those performing and the perspectives of those in the audience. Many research studies document the value of simply being an audience member and how the resulting interactions enable individuals to develop a sense of community as they share an experience with

likeminded individuals (Reason, 2010; Pitts, 2005). Quantitative data alone cannot capture the immediacy of those experiences. The use of an observational protocol is a way to collect both qualitative and quantitative data in this setting and has been used in various research settings (Creswell, 2007).

To develop such a protocol, consider creating a short list of the goals of the exhibition or performance. Some of these might include performing with expression, audience response, or artistic collaboration. Narrow the goals for the protocol to ten items and create a Likert-type ranking system. As an evaluator observes these goals, he or she records the frequency of each goal during a set observation. The protocol should also include a section for the evaluator to record notes and additional descriptions. The grant professional should assess the validity and reliability of the protocol by piloting the document protocol with at least three different researchers.

Individually, these different sources of data provide a glimpse of the activities and initiatives that arts organizations promote. Collectively, they create a foundation upon which to document growth and change, and they present a systematic collection of evidence on learning and engagement through the arts.

## Conclusion

As funding priorities shift and change each year, individuals working within and with arts organizations often have anxiety as to the state of funding available for their programs. Rarely does funding increase for arts initiatives, creating a continuous challenge in applying for and seeking funding. While professional artists may innately know the value of the arts in people's lives, grant development provides an opportunity for translating the aesthetic value of the arts through systematic data collection. Documenting learning and engagement in the arts is important for pursuing funding to support these initiatives, ensuring sustainability, and demonstrating the importance of the arts within communities.

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# Exploring the National Philanthropic Infrastructure: Opportunities for Grantseekers

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

*GPCI Competency 08: Knowledge of methods and strategies that cultivate and maintain relationships between fund-seeking and recipient organizations and funders*

## **Abstract**

An active philanthropic infrastructure has evolved over the past 25 years around the flow of funds from grantmaker to grantseeker that merits deeper attention from grant professionals. That infrastructure provides valuable information about donor motivation and interests of organized private philanthropy that enhances the fund developer's work. These information sources provide insights into the trends and factors that influence funders' goals and objectives as they focus on social change and enhancing quality of life. The sources also inform grant professionals about the terminology and practices that funders utilize to describe their work in a particular field. By broadening their attention to additional dimensions of the philanthropic infrastructure, professional grantseekers increase their opportunities to identify funding resources, create new relationships with funders interested in their practice areas, and better position their organizations as effective partners. This article explores some of the philanthropic resources that engage funders, including regional associations of grantmakers, national affinity groups, and coalitions, and identifies strategies for grant professionals to develop knowledge and relationships to increase their interactions with organized philanthropy.

## Introduction

An active philanthropic infrastructure developed since the passing of the Tax Reform Act of 1969 around the flow of funds from grantmaker to grantseeker that merits deeper attention from grant professionals. The dramatic growth in US philanthropy—an increase of \$247 billion over the past 25 years (US Census Bureau, 2012; Giving USA, 2014)—fostered a portfolio of resources dedicated to the development and service of private, organized philanthropy. This infrastructure provides useful information about the charitable interests of individuals, private foundations, and public charity grantmakers that can enhance fund development work. Broader knowledge of the funding culture positions an organization and its staff to build closer relationships with those that practice private, organized philanthropy.

Many grant professionals utilize some segments of the philanthropic infrastructure to research grant opportunities and statistics on giving. A large network of philanthropic support organizations and academic centers of philanthropy provides useful information, helping grantseekers in the search to fund the work of their organization or clients. Databases such as The Foundation Center's Foundation Directory Online, the National Center for Charitable Statistics at the Urban Institute, and academic centers of philanthropy (e.g., the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy at Indiana University) are well-known.

However, there are other valuable sources of information about grantmaker motivation and interest. These sources can provide insights into the factors that influence funders' goals and objectives as they focus on creating social change and enhancing quality of life. They introduce the terminology that funders use to define their funding interests and frequently describe collaborative goals for funding in a given field. This knowledge can help the grant professional align the work of their organization or clients with that of current and potential funders and can be well worth the research time and effort.

Although visits to individual funder websites are a standard step in grant seeking and management, understanding the *collective* actions of funders in a given field increases the grant professional's effectiveness. The way funders address social problems in a particular field may differ from that of a service provider. Each field has its own vocabulary used to define its work. Often, a funder's website will use buzzwords or reference specific research from regional or national sources. A visit to those sources allows grantseekers to further understand a funder's interest in a field and to enhance their knowledge about that field.

A federal grants program will usually provide specific information about the research that fostered a program (e.g., a White House report on STEM has created grant programs at the National Science Foundation focused on teaching and learning). Private philanthropists are often less open about identifying the origins of their goals and strategies

than government agencies. The grant professional can ask what sources influenced a funder to pursue a particular funding path or to develop a particular interest. By identifying and exploring the references on a funder’s website, in an annual report, or in conversations with staff, the grant professional can better communicate with a common language and definitions that resonate with funders.

### The Philanthropic Infrastructure

The philanthropic infrastructure, shown in Figure 1, consists of regional associations of grantmakers, national funder affinity groups, and national coalitions that bring funders together to focus on constituencies, issues, or geographies. The infrastructure also includes consultants/advisors and academic centers of practice that scrutinize the field of philanthropy, offering analysis and recommendations to funders.

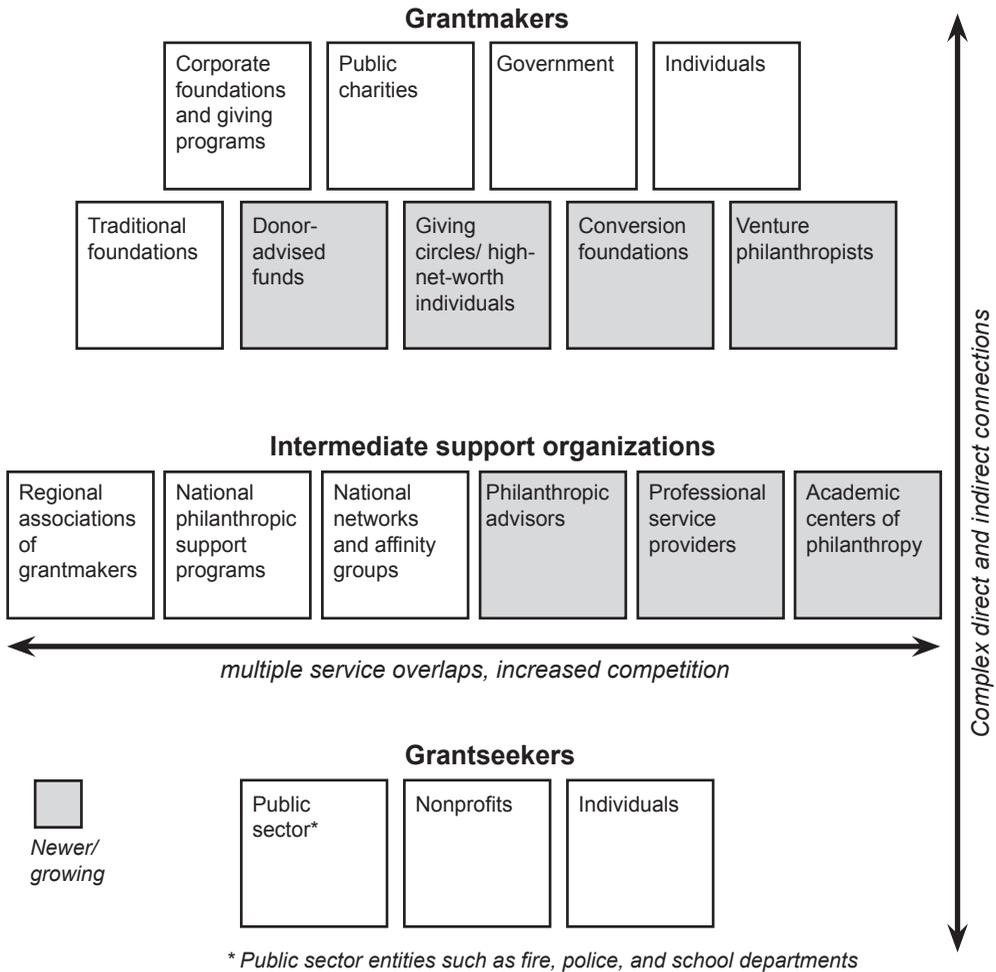


Figure 1. Philanthropic Infrastructure (adapted from Kinsey Consulting)

These groups evolved to enable funders to unite, share knowledge, and take action. They provide unique opportunities to develop a deeper understanding of the goals of funders. A more detailed discussion of the roles of these groups follows.

## **Regional Associations of Grantmakers**

There are 34 regional associations of grantmakers (RAs) in the United States and they represent 5,532 participating organizations—the largest philanthropic network in the world (Forum of Regional Associations of Grantmakers, 2015). Participants include:

- Private foundations,
- Public charity grantmakers (e.g., community foundations and population-focused funds),
- Corporate foundations and giving programs,
- Federated fund organizations (e.g., United Way),
- Donor-advised funds,
- Individual and family philanthropists, and
- Philanthropic advisors to high-net-worth individuals and private foundations.

Regional associations have a commitment to strengthen and expand the field of philanthropy. In general, they promote effective philanthropy, raise awareness of the work of philanthropy, and promote ethical standards among grantmakers. They focus on improving management and governance, ensuring accountability and ethical behavior, and bringing funders together around common issues. Members of RAs represent the most active, involved grantmakers in a given region. Although the number of RA members may seem small in relation to the 86,000 foundations in the US (Foundation Center, 2014), these members provide from 60 to 90 percent of the grantmaking in a given region.

Forty percent of RAs were formed in the past 25 years in concert with the tremendous growth of philanthropic giving in the US (<https://www.givingforum.org/network-at-a-glance>). Geographic focuses of RAs include metropolitan, partial-state, state, or multi-state areas. While each RA serves funders located in a particular geographical area, those funders may distribute funding around the world.

These regional associations, in turn, are served by the Forum of Regional Associations of Grantmakers, a national organization. Once a supporting organization of the Council on Foundations and now an independent 501(c)(3), the Forum leads and coordinates RA activities

around public policy, accountability, and knowledge management—setting standards and sharing resources across their member network of RAs ([www.givingforum.org](http://www.givingforum.org)).

Although there are many less formal networks of funders, these 34 RAs adhere to particular standards in how they operate and the services they provide to funders. Most regional associations of grantmakers offer a suite of member services that include:

- Networking, education, and skill-building for grantmakers,
- Addressing issues of policy,
- Providing guiding principles for ethical and responsive practice,
- Creation and support of issue/affinity groups and funder collaboratives,
- Products and services to streamline the grantmaker/grantseeker relationship, and
- Members-only listservs, publications, and websites.

### *Regional Associations' Added Value to Grantseekers*

Because of their interest in the whole field of philanthropy, most RAs offer some services and/or products of interest to other philanthropic practitioners such as grantseekers, grant managers, and financial advisors. Grant professionals can access many of these services by visiting the website of the RA in their region to determine what is available. A complete list of RAs in the US is available through the national Forum (<https://www.givingforum.org/network-at-a-glance>).

Typical services of particular interest to grantseekers include (with some examples):

- *Regional giving studies defining the sources and amounts of giving in a region.* These allow grantseekers to understand the opportunity for funding in particular topic areas and the balance between institutional funding and individual donations (Minnesota Council on Foundations <http://www.mcf.org/research>; Philanthropy Network Greater Philadelphia <http://www.philanthropynetwork.org/?page=PNresearch> ).
- *Common grant application/report forms.* These forms allow submission of a single proposal to multiple funders (Maine Philanthropy Center <https://www.mainephilanthropy.org/node/53>; Council of New Jersey Grantmakers [https://cnjg.org/sites/default/files/resources/NY%20and%20NJ%20Area%20Common%20Application%20Form\\_0.pdf](https://cnjg.org/sites/default/files/resources/NY%20and%20NJ%20Area%20Common%20Application%20Form_0.pdf) ).

- *Publications with regional grantmaking news.* Connecticut Council for Philanthropy <https://www.ctphilanthropy.org/resources-grantseekers-and-nonprofits>; Philanthropy New York PhilanthroPost <https://philanthropynewyork.org/>).
- *Periodic grantmaker/grantseeker meetings or conferences.* These give nonprofit staff the opportunity to interact with funders and enhance their joint understanding of community issues (Florida Philanthropic Network <http://www.fpnetwork.org/>).
- *Collaborative funding projects that sometimes include service providers.* These projects present the opportunity to work closely with particular funders to solve social problems (Iowa Council of Foundations <http://www.iowacounciloffoundations.org/initiatives.aspx> ; Colorado Association of Funders <http://coloradofunders.org/programs-and-events/caf-peer-networks>).
- *Information about emerging philanthropic trends and vehicles (e.g., giving circles) to incorporate in fund seeking strategies.* (Donors Forum of Wisconsin <http://wiphilanthropy.org/learn/wisconsin-gives/> ).
- *Job banks for individuals looking for new professional opportunities.* (Philanthropy New York <https://philanthropynewyork.org/news-type/job-posting> ).
- *Policy/advocacy activities.* These include meeting with elected officials and regulators to tell stories that affect the field (Indiana Philanthropy Alliance <https://www.inphilanthropy.org/advocacy/state>).

In addition, several regional associations offer special memberships to nonprofit service providers (Associated Grant Makers <http://www.agmconnect.org/>; Donors Forum <https://donorsforum.org/>). These sometimes include access to training, libraries for research, and other useful tools. Other RAs are co-located with their state's nonprofit association and/or provide frequent programming on grant development and other common topics (Maine Philanthropy Center <https://www.maine philanthropy.org/node/53>; Philanthropy West Virginia <http://www.wvgrantmakers.org/>).

Many RAs are active on social media. Connecting with a regional association through social media gives access to an overview of funder interests in the region. Follow RAs on Facebook, Twitter, blog posts, or other currently popular media.

RA-hosted local/regional funder interest groups have the capacity to identify potential funding partners and enable an understanding of social concerns from the funder's viewpoint. Conversely, funders interested in specific topic areas frequently engage with other

funders through regional interest or affinity groups. Often, regional associations post public information about their affinity groups and their members on their websites (e.g., Arizona Grantmakers Forum <http://arizonagrantmakersforum.org/affinity-groups/>).

RAs support important regulatory improvements that benefit both grantmaker and grantseeker, such as a permanent IRA Charitable Rollover, or the defense of the charitable deduction (Charitable Giving Coalition, <http://protectgiving.org/>). Tracking an RA's level of policy involvement can provide another connection point for nonprofit service providers.

In recent years, RAs have come together with national nonprofit associations around common issues. For instance, they supported the need for responsible overhead funding (Peeler, 2015). Recent articles (GuideStar et al., n.d.; Donors Forum, 2013a) show that funders share the concern that: a) nonprofits suffer because of arbitrary limits on overhead funding, and b) there is a false conception that financial ratios are the true measure of a nonprofit's effectiveness. The common concern around overhead or other issues is another potential point of connection for nonprofit service providers.

The foregoing examples give a taste of the potential information available from RA websites to identify opportunities to interact more closely with RA members. While RAs are primarily member organizations, many realize the value for funders of encouraging closer interaction with nonprofit service providers around community issues.

## National Funder Affinity Groups

Funder affinity groups evolved since the 1980s in recognition of the fact that pooling resources increases impact. These groups bring funders together for knowledge sharing, collaborative learning, and action. The national affinity group infrastructure is extensive and growing. There are dozens of organizations that focus on a broad range of funder interests. Generally, the types of groups that interest or attract funders include:

- *Issue groups.* Organized around specific topics or causes. Examples include: Neighborhood Funders Group, Literacy Funders Network, Grantmakers for Education, Grantmakers in Health, Grantmakers in Aging, Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees, and Grantmakers for Children, Youth and Families.
- *Identity-based groups.* Organized around a targeted constituency or community, usually perceived as underserved. These are often groups that represent population-focused funds. Examples include: Funders for LGBTQ Issues, Native Americans in Philanthropy, Hispanics in Philanthropy, Jewish Funders Network, and Women's Funding Network.

- *Professional development for foundation staff and trustees.* These are organized around the practice of grantmaking. Examples include: Grants Managers Network, Emerging Practitioners in Philanthropy, Foundation Financial Officers Group, PRI Makers Network, Communications Network, and Grantmakers for Effective Organizations.

Philanthropic Support Organizations (<http://www.cof.org/content/philanthropic-support-network>), a list of affinity groups developed by The Council on Foundations, while by no means complete, provides links for many of these funder groups. A visit to an affinity group website offers helpful information about the group and the funders that support it. National Affinity Groups routinely publish national data useful to compare and contrast local or regional information for impact.

By demonstrating a comprehensive knowledge of a practice area and its national issues, the grant professional relates their nonprofit's work at the local level to national concerns. Understanding the broader context that engages a funder helps the grantseeker create a more effective proposal for funding.

### *Case Example*

A freelance grant consultant researching sources of funding for a regional AIDS health center visited the Funders Concerned About AIDS website (<http://fcaids.org/>). The website included a report on AIDS funding and funders, techniques for resource tracking, and a global AIDS funding map. The consultant checked the profiles of funders and discovered several new to the client's list of potential funders. After researching each funder, the grant consultant provided the expanded list to the client. This increased the client's opportunities for funding, enhanced the freelancer's reputation for thorough work, and increased the freelancer's field knowledge of work in AIDS research.

### **National Collaborations**

There are numerous national collaborations of funders and funder support groups, often including academic centers, which focus on a particular issue. Tapping these collaboration websites is useful to understand the approach that funders take to address social problems, policy issues, and the grantmaker/grantseeker relationship. Many of these coalitions include nonprofits as participants. The coalitions provide a unique opportunity to interact with funders on a national level around common issues. Several general practice examples include:

- *Project Streamline.* A coalition started by national nonprofit and funder organizations to focus on helping grantmakers get the

information they need, while reducing the burden of application and reporting practices on nonprofit grantseekers (<http://www.gmnetwork.org/projectstreamline/>).

- *Charitable Giving Coalition.* A coalition designed to promote policy activity in protection of the charitable traditions that sustain the nonprofit sector in the United States. Members include national funder, advocacy and nonprofit groups. (<http://protectgiving.org/>).
- *Reimagining Service.* A source of information about the value of volunteerism that is useful to compare an organization's utilization of volunteers with national statistics and practice. Created by a coalition of funders and maintained by the Points of Light Foundation (<http://www.reimaginingservice.org/>).

Other examples exist in most topical fields: for example, education (Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, STEM Education Coalition, et al.); environmental policy (Sustainable Energy and Environment Coalition, et al.); and housing (National Rural Housing Coalition, Green Affordable Housing Coalition, et al.).

### *Case Example*

Through membership in a national housing coalition, a private foundation came to know a number of nonprofits in its region concerned with homelessness and housing issues. The funder subsequently mounted a region-wide research project on homelessness and funded several projects with nonprofits in communities where they had not funded in the past. The funder became an active partner in the work of these nonprofits with homeless families. The nonprofits' association with the national coalition was the gateway to these new relationships.

### **Consultants/Advisors and Academic Centers of Practice**

There are many individuals and organizations that develop new practice methodologies and offer commentary and criticism of philanthropy, all aimed at improving impact and effectiveness. Tracking some of these sources also adds to the grantseeker's arsenal of knowledge about the field.

Exploring the work of consultants and advisors in organized private philanthropy increases a grantseeker's knowledge about the methods and measurements recommended to funders to plan their strategies and assess their work. Today, many funders ask what impact their community investment has and how they should measure it. It is of great value to the grant professional to understand how funders define their success and how that may differ from the nonprofit provider's definition of impact measurement (see case example below).

An appreciation of the broader context and understanding of funders' approaches to strategic planning and evaluation helps align nonprofit requests for support. By understanding how consultants define effective nonprofits and their impact, the grantseeker can compare and contrast the methods used by their nonprofits to achieve results. The process of strategic planning, the field of evaluation, and the roles of the funder and service provider cannot be fully explored in this article, but are worth some scrutiny by the grant professional.

Academic centers of practice frequently provide information about philanthropic trends beyond giving that increase understanding of the underlying motivations behind funder behavior. They host education and publications that illuminate the field.

Many RAs and national groups work closely with consultants, advisors, and academic centers of practice to help funders achieve their philanthropic aspirations. The exploration of these infrastructure groups yields consultant references worth visiting. Examples include:

#### *Consultants/Advisors*

- Alliance for Justice
- Center for Effective Philanthropy
- Council on Foundations
- FSG–Social Impact Consultants
- Independent Sector
- National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy
- The Philanthropic Initiative

#### *Academic Centers of Practice*

- Boston College Center for Corporate Citizenship
- The Johnson Center at Grand Valley State University
- Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, Indiana University
- *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (Stanford University publication)

#### *Case Example*

A grant professional at a small, local arts organization visited the website of the National Center for Responsive Philanthropy and read its report, *Fusing Arts, Culture and Social Change* (Sidford, 2011). The article discusses equity in arts funding and the impact arts funding equity has on social change. It highlights the tendency of arts funders to fund large projects or institutions and neglect small, grassroots arts organizations, and it contains significant statistical information about the impact of small organizations. Using the information in this report, the grant professional was able to compare and contrast the social value of a small, local arts program to that of the larger institutions in the community. The grant application was funded.

## Conclusion

There is a growing philanthropic infrastructure that offers broader insights into the goals and practices of funders and those that influence them. Whether the grant professional starts with information gleaned from an individual funder or from a general search on the Internet, an exploration of this infrastructure expands the knowledge base and tools that grant professionals use to develop and manage funds for nonprofit work.

Regional associations, funder affinity groups, national coalitions, and consultants can have a profound influence on a funder's strategic goals and practices. Familiarity with these organizations leads to a better understanding of the terminology and methodologies funders use to pursue their philanthropic goals and allows the grant professional to "speak the funders' language." And, by exploring opportunities to engage directly with funders through the Internet, social media, and conferences, common interests between nonprofits and funders increase in strength.

When establishing dialogues with funders, grant professionals achieve an advantage by demonstrating familiarity with funder practice terminology and funder strategies for solutions in their field. This knowledge aligns the work of the nonprofit with the interests of the funder to help them achieve their charitable goals. It is this depth of knowledge that empowers nonprofits to make funders active partners in addressing the social, political, and environmental issues that affect the field of philanthropy today.

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## Biographical Information

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# The Impact of the Demand for Program Evaluation on Professional Fundraisers

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*GPCI Competency 02: Knowledge of organizational development as it pertains to grant seeking*

*GPCI Competency 07: Knowledge of practices and services that raise the level of professionalism of grant professionals*

## **Abstract**

Nonprofit organizations are experiencing an increasing demand for accountability to demonstrate the efficiency and effectiveness of their programs. This demand comes from external stakeholders such as the United Way, foundations, government agencies, accrediting organizations, and the general public. This trend presents a challenge to determine what role program evaluation plays in efforts by fundraisers to sustain programs. This mixed-method, exploratory study examines how professional fundraisers view program evaluation, how they attempt to meet the demand for it, and what role they play in helping to build their organization's capacity to evaluate programs. This article suggests that if professional fundraisers and their organizations are better equipped to meet the demand for program evaluation, they will be more effective at fundraising. While the study's participants were fundraisers, the results are equally useful to grant professionals because of the current trends, and because grantwriting and grant management are a core, primary component of fundraising. Wherever the words 'fundraiser' and 'fundraising' occur, they are inclusive of proposal writers and grantwriting.

## **Introduction**

There is an increasing demand for accountability with respect to the effectiveness of nonprofit programs. Program evaluation is a major focus for nonprofit leaders, funders, accrediting organizations, board members, individual donors, the media and scholars (Alaimo, 2008). Some scholars indicate that program evaluation is increasingly important in the nonprofit sector as a tool for strategic measurement (Carman & Fredericks, 2008). Foundations and government agencies require program evaluation from their funding applicants and grantees. Some incorporate this information into their funding decisions as a means of increasing accountability and stewardship of resources, while many use it as a tool to help them narrow down the organizations they can fund with their limited resources. Nonprofit organizations now operate in an environment in which the demonstration of program effectiveness is a necessary component to compete successfully for funding (Saul, 2004).

This study seeks to determine what perspective fundraisers have on program evaluation as a concept, if they incorporate it into their work, how they confront the demand for program evaluation, and what role they play in building program evaluation capacity within their organizations.

The issue of capacity—an organization's capability to evaluate their programs efficiently and effectively—ultimately drives the writer's ability to secure the required information to complete grant applications. If the organization cannot effectively evaluate its programs and provide the evaluation results to the writer, it is unlikely that a successful grant proposal can develop. Evaluation capacity is defined as "human capital (skills, knowledge, experience, etc.) and financial/material resources" that are necessary for the practice of evaluation (Boyle & Lemaire, 1999, p. 5). Evaluation capacity building (ECB) is "the intentional work to continuously create and sustain overall organizational processes that make quality evaluation and its uses routine" (Baizerman, Compton & Stockdill, 2002, p. 1). Volkov and King offer three main elements for ECB: resources, structures, and organizational context (2007).

*Resources* necessary to evaluate a program include people, facilities, funds, equipment, software, and time (Volkov & King, 2007).

*Structures* are the physical and mental processes within the organization that contribute to ECB. The overall ECB plan is a structure used to guide and monitor the ECB process. One example is an evaluation oversight group, sometimes called an evaluation work group, team, or advisory committee. It can be the catalyst for stakeholder involvement, effectively using available human resources, and moving forward evaluation processes (Wholey, 1994). Other structures for learning may include training and coaching, access to evaluation learning materials, ongoing learning activities, and opportunities for reflective discussion about evaluations (Preskill & Torres, 1999; Volkov & King, 2007).

*Organizational context* drives ECB (Baizerman, et al., 2002; Bamberger, Rugh & Mabry, 2006; Fetterman, 2005; Patton, 1997; Sufflebeam, 2002; Volkov & King, 2007). Organizations interested in building capacity for program evaluation should recognize their internal and external organizational context. Volkov and King suggest a balanced approach of building an internal supportive culture for ECB while integrating the demands from external stakeholders (2007) such as funding organizations, government agencies and accreditation organizations. An indicator of a supportive culture for evaluation may include “stakeholders’ buy-in, participation, and support from all levels” (Stufflebeam, 2002). This raises the question as to what role, if any, fundraisers and grant-development professionals should or can play in helping build evaluation capacity for the organizations they represent and the programs for which they raise funds.

## **Methods**

This study consists of a structured, online survey and focus groups. A total of 2,066 Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP) members completed the survey yielding a 17% participation rate from the total membership of the participating 73 chapters. The sample was representative of the population of AFP members in the categories of tenure as a professional fundraiser, level of education, and type of organization represented. The percentage of participants in the study having the CFRE (Certified Fundraising Executive) credential was 21% compared to 12% of all AFP members. Focus groups complemented the survey, and participating chapters included the Greater Atlanta Chapter in Atlanta, Georgia; the West Michigan Chapter in Grand Rapids, Michigan; the Northern New England Chapter in Concord, New Hampshire and Portland, Maine; and the Golden Gate Chapter in San Francisco, California, yielding a total of 40 participants. The focus groups discussed eight questions and averaged 75 minutes in duration. They were recorded, transcribed word-for-word and coded for analysis.

## **Professional Fundraisers’ Perceptions and Perspectives**

An important first step in attempting to determine how the demands for program evaluation impact the work of professional fundraisers and grant professionals is to determine what perspective they have of the concept. Context drives evaluation, and the environment, culture, knowledge, and social construction of stakeholders drives perceptions and perspectives.

Respondents described what comes to mind when they hear the term “program evaluation.” Notwithstanding the powerful influence of resource dependency and the pressure it places on fundraisers, only 4% of the 2,066 respondents referenced program evaluation solely as

a funder requirement and approximately 5% described it as part of the grant reporting process. The majority (86%) described a process for determining the merit or worth of a program and used action verbs such as “assessing,” “reviewing,” “measuring,” and “analyzing” while describing the desired end for the process as “effectiveness,” “success,” “impact,” “feedback,” and “results,” with the most frequent being “outcomes” from 24% of the participants.

Overall these respondents conveyed an adequate knowledge of the concept and in many cases came close to providing textbook definitions. This might be a result of program evaluation permeating the work of nonprofit management over time. More specifically to this sample of respondents, 57% received some type of instruction in program evaluation. Of those, 50% took a workshop or seminar, 25% took a college course, 16% received their instruction from some other source, and 9% took both a college course and a workshop or seminar.

Approximately 64% of the survey participants stated program evaluation was extremely important to their work, while 34% stated it was somewhat important, 1% it was not important at all, and for 1% this was not applicable. Of the 1,673 who responded to whether the incorporation of program evaluation information into their current fundraising had been helpful to their work, 95% said “Yes.” From those participants, 95% of the responses indicated they were better equipped to tell the stories of their programs to potential funders, 78% stated they had a better understanding of the programs, and 53% stated it helped them raise more funds.

*Table 1. Types of Program Evaluation Information Incorporated into Fundraising*

<b>Information</b>	<b>% of Responses N=1,653*</b>
Number of whom or what is served by the program	90
Program outcomes	88
Description of how the program is delivered	74
Client / Consumer / Customer satisfaction	60
Program (service) delivery “best practices”	41
Demonstration that evaluation results have been used	34
Program logic model	20
Other	5

*\*Note: Percentages do not add up to 100% because respondents could chose more than one response*

Of the 2,066 participants that responded to whether they incorporated program evaluation into their fundraising efforts, 80% said they did. Table 1 displays the types of information they incorporate in their work. Similarly, they were asked how they incorporate program evaluation into their work, and their responses are shown in Table 2.

*Table 2. How Program Evaluation is Incorporated into Fundraising*

<b>How Program Evaluation is Incorporated into Fundraising</b>	<b>% of Responses N=1,641*</b>
In grant/funding applications	85
In fundraising materials such as brochures or direct mail	74
In case statements	64
In electronic communication (e-newsletters or a website)	58
Other	10

*\*Note: Percentages do not add up to 100% because respondents could chose more than one response.*

It is important to note that “use in grant applications” was the most frequent response.

## **Funding Environment**

The trend of increasing funders’ demands for program evaluation is confirmed in this study, as 71% of all survey respondents indicated at least one funder in the past year required program evaluation information in an application. The types of funders in order of percentage of total responses included independent foundations (72%), corporate foundations (48%), community foundations (47%), government (44%), United Way (32%), corporate giving programs (19%), and other (12%). Approximately 55% of those checking “Other” indicated that individual donors requested program evaluation information indicating that individuals are increasingly interested in the effectiveness of the programs they support.

The respondents indicated how frequently in the past year a grant application required program evaluation information. Of the 1,464 respondents, 70% said “sometimes,” 25% “always,” 4% “didn’t know” and 1% said “never.” The types of program evaluation related information these funders requested are shown in Table 3.

The survey participants were asked how frequently funders supported evaluation in the past calendar year. The responses from 1,525 respondents are shown in Table 4.

Table 3. Types of Program Evaluation  
Related Information Requested by Funders

Information	Number of Responses	% of Respondents N=1,464*
Program outcomes	1350	93
Number served by the program	1350	93
Description of program delivery	1040	71
Demonstration that evaluation results have been used	600	41
Client / Consumer / Customer satisfaction	550	38
Program (service) delivery "best practices"	508	35
Program logic model	444	30
Other	101	7

\*Note: Percentages do not add up to 100% because respondents could chose more than one response.

Table 4. Program Evaluation Expenses  
Funders Paid in Calendar Year (n=1,525)

Expense	All of the Time	Most of the Time	Some of the Time	Never	N/A
Software	1%	1%	9%	77%	12%
Hiring an evaluator	2%	2%	13%	73%	10%
Supplies	1%	3%	15%	71%	10%
Staff time	2%	6%	23%	62%	7%
Other	3%	6%	22%	56%	13%

They responded to a question of how often in the past year a funder paid for all of the program evaluation expenses incurred. Of the 1,490 who responded, only 2% said "all of the time," 2% said "most of the time," 11% said "some of the time," 79% said "never," and 6% indicated it was not applicable.

### Contextual Challenges

The focus groups identified what the fundraisers felt were their biggest challenges. They included decreased available funding combined with

increased demand for their organization's services, issues relating to the board of directors, competition, and their ability to tell the story of the program. Discussions about competition consistently segued into discussing the challenge of telling the program's story, in order to be competitive and successfully win the grant. They framed this challenge in the contexts of being able to convey relevance and to portray distinctiveness.

Fifty-seven percent of survey respondents said that they face challenges from funders relating to program evaluation. Their challenges are shown in Table 5.

*Table 5. Challenges Fundraisers Face From Funder Requirements for Program Evaluation*

<b>Challenge</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>	<b>% of Respondents N=1,187*</b>
I have difficulty getting access to information relevant to program evaluation	795	67
I have spent more time on the program evaluation component of my fundraising work	757	64
I have communication challenges with program staff (people who deliver or manage the program that serves clients, consumers or customers)	715	60
I have applied for fewer grants or funding opportunities than I would without such requests	306	26
I have communication challenges with funders	159	13
Other	154	13
I have communication challenges with evaluators	102	9

*\*Note: Percentages do not add up to 100% because respondents could chose more than one response.*

Only 38% of the participants indicated they received regular communication from program staff concerning their programs, while 51% occasionally received communication, 6% never received communication and for 5% this issue was not applicable. The responses below help describe this challenge:

“Wrapping my mind around how to get program staff and administration to understand how important evaluation methods are for fundraising.”

“The hope that people running the program have collected and analyzed the data according to the proposal’s requirements.”

The focus group participants repeatedly emphasized that the program staff were the most important stakeholders in the process. The following quotation helps capture this sentiment:

“The direct service people are the most important because they’re the ones who are going to give you the right information. Since I am the fundraiser, I am not out there actually doing the physical, direct work, so I don’t know the great stories that come along with it or how it changed someone’s life or gave them a new opportunity. I need them to get me that important information.”

Leadership and culture play important roles in establishing the internal organizational context for program evaluation. Survey participants described the culture for program evaluation in their organization. Of the 2,064 respondents, 55% stated it was “somewhat supportive,” 33% stated it was “very supportive,” 9% stated it was “not supportive at all,” and 4% did not know. After program staff, the executive director, or CEO, was the second most important stakeholder for the program evaluation process.

### **Resource Challenges—Time and Cost**

The most significant challenge faced by respondents was a lack of time. Of the 1,187 respondents who indicated they faced challenges from funder requirements for program evaluation, 64% said the time spent on evaluation reduces the available time for writing more grant applications.

Another challenge on which the respondents focused was the cost associated with conducting a proper evaluation. This typically was linked to the role of leadership within the context of the prioritization and proper budgeting for the evaluation process. Funders increasingly require program evaluation, but are not adequately paying for it, if at all. While 71% of respondents indicated at least one funder in the past year required evaluation, 73% indicated that funders did not pay for an evaluator. This imposes fiscal pressure on organizations as they try to find resources to meet these requirements.

The majority (62%) of evaluations were conducted internally by existing staff. Other methods included independent evaluation consultants; a government agency; an evaluation company; and the

funder itself. Dedicated funding for evaluation is lacking. Seventy-four percent stated that allocation of evaluation costs was assigned to the organization's general operating budget. Eleven percent indicated evaluation costs constituted a specific line item in the budget.

Organizations are more likely to plan, budget and raise money for dedicated line items in grants and in budgets. Seventy percent of respondents indicated that their organization's budget does not include a dedicated line item for evaluation. They indicated that they use funds from their general operating budget for this purpose.

## Professional Development

Of the 2,041 participants that responded to whether they were interested in professional development for program evaluation, 73% said they were. Similarly, 78% indicated they were interested in professional development for ECB. Professional development in these areas will help professional fundraisers have a working knowledge and be equipped to facilitate or convene their organization's effort to build long term capacity to evaluate its programs.

## Strategies

A total of 808 participants from the survey and focus groups listed strategies they use to meet the demand for program evaluation. These strategies included communication, stakeholder involvement, relationship building, planning, allocating resources, and utilizing technical expertise. Participants focusing on communication emphasized that it be regular, consistent, and most often occur with program staff. One participant reflected this dynamic, "I meet with program managers and review the grant guidelines to help them understand the reason for evaluation requirements and the value of evaluation for the funder."

A more advanced form of *communication* engages stakeholders in the process, something evaluators typically recommend for successful program evaluation. The following quotations represent the participants' value of *stakeholder involvement*:

"Including program staff in the evaluation design process."

"Emphasizing how the team needs to pull together for this grant/donation. Even though most of the staff is not dedicated to fundraising, it's important to give them a sense of ownership in it. Without their cooperation, it would be very difficult to complete any kind of evaluation."

*Relationship building* was seen as an extension of communication and stakeholder involvement and as critical to the overall program evaluation and grant management process. Participants identified the stakeholders with whom they felt it was important to develop a solid working relationships.

“Try to get CEO on board so he/she can stress how important staff input is to getting our funds.”

“Build closer personal relationships with the folks in programs, and spend a day or two with them getting to better understand exactly what they do.”

The importance of *planning* came up often, typically describing the program evaluation component of the grant management process. The majority of the participants described it as being an essential component to the time management of the grant and program evaluation process.

“Start the information gathering process with lots of lead time before the evaluation is due.”

“Designing the evaluation at the time of seeking the funding, rather than retroactively.”

All participants emphasized the importance of *allocating resources* specifically dedicated to the evaluation process.

“Allocate funding specifically for evaluation.”

“Securing the funding needed to cover at least some of the costs of evaluations has reduced the program directors’ sense that we are making unreasonable demands.”

Participants characterized *utilizing the available technical expertise* for program evaluation as an effort of good stewardship of intellectual resources and as a cost-saving measure. The following quotations indicate that technical expertise can come from a variety of sources.

“Actually, we are working with a university professor on a logic model for our program.”

“I am the Executive Director, fundraiser and evaluator. I simply have to juggle all these hats, often work late to get evaluation reports completed. I keep up with database entry so that I can run the stats that I need at any time. I have statistical research skills and considerable evaluation expertise that help me manage the challenge.”

In addition to these strategies, approximately 62% of all respondents indicated they advocated for evaluation to others in their organization:

- Program staff—80%
- Executive Director—70%
- Board of Directors—33%
- Funders—15%

The results of their advocacy efforts were mixed:

- “Varied, depending on who they spoke with”—47%
- “Successful”—40%
- “Not successful”—9%
- “Do not know”—4%

### **Conclusions and Implications for Practice**

Resource dependency dictates that nonprofit organizations must rely on their external environment for resources to subsist and thrive (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003). The demand for program evaluation is increasingly common. However, program evaluation is typically not in a fundraiser’s role. It requires the efforts of other stakeholders, some within and some from outside the organization.

Professional fundraisers are in a desirable position to advocate for Evaluation Capacity Building (ECB) based on the following logic:

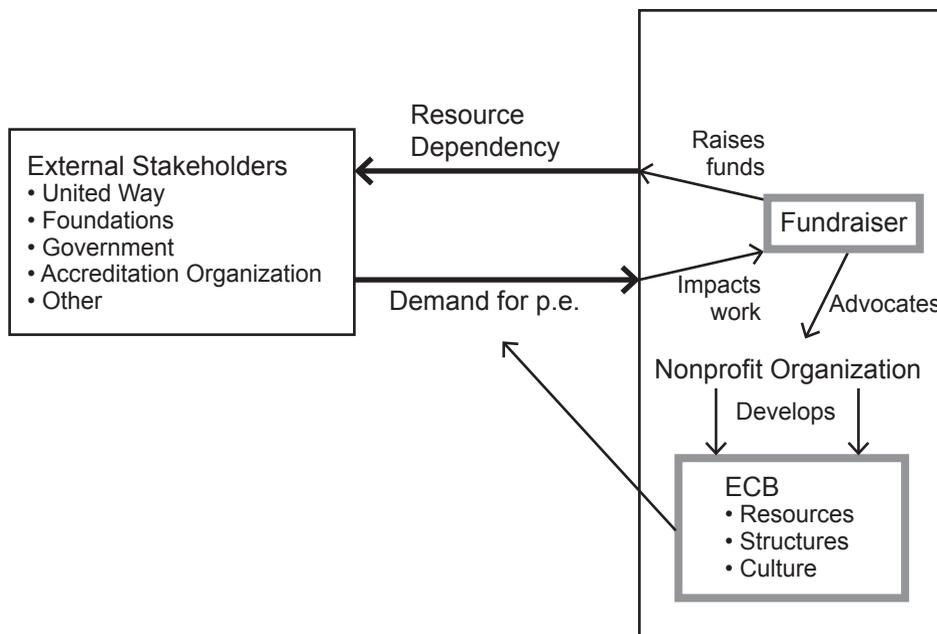
If professional fundraisers:

- increasingly confront the demand for program evaluation;
- incorporate program evaluation into their fundraising efforts;
- indicate that program evaluation helps their fundraising efforts;
- convey that demands for program evaluation present challenges for their work;
- are viewed as important stakeholders for securing funds for the organization; and
- are viewed as vital to the ability of organizations to respond to resource dependency in order to survive and thrive,

Then, professional fundraisers are in a position of power to advocate within their organizations for ECB with regard to resources, structures and organizational culture. This hypothesis can be seen in Figure 1.

The results of this study along with the strategies that fundraisers already use, provide possibilities for advocacy as follows:

- Professional development in program evaluation and ECB



*Figure 1. Rationale for Advocating for Program Evaluation*

- Prioritization of program evaluation from organizational leadership beyond rhetoric by:
  - cascading it as a value orientation for staff, Board and volunteers
  - developing and nurturing a culture for evaluation
  - marshaling proper resources
- Dedicated funding for program evaluation with a line item in the budget
- An evaluation oversight group, preferably an official Board committee, consisting of key stakeholders
- Improved communication and relationships with program staff
- Incorporation of program evaluation, or at minimum a working knowledge of it, in program staff's job description and performance accountability
- Allowance of the proper amount of time necessary to conduct program evaluation
- Working with a representative of a local university who has expertise in program evaluation
- Planning for program evaluation

- More open dialogue with funders that may allow program evaluation expenses to be negotiated

In conclusion, if professional fundraisers and grant writers engage other stakeholders in their organizations and advocate for Evaluation Capacity Building, they will be more successful at meeting the demands for program evaluation.

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## **Biographical Information**

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# Building a GPA Chapter from a Social Networking Group

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*GPCI Competency 07: Knowledge of practices and services that raise the level of professionalism of grant professionals*

## Abstract

From the progression of an informal group of colleagues (networking/social events) to an established Grant Professionals Association (GPA) chapter (the North Florida Grant Professionals, a GPA Chapter), the writing team identified helpful tips and a series of steps for those grant professionals deciding whether to evolve from a social group to a formal organization. Details regarding the effectiveness of scale-up strategies are offered. Topics include: forming a social networking group; formalizing the organization; and identifying benefits of creating a local chapter.

## Introduction

As in many communities, grant professionals in Jacksonville, Florida knew each other professionally. The awareness predominately covered grant professionals in organizations that typically worked together with common missions and in collaborative grant proposals. For example, the grant professionals at Florida State College at Jacksonville (FSCJ) primarily worked with grant professionals at regional colleges, school districts, and the workforce investment board when developing applications. Other college administrators, faculty members, and departments worked with community organizations and nonprofit grants offices when implementing projects, thus enlarging the circle of grant professionals who worked with FSCJ.

Some grant applications encouraged working relationships among community grant professionals. The Bill & Melinda Gate Foundation's Postsecondary Success Strategy (Gates, 2008) Community Learning in Partnership (CLIP) project rallied education, nonprofit, philanthropy, and government partners, along with their grant professional staff members, to draft a planning grant. This proposal was the first of many Jacksonville consortium applications. During the CLIP proposal development, the FSCJ grant professionals discovered a large network in the community that could work more efficiently together if they knew each other. FSCJ served as the lead on the proposal which engaged 26 community agencies and organizations in the application process. This large consortium expanded the College's network with other grant professionals and made the team aware of the many agencies in the community that employed grant professionals, the different missions to support each other in a comprehensive project, and a wealth of community resources to share.

A network of professionals working together on a project will increase overall efficiency by sharing development tasks. As Stinson and Renninger (2007) state, "There are many advantages to collaboration, including shared responsibility for researching and writing" (p. 119). With a network in place, grant professionals have a setting for meeting others and collaborating both professionally and socially.

Grant professionals in collaboration develop a stronger proposal than an individual grant professional can do alone. This is an idea supported in Ericka Harney's *GPA Journal* article, "Creating Impact with Policymakers: Cases of Building Cross-Sector Partnerships to Build Stronger Programs and Grant Applications" (2009). Harney states that, "Many organizations and experts acknowledge the necessity for stronger inter-organization relationships for the benefit of the communities served by collaborations. These include collaborations among non-profits, but also between the non-profit, business and government sectors" (p. 16). Because of the disparate nature of grant professionals' roles in the business community of Jacksonville, the College's Resource Development (RD) team formed a professional network.

The RD department served as the center for grant development and management assistance for the College and advanced the city-wide social networking effort for grant professionals. The RD department consists of a Director, three Resource Development Officers, and three staff members. This seven-member team recognized that networking provides the venue to discuss current and upcoming grant opportunities with fellow grant professionals and enables grant professionals to talk with colleagues who recognize terms such as "design teams," "RFP," "indirect cost," "non-negotiable deadlines," and "application packages," without needing to define each phrase. It is helpful to network with fellow grant professionals who know the pressure of a deadline or the overwhelming weight of the responsibility to secure funds to sustain a program.

After the CLIP program, the Resource Development team started to review more grant solicitations requiring collaboration as a means to stretch funding and raise the level of competition to that agency (Douma et al., 2012). That trend, which started with the “Great Recession” in December 2007 (Bivens, 2013; Willis, 2009), produced new grant opportunities such as the Bill & Melinda Gate Foundation’s Completion by Design (CBD) initiative and the US Department of Labor’s Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) Programs. Both programs required the joint efforts of many organizations. Therefore, a network of grant professionals strengthened the connections in the community and facilitated a greater chance to produce a more competitive proposal.

### **Forming a Social Networking Group**

In January 2012, the FSCJ Resource Development team began steps toward assembling a social network. Using the contact list from the collaborative grant applications, the team decided to expand the network before setting up the first gathering of grant professionals in a social setting. The team recognized that there were many other grant professionals in the community outside those who worked on proposals together, and that the list needed to be broadened. Each RD team member conducted research either via Internet, the local Association of Fundraising Professional (AFP) chapter site, nonprofit websites, or phone calls to identify and create a larger contact list for the event. The team targeted those professionals who either developed or managed grant projects at their respective organizations. In total, approximately 68 individuals from 45 agencies received invitations, including grant colleagues from local hospital foundations, community nonprofit organizations, art museums, public radio stations, local school boards, and higher-education institutions.

The first networking social occurred at a local coffee shop. Roughly 40 percent of those invited attended the social gathering after work hours from 5:00–7:00 pm. There was no agenda for the gathering, just name tags and a get-to-know-you exercise to meet new grant colleagues. The invitation method for the gathering used the social, Internet-based software Evite.com because it was a cost-effective way to collect and sort comments from invitees and monitor a headcount. Additionally, the colorful Evite invitation called more attention to the event than does an Outlook meeting request. The team continued to utilize Evite for additional social gatherings but then elected to send more formal emails because the gatherings began to include discussions on topics of interest.

Understanding that the initial event would set the tone for future socials and meetings, the team carefully considered the space and location. The team deliberated on a time of day and a location that would offer a crowd-friendly, after-work happy hour with drinks and appetizers

and a noise level reasonably low to allow for conversations. The team decided on a central location in the downtown area that offered a semi-private space, coffee, and wine.

With positive participation at the first social, the FSCJ team hosted a second social in the fall of 2012. With each social, the database of names and e-mail addresses expanded. The FSCJ team served as the default host but solicited other hosts from local agencies. Members began to volunteer as hosts with each agency updating the database, sending out invitations by e-mail, and reserving the venue. As a social group, there were no funds for gatherings and the socials incurred little to no cost to the host. The locations were selected with the following requirements:

- Large enough for gatherings of approximately 25 people.
- Meeting areas not too loud so conversations could easily flow.
- Availability of a variety of drinks and appetizers.
- In a convenient area with ample parking.

Finally, the participants agreed that the database information was to be used for the social gathering only. Hosts could not use the list to promote activities or interests of their agencies. This is an important parameter that ensures cooperation among the organizations involved.

### **Formalizing the Organization**

In 2013, the group began a discussion of whether to formalize a local GPA chapter. Although attendees enjoyed the after-work hours gathering, they shared a few concerns:

- The database might be more efficiently maintained if the group formalized and created a central contact for data, rather than a rotating volunteer responsibility.
- Attendance might increase if the gatherings were during the day, especially for those who had family or civic obligations after work.
- Organizations might be less willing to allow time away from the office for social gatherings, but might be agreeable if the meetings were considered to be formalized, professional gatherings.
- Professional development activities should be part of each meeting.
- Since smaller agencies are often unable to send grant staff to conferences and workshops, a sharing of skills and knowledge at each meeting would meet professional development needs.

## Formalizing the Group

During the social gathering in November 2013, the group voted unanimously to establish a GPA chapter. The group began researching the process to form a chapter. In January 2014, after following the steps below, as outlined in the GPA website (<http://grantprofessionals.org/chapters-1/starting-a-chapter>), the grant professionals in North Florida officially chartered the North Florida Grant Professionals, a GPA Chapter.

- *Membership:* The North Florida Grant Professionals Chapter easily met the requirement to start the chapter with ten or more members. This was one of the benefits of beginning as a social networking group. The chapter is developing policies and procedures such as: 1) non-member fees to attend professional development presentations; 2) raising money to help grantwriters in the community who cannot afford to join the national organization (a requirement of all chapter members), and 3) creating varying levels of membership, such as “student” or “associate member.”
- *Contact the GPA National Office:* In starting a chapter, the GPA National Office answers questions and provides information. They ensure that the state/regional representative is available to assist with paperwork and attend the inaugural meeting.
- *Other GPA Chapters Nearby:* The closest chapters are the South Florida Chapter in Miami and the Georgia Chapter in Atlanta.
- *Hold an Inaugural Meeting:* The first official meeting of a chapter is normally conducted by a GPA representative. At the inaugural meeting, the state representative led the new chapter members in the election of officers. The group approved the chapter by-laws, selected the name *North Florida Grant Professionals, a GPA Chapter*, and established a meeting schedule for the next 12 months.
- *Submit Minutes:* Minutes were recorded and submitted to the GPA National Office. The GPA representative requested members to sign the Chapter Charter application and submitted it to the National Office.
- *Collect Dues:* According to GPA, each chapter establishes chapter dues. The North Florida Grant Professionals Chapter researched other annual chapter dues and found that \$25.00 was an average rate.
- Other details:
  - Host four meetings a year. the group decided to start the first year with four scheduled meetings during the day and at least four social gatherings after work.

- Maintain a consistent start (11:30 am) and stop time (1:00 pm) for daytime meetings. The chapter group decided that meetings would include a rotation of hosts and locations and allow time for hosts to introduce their agencies, Brown Bag Lunches to keep costs down for hosts, one half-hour for professional development, and one-half hour for the chapter meeting.
- Maintain social networking venues and procedures. Events occur between 5:00–7:00 pm, and hosts select the location. The chapter secretary sends out notices the week before the social.

## Identifying Benefits of Local Chapters

In addition to professional membership benefits, as outlined on the GPA website, the main benefits of creating and participating in a local chapter are networking with like-minded colleagues and enhancing collaboration; developing or expanding the awareness of community resources; offering professional development; and increasing professional standing in the community.

### *Networking with Like-Minded Colleagues and Enhancing Collaboration*

The world of development and management has technical terms and complex language understood by those involved in it, but often misunderstood by the teams formed to develop or manage a proposal. With a daily job that requires reviewing solicitations, developing proposals, meeting deadlines, and coordinating teams of non-grant personnel, chapter members find that, through networking, they have an opportunity to communicate with like-minded professionals—and sometimes to commiserate with people who understand each other.

The network serves as a venue for airing issues and receiving advice from those who have “been there, done that.” As grant opportunities increasingly require collaboration, becoming a member of a GPA chapter is a great way to strengthen partnerships among organizations within the same region. Like-minded professionals have a network for communication and collaboration. They have a setting in which to discuss new initiatives or funding opportunities. In a 2009 *Chronicle of Philanthropy* article, Marty Michaels (2009) identifies one particular foundation, the Ford Foundation, and its 2009 grantmaking changes towards encouraging collaboration with plans to, “...spur collaboration and efficiency among its grantees” (p. 23).

### *Developing or Expanding the Awareness of Community Resources*

Hosting a chapter meeting offers an opportunity for agencies to introduce themselves to one another. For example, the Wounded Warriors Project conducted a tour of their national headquarters when they served as host. FSCJ hosted a virtual tour of their college’s ten campuses and

centers. Tours and overviews of each organization informs the group about programs and services available in the community.

Another benefit of a GPA chapter is avoidance of duplication of grant efforts on similar projects by gaining awareness of the activities and missions of member organizations. A deeper understanding of one another's agencies can lead to partnerships. As Susanne Carter writes in *Grant Writing in the Age of Collaboration* (2004), "The increasing levels of complexity in the world require individuals to develop expertise in highly specialized fields. No one person has the capacity to accumulate all the knowledge in any given field" (p. 17).

### *Professional Development*

One possibility offered by becoming a chapter is to create a mentorship program for professional development by cultivating an active membership consisting of both seasoned and new grant professionals. The North Florida Grants Professionals Chapter began with a discussion on specific professional development needs as well as the available expertise in these topics. The group researched how other chapters presented their professional development opportunities. Other chapters cited the benefits of hosting conferences that served professional development needs and generated additional revenue for scholarship programs and chapter expenses. The current plan is to conduct professional development sessions at each of the chapter meetings. The group suggested making trainings or workshops virtual, so that all members can participate either in person or via technology.

### *Increasing Professional Standing in the Community*

Although there are many definitions, a profession is typically founded on skillsets, experience, professional development, ethics, credentials, and membership. The GPA was established to help provide these components that constitute a profession and to help move the grant vocation to a higher level. Many North Florida grant professionals joined in that effort as members of the nationally-recognized grant professional organization, and this local chapter unites those members in the area. Before the local chapter was formed, GPA members in this area might not have met, or only connected at national conferences once a year.

The local chapter is a venue to build leadership. Perhaps an individual is not ready to run for a national board or committee but may be more inclined to serve at a chapter level. Leadership experience and membership in a local professional organization are also great resume builders and add credibility to the services grant professionals provide.

Just as GPA focuses on building the grant profession, the local chapter helps the grant professional strengthen the skills and knowledge in its region. GPA focuses on national topics and concerns, whereas a chapter focuses on issues relevant to its community. Just as in federal

grant applications, a chapter takes a common focus or goal and applies it locally.

The connectivity offered through chapter membership serves as a career resource for information on job openings, advice on procedures, and assistance on a proposal. A grant professional cannot turn to a proposal-design team member to ask a technical writing question or to seek clarification about a solicitation, but as a chapter member, can turn to colleagues for assistance. Grant services and nonprofits in the local region increase in strength as each chapter member grows in the grant profession.

The chapter is a community resource that provides a venue for advice or references for hiring grant consultants. The chapter offers a pool of resources and community experts for guidance.

## Conclusion

In summary, communities wishing to start a chapter can benefit from implementing the following three steps:

1. *Form a social networking group.* Allow time for the members of the group to become acquainted with one another, establish communication systems, and create a database of contacts.
2. *Make the decision to formalize.* The GPA steps to organizing a chapter are easy to follow, and the GPA staff is supportive in answering questions and providing information. The process is clear and well-vetted.
3. *Identify the benefits of establishing a chapter.* From networking with like-minded colleagues to enhancing grant collaboration, there are many benefits to creating a GPA chapter.

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## Biographical Information

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**Sarah S. Reardon, MEd** joined the Resource Development team in August 2011. She earned her BA in English from Elon University in Elon, NC and her MEd in Higher Education Administration from North Carolina State University in Raleigh. Prior to coming to Florida State College at Jacksonville, Ms. Reardon worked over seven years in higher education in both student affairs and academic affairs at North Carolina State University, Duke University, and the University of North Florida. Sarah can be reached at [sreardon@fscj.edu](mailto:sreardon@fscj.edu).

**Tyler Mikell Winkler, MA, GPC** joined the Resource Development Team in August 2008. Ms. Winkler graduated from the University of Florida with a BS in Public Relations and holds an MA in Children's Literature from Hollins University in Roanoke, VA. She has more than 10 years' experience in the nonprofit sector and five years in higher education, including responsibilities such as program management, contract compliance, and the development of ongoing and new resources. Tyler earned her GPC in October 2013. Tyler can be reached at [twinkler@fscj.edu](mailto:twinkler@fscj.edu).

# Collective Value, Collective Power: One- and Four-Year Comparative Analyses of National Grant Professionals Impact Survey Data

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*GPCI Competency 02: Knowledge of organizational development as it pertains to grant-seeking*

*GPCI Competency 04: Knowledge of how to craft, construct and submit an effective grant application*

*GPCI Competency 07: Knowledge of practices and services that raise the level of professionalism of grant professionals*

## **Abstract**

The Grant Professionals Foundation (GPF) was established in 2006 as an affiliate agency of the Grant Professionals Association. Beginning in 2010, the GPF conducted a series of surveys designed to quantify the impact of grant professionals' work. The authors herewith present the results of their analyses which provide grant professionals, national membership organizations, and nonprofits with quantitative evidence about the effect grant professionals have on nonprofit organizations, communities, and individuals. This information is useful in wage and contract negotiations, promoting the profession, and engaging with other national professional organizations in the field.

## Introduction

The Grant Professionals Foundation (GPF) strengthens nonprofits and advances the grant profession by providing scholarships for the Grant Professionals Association's Annual Conference, Grant Professionals Certification exams, and support for other educational opportunities. It surveys grant professionals and collects data for the purpose of defining the community of grant professionals' work. The GPF is committed to the importance of data collection in order to make an effective and compelling case for financial support of the grants profession.

The impact of grant professionals is challenging to measure. For purposes of this analysis, the GPF has defined "Collective Value and Collective Power" as follows:

- *Collective Value* is the notion that the contributions of a group, nation, or association of members are significant and can be aggregated. The group as a whole can be assessed, measured, and evaluated to determine worth.
- *Collective Power* is the notion that a group, nation or association of members is more impactful and thus greater than the sum of its parts. Together the group exerts more leverage and efforts in lobbying, advocacy, networking, and partnerships are more substantial and easier to measure.

## A Case for Support

The grant profession is a dynamic sector responsible for the identification, application, and management of grant awards from private foundations, corporate philanthropy programs, and government entities. Grant funds support projects that are as diverse as the variety of needs expressed by nonprofits and government agencies. Grant professionals are involved in every aspect of the process, from the creation of projects and the development of grant proposal materials to the implementation and accounting of the project funds.

Although grant professionals know intuitively that grant-funded projects make a positive difference in the lives of those served, there is an increasing need for quantitative evidence confirming community impact. For example, the legitimacy of the Community Development Block Grant program was challenged during the administration of George W. Bush. The US Department of Housing and Urban Development mandated documentation of outcomes to justify continuing the program. The program survived, but at lower budget levels as the result of outcomes reported.

## Background

The Grant Professionals Foundation Impact Survey Committee formed in 2010 and created a survey instrument, beta-tested questions and

answers, analyzed results, and published findings. The conclusion was that the underlying assumptions inherent in the original hypothesis—that all grants impact the communities in which grant professionals work—proved false and contradicted by the results.

Therefore, from 2012–2013, the committee refined the hypothesis and survey methodology to increase the precision and accuracy of the results. The 2012 survey data were not published. The committee worked with Dr. Andrew Cherry from the University of Oklahoma to validate the survey instrument, questions, and data-collection methods. Dr. Cherry found the majority of the survey questions to be valid. He determined the committee’s analysis of the results to be appropriate. The methods and statistical requirements for comparative analysis and studies led Dr. Cherry to recommend the survey collect 2013 and future data. The committee commissioned a statistician (Megan Brown, MPH) to redesign the survey and refine the definition of “impact” to include four quantifiable measures: funding secured, number of people served, number of new programs created, and number of continuing programs supported. The committee also evaluated the Grant Professionals Certification Institute (GPCI) Competencies, which represent the competencies and skills necessary for a grant professional to possess. The 2013 survey used the eight GPCI Competencies as a corollary to measure impact.

The committee presented the study in its *Grant Professionals Impact Survey 2013 Descriptive Summary Results* report and published it on the GPF website (Grant Professionals Foundation, 2014). The paper builds on the preliminary analysis to present the validation process, data, and comparative analysis conducted using four years of available data (2010–2013). The relationships to be drawn from the deeper analysis are essential for the GPA, GPF, and the profession as a whole. While other national surveys measure how philanthropists invest through foundations or how organizations use grants as part of their fundraising efforts, the *Impact Survey* represents a look at how grant professionals’ work changes the lives of grant-funded programs’ participants.

## **Selection and Description of Participants**

In each year of the survey, the committee used a convenience sample of people who self-identified as grant professionals. A convenience sample is one in which subjects are not randomized but are selected to participate because of their proximity (or convenience) to the researchers (Battaglia, 2008). In the survey, the GPF (2014) defined a grant professional as, “someone who writes, manages, researches, develops, administers and plans projects funded in whole or in part by grant funds.”

The committee solicited potential participants using existing channels through the GPF and its affiliate organizations, the Grant

Professionals Association (GPA), and the GPCI. These channels include the GPF's monthly e-blast; the GPA weekly email blasts; notices on all three websites; and Twitter messaging, Facebook posts, and LinkedIn group discussions for all three groups (for GPF, through social media for the 2013 survey only). It is likely some participants reached the survey through organic or indirect means (referral, online search). The committee collected information on perceptions about the grant profession, data on the respondent's activities in the profession in the last year, and demographics. To be included in the 2013 analysis, participants had to complete the entire survey.

## **Survey Methodology**

The methods for the 2010–2013 surveys are identical in nature. Only the content of the survey changed year to year. The GPF Impact Survey Committee implemented a redesigned survey in 2014 by collecting more quantitative variables from a broader sample of GPA members and non-members. The committee built the redesigned survey from the previous three surveys and, while it was not identical, it retained some variables of import for longitudinal analysis. Expert reviewers—grant professionals who serve on GPA, GPF, or GPCI boards and have extensive experience in the field—established the tool's face validity.

In each year, the survey was open for six weeks. Participants could enter to win a \$100 Visa gift card, an incentive the committee used to increase participation in the electronic survey through SurveyMonkey.com (Young et al., 2014).

The survey tool used a combination of closed-ended yes/no questions, Likert scales, and fill-in-the-blank questions. Each survey asked respondents to comment on the prior year's work. In 2013, the tool assessed the following variables:

- Memberships
- Perception of the grant profession
- Daily activities
- Certifications
- Geographic service area
- Subject areas
- Funds raised
- Sources of funding
- Types of grants secured
- Populations served.

## **Statistical Analysis**

The committee produced reports on the descriptive analyses of the 2010 and 2011 surveys (Alford, Blich, Day, Freeman, & Hays de Muga, 2013).

For the 2013 study, the statistician conducted frequency and descriptive analyses of perceptions and behavior for respondents who completed the survey. The analysis included tests to determine relationships between membership, certifications, geography, and funds raised. The committee then conducted a similar comparative analysis of the four years of data collected. To augment the 2013 results, the total funds awarded, subject area totals, and giving, geography results were compared to the 2013 annual report from the Foundation Center to assess the reach of the survey to the grant professionals' population outside of the GPA (Foundation Center, 2013).

### Results—2013 Analysis

A total of 403 individuals responded to the 2013 survey of which 261 completed the survey and are included in the analysis. The cohort is described as follows:

- 84% were female
- Nearly 80% were between the ages of 35-64 years
- More than half (54%) held a graduate degree
- Just 5% had a year or less of experience in the field
- 77% were employed full-time as grant professionals
- Fewer than 1% were volunteers
- 80% were members of the GPA.

Figures 1 and 2 describe the respondents' experience and GPA membership status.

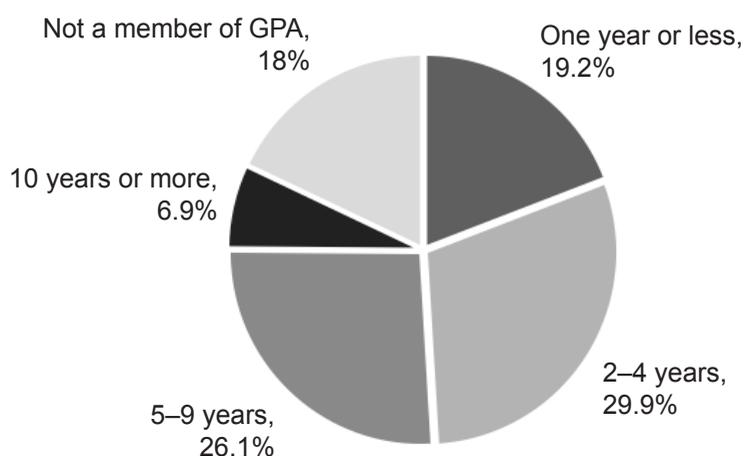


Figure 1. Years of Experience as a Grant Professional, 2013 Survey

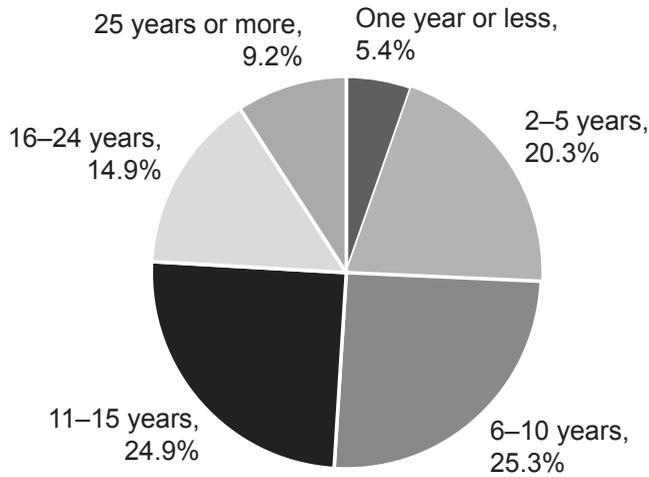


Figure 2. Length of Time as a GPA Member, 2013 Survey

The geographic analysis indicates the disparate distribution of grant professionals across the country (Figure 3). Seven respondents reported that they serve areas outside of the United States. Twenty grant professionals indicated they serve all 50 states.

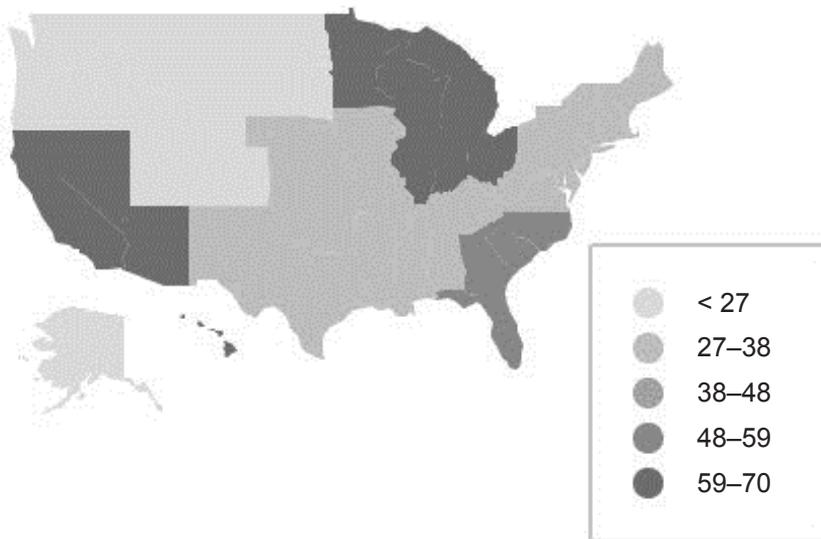


Figure 3. Geographic Distribution of Grant Professionals, 2013 Survey

The survey found that GPA members versus non-members spend a significantly higher percentage of time on grant writing and CEO/executive director functions (Table 1).

Table 1. Grant Professional's Activity by GPA Member Status, 2013 Survey

Activity	Average Percent		p-value
	GPA Members	Non-GPA Members	
Grant prospecting	15.2	13.6	0.47
Grant writing	36.2	27.3	*0.006
Grantmaker cultivation	5.2	3.9	0.09
Grant management	18.8	25.8	0.06
Training others on grant writing	5.8	7.7	0.34
Other fundraising activities	4.9	8	0.10
Program management and administration	6.3	7.7	0.44
Direct service provision	0.7	0.3	0.10
CEO/Executive Director functions	1.8	0.4	*0.008
Work not related to grants	5.3	5.3	0.97

\*indicates a statistically significant difference

Respondents were asked to use the GPC competencies to rank their daily activities from “most work in that area” to least. There was no statistically significant difference in ranking for GPA vs. non-GPA members. For GPA members, the top three areas for work as a grant professional included:

1. Knowledge of how to craft, construct, and submit an effective grant application
2. Ability to write a convincing case for funding
3. Knowledge of how to research, identify, and match funding resources to meet specific needs.

For non-GPA members, the top three areas for work as a grant professional included:

1. Knowledge of how to craft, construct, and submit an effective grant application
2. Knowledge of post-award grant management practices sufficient to inform practical grant design and development
3. Knowledge of how to research, identify, and match funding resources to meet specific needs.

There is no statistically significant difference in the subject areas of focus for GPA members versus non-members (Table 2).

*Table 2. Subject Area of Focus by GPA Membership Status, 2013 Survey*

Rank	GPA Members		Non-GPA Members	
	Organization Type	%	Organization Type	%
1	Education	43.5	Human services	46.2
2	Human services	40.2	Education	34.6
3	Health	26.3	Social services	30.8
4	Social services	21.5	Health	23.1
5	Arts and culture	15.8	Public affairs/society benefit	17.3
6	Public affairs/society benefit	13.9	Arts and culture	13.5
7	Science and technology	11.0	Science and technology	9.6
8	Environment and animals	5.3	Environment and animals	3.8
9	International affairs	1.4	International affairs	1.9
10	Religion	1.4	Religion	1.9

Figure 4 compares the populations that benefited from grant professionals' work in 2013 among GPA members versus non-members.

By comparison, the Foundation Center reported in 2013 that 35% of grants were awarded to grantees serving economically disadvantaged populations; 22% for youth services; and 9% for programs serving ethnic or racial minorities (Foundation Center, 2013).

Between the two groups, there was no statistically significant difference in grant funds raised or spent in 2013.

Grant funds raised: (mean per respondent)

- GPA members \$3,377,565
- Non-GPA members \$9,886,883

Grant funds expended: (mean per respondent)

- GPA members \$4,233,881
- Non-GPA members \$5,833,125

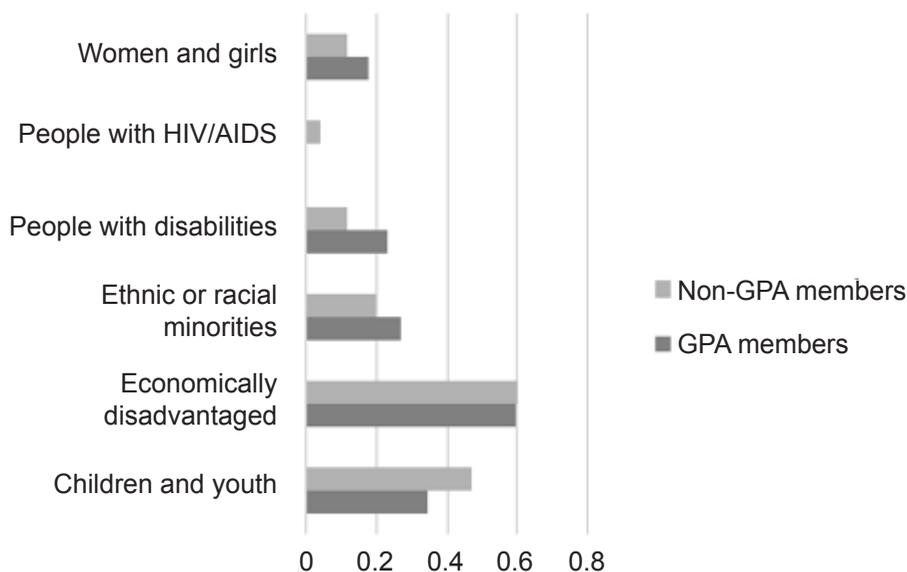


Figure 4. Populations Benefitting from Grant Professionals, 2013 Survey

In addition to membership status, the committee also analyzed differences between professionals who hold the Grant Professional Certified (GPC) and those who do not. The analysis found that non-GPC respondents secured a significantly higher percentage of program grants than GPC respondents, while GPC respondents secured a significantly higher percentage of capital and research grants than non-GPC respondents (Table 3).

Table 3. Types of Grant Awards Secured by GPC vs. Non-GPC, 2013 Survey

Grant Award Type	Average Percent		p-value
	GPC	Non-GPC	
Program grants	60.2	70.0	*0.04
General operating grants	12.2	10.8	0.59
Capital grants	15.4	8.3	*0.05
Research grants	7.8	2.5	*0.04
Scholarships	2.2	2.1	0.86
Other	0.8	1.8	0.10
No grant awards secured	2.5	7.3	0.16

\*indicates a statistically significant difference

By comparison, the Foundation Center's *Key Facts on U.S. Foundations: 2013 Edition* reports that 55% of grants were awarded for programs, 29% for operating support, 21% for capital, and 17% for research (Foundation Center, 2013).

### Results—Four-Year Analysis

Chi-square analysis revealed that the proportion of GPA member respondents and GPC respondents varies significantly from year to year, <0.001 and 0.02, respectively (Table 4).

*Table 4. GPA Membership and GPC Status Responses, Comparative 2010-2013*

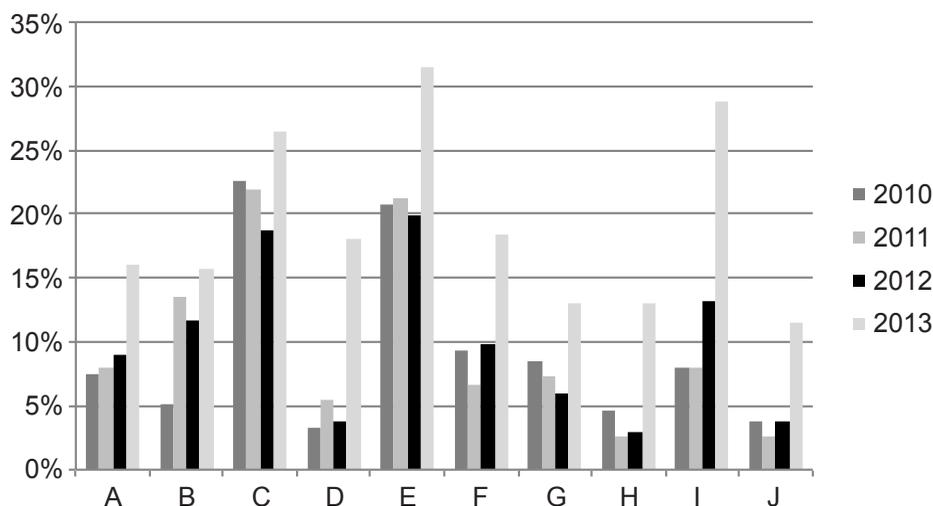
	2010		2011		2012		2013	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
<b>non-GPA Member</b>	12	5.63	80	29.20	46	17.23	51	19.54
<b>GPA Member</b>	201	94.37	194	70.80	221	82.77	210	80.46
<b>non-GPC</b>	68	31.92	58	21.17	86	32.21	71	27.2
<b>GPC</b>	145	68.08	216	78.83	181	67.79	190	72.80

Chi-square analysis revealed that the service region proportions vary significantly from year to year, <0.001 (Figure 5).

### Conclusion

From this one-year and four-year analysis, the committee concluded that it must continue to refine its methodology to improve the validity and reliability of its results. Refinements are necessary for participant recruitment and outreach, comparison of data with related national survey results, and use of a convenience sample. Continued focus on methods will produce results that improve the GPF, GPA, and GPCI's ability to communicate to external audiences about the collective value and power of the grant profession.

The geographic distribution of respondents varied considerably over the four years of study, likely due to varied participant recruitment and outreach methods over time. This distribution has significant implications for results, as the study hopes to relate results to activities, and the lack of a representative sample makes analysis of that factor inherently biased. The results contain the following biases (Baumgartner & Steenkamp, 2001):



Region A	Region B	Region C	Region D	Region E
Connecticut Maine Massachusetts New Hampshire New York Rhode Island Vermont	Delaware District of Columbia Maryland New Jersey Pennsylvania Virginia West Virginia	Florida Georgia North Carolina South Carolina	Alabama Kentucky Mississippi Tennessee	Illinois Indiana Michigan Minnesota Ohio Wisconsin
Region F	Region G	Region H	Region I	Region J
Arkansas Louisiana New Mexico Oklahoma Texas	Iowa Kansas Missouri Nebraska	Colorado Montana North Dakota South Dakota Utah Wyoming	Arizona California Hawaii Nevada	Alaska Idaho Oregon Washington

Figure 5. Comparison of Service Regions 2010-2013

- Use of a convenience sample (not a random sample)
- Self-reporting—specifically answering questions in the way one thinks one’s peers would want the answer (social desirability), tendency to agree with all items on a survey regardless of content (acquiescence), and dependency on the respondent’s recall of events (recency)
- Closed survey format (forced choice vs. open choice for respondents)

Despite these limitations, the results of the one-year and four-year comparisons provide GPF, GPA, and GPCI with information about grant professionals’ impact. In 2013:

- Grant professionals secured \$1,054,847,592 in funding (mean \$4,057,106).
- Nearly 40% of all grants secured support for 1,001-10,000 people, and just over 30% supported 10,001-100,000 people.
- Approximately 15% of GPA members and 11% of non-members created new programs with grant funds.
- Just over 18% of GPA members and 22% of non-members secured grants to continue existing programs.

These results, in combination with the deeper analysis reported in this paper, provide quantitative evidence about the collective value and collective power of grant professionals. By securing funding to address local needs, grant professionals enable real change in people's lives across the country.

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## Biographical Information

**Danny W. Blitch, MPA, GPC** is the Grants Manager for the City of Roswell, GA. He is responsible for the City's grant program, which has been awarded more than \$65 million in federal, state, and local government grants and private donations. Danny is a grant professional with more than 20 years of experience. Besides municipal government, his professional experience includes a regional development center, a county board of education, a state university's development office, and as a grant consultant. As a grant consultant, Danny's efforts have produced more than \$24 million in federal grant funding for clients nationwide. In total, Danny has raised close to \$115 million. Danny joined the board of the Grant Professionals Foundation in 2007 and served as the Board Chairman from 2008–2011. He was an original GPC, receiving the credential in 2008. He joined the Grant Professionals Association Board in 2013. He received his MPA in 1994. Danny can be reached at [dblitch@roswellgov.com](mailto:dblitch@roswellgov.com).

**Heather Stombaugh, MBA, CFRE, GPC** is a nonprofit professional with more than 15 years of experience in leadership, programming, communications, and fundraising. She is the founder and principal consultant of JustWrite Solutions, LLC, a national nonprofit consulting firm based in Ohio. Heather practices and teaches integrated grant seeking, a process by which the strategy and tactics of fundraising, marketing, and grant seeking are coordinated to increase engagement, donations, and grant awards. Using this philosophy, Heather has secured more than \$67 million in grants and donations to nonprofits across the country. She is also a published author in the peer-reviewed medical literature in trauma and injury prevention. Heather is a member of the Grant Professionals Foundation Board where she serves as Chair of the Marketing Committee. She is also the Editor of the weekly *GPA Grant News*. Heather is

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**Megan Brown, MPH** is a trained researcher who works for ProMedica's Toledo Hospital as the trauma research coordinator. She received her Master of Public Health in Epidemiology from The University of Toledo. Previously employed as a biostatistician, she is skilled in developing statistically valid study designs, implementing data collection and management systems, using multiple univariate and multivariate analytic methods to produce results, and creating graphic representations to report results. In her nonprofit consulting work, she assists with survey development for needs assessments, statistical analysis, interpretation/presentation of results, and social return on investment (SROI) projects. Megan is a member of the Grant Professionals Association and volunteer for the Grant Professionals Foundation Impact Survey Committee. Megan can be reached at [mgnbrwn53@gmail.com](mailto:mgnbrwn53@gmail.com).

# The Importance of Mentoring Junior Faculty

**Nicole A. Gibson, CRA**

University of California, Davis, CA

*GPCI Competency 02: Knowledge of organizational development as it pertains to grant seeking*

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

## **Abstract**

Grant administrators have a unique window on the world of extramural funding. They receive information on funding opportunities, updates on the latest industry trends, and are aware of guidelines imposed by sponsors. Their knowledge can and should be shared with others seeking funding opportunities, and especially with those who are new to the process, such as junior faculty. By collecting, reviewing, and disseminating essential information on extramural funding, grant administrators fulfill the expected knowledge of the competencies that are the foundation of the Validated Competencies and Skills of the Grant Professionals Certification Institute (GPCI, 2015). Individuals who are new to an academic title, also referred to as junior faculty, often depend on extramural funding to pay all or part of their salary. Therefore, it is important to help them become adept at finding, applying for, and successfully receiving and managing funds from a wide variety of funders. Grant administrators have the responsibility to mentor junior faculty in order to strengthen their standing within their academic communities and allow them to grow in their designated research areas. Successful grantsmanship and subsequent funding contribute to a win-win situation for both the junior faculty member and the grant administrator. Both will find satisfaction in working together as a team in proposal development.

## Introduction

Grant administrators are the experts in finding funding opportunities, navigating organizational development as it pertains to grant seeking, preparing comprehensive grant proposal packages, and managing post-award activities. Junior faculty may not be trained in the nuances of grant writing, application submission, or funds management, but success and growth in their academic career depends upon their ability to acquire extramural funding to support their research emphases (Brown, 2015). It is the grant administrator's role as a mentor to help guide junior faculty in their efforts to apply successfully for funding and then manage the grant post-award. Many grant administrators achieve designation as a Certified Research Administrator (CRA) as a result of understanding and successfully passing the test of the Research Administrators' Certification Council (RACC) Body of Knowledge. The RACC Body of Knowledge is a widely accepted standard of knowledge and understanding associated with finding funding, managing awards, and understanding the importance of research in the academic environment (RACC, 2014).

By applying broad knowledge of grantsmanship and accountability, mentoring junior faculty can be rewarding and productive. The key is to maintain a positive and collaborative relationship between the grant administrator and the junior faculty member.

## Roles, Rules, and the Path to Success

All aspects of grantsmanship have specific rules that must be followed. Rules are established by organizations or institutions for proposal submission, funders have their own rules for submission of proposals, and there are financial and ethical rules for post-award fund and program management. By following the rules and using strategy, junior faculty members can become successful at seeking and winning grants. The goal is to obtain research funds to pay salaries, support research programs, and develop opportunities that contribute to a successful career in research.

Junior faculty members should be able to rely on their grant administrator as a mentor who helps to navigate the rules as they seek research funds for hard science, social sciences, equipment fabrication, career development, or other activities. Research can be basic, focusing on increasing scientific knowledge or applying it and designing solutions to problems.

The grant administrator's role as a mentor thus means they are the coach, interpreter, enforcer, and motivator for the junior faculty member. They help the junior faculty member to understand the rules of the funding agencies, financial auditors, federal government, and institution. Not following the rules at any step during the process can result in failure and has the potential to negatively impact the junior

faculty member's career trajectory. The grant administrator's certification by the Research Administrator's Certification Council reassures junior faculty members that they are working with an individual who is able to fulfill a particularly important role in making sure that all paperwork and budgets comply with both the agency and institution guidelines to ensure sound fiscal responsibility (RACC, 2014).

The grantseeking process has five basic rules.

***Rule #1: Understand the junior faculty member's area of expertise***

Subscribe to listserves and funding opportunity services to find appropriate funding vehicles related to that area. ScienceCareers.com has an extensive list of funding sources including Grants.gov, Pivot, and SPIN ("Science Careers," 2015). Targeted funding opportunities for junior faculty may specify that they are for academic professionals who are less than a set number of years from award of PhD; that they are for individuals who will have a mentor to help develop their scientific expertise in a specific area; or they are for those who have not been awarded tenure. Many private or subject-specific websites such as the American Heart Association will have their own subscriptions for upcoming funding opportunities, and these websites will have detailed information on application process, eligibility requirements, and post-award management (American Heart Association, 2015).

***Rule #2: Read all instructions and guidelines carefully***

Determine eligibility, restrictions, requirements for application and management of award, budget requirements and restrictions, award period, and submission and reporting deadlines. Success can only be achieved by reading and following the rules to the letter. Some guidelines are hard to find, so it can take cooperation between the grants administrator, the junior faculty member, and the funder to find and interpret the guidelines. Each can provide interpretation and guidance, so they should be encouraged to explore, collaborate, share and utilize information to the greatest extent possible. Many institutions rely on the federal government's OMB circulars to shape their institutional policies for management of research awards (OMB, 2015). There will be additional institutional requirements that must be followed, but the OMB circulars will often provide the basic structure for award management.

***Rule #3: Identify and apply for a specific funding opportunity based on eligibility and relevance***

The grants administrator will play a key role by assisting with budget development, completing the application and associated paperwork, and submitting to the institution's Development Office for approval. Once the application receives approval from the junior faculty member and the

institution, the grant administrator will assist with final submission to the funder.

Junior faculty know the subject of their research, but they may not know how to develop a budget or write a comprehensive proposal. The grant administrator can help identify desired budget components such as personnel, supplies, travel, equipment, and institutional overhead, and assist with preparation of the budget justification. The junior faculty member can request support from a colleague or senior faculty member who might provide guidance on construction of the Specific Aims, Materials and Methods, and supporting documentation such as the bibliography and letters of support. However, it is up to the grant administrator to ensure that the budget is appropriate and allocable and that the correct institution and agency forms are used. The proposal is reviewed by the Office of Research or Sponsored Programs whose aim is to ensure that the proposal is complete and in compliance with the institution's policies.

It is important to guarantee that there are no conflicts associated with proposed research activities and that full disclosure occurs when one application is submitted to more than one funding source or when funding is already in place from an alternate source.

If the application is successful and an award is forthcoming, the junior faculty member and institution official will review the terms of the award and accept, negotiate, or deny. If accepted, the terms of the award are finalized. At this time, the junior faculty member's role becomes that of Primary Investigator.

#### *Rule #4: Implement sound management policies and procedures*

The Primary Investigator must work closely with the institution official and grant administrator to set up the award in the institution's award database or award management system, assign appropriate accounts to receive the award funds, hire personnel that may have been included in the budget, and develop tracking systems to ensure the project remains on budget and in compliance with the agency and institution guidelines.

The grant administrator can assist by discussing budget restrictions and reporting requirements with the Primary Investigator so that they both understand and comply with the terms of the award.

#### *Rule #5: Ensure comprehensive documentation*

When the initial award period reaches a close, the Primary Investigator must document the activities that took place as a result of the award, disclose any scientific discoveries that may have occurred, detail the successes and disappointments of the research activity, reference resulting publications, establish mechanisms for data sharing, and describe the potential to use this research as a building block for future

important and significant discoveries. The funding agency will review the final reports, often assigning a score that determines satisfaction and future funding potential, and will let the Primary Investigator know whether they met the expectations of the award. If the funding agency is satisfied with the results of the research supported by the award, the Primary Investigator succeeded on many levels.

## **Conclusion**

A research award represents significant progress toward tenure, provides opportunities for professional growth and recognition, and contributes to a publication record of valuable data. A research award provides the basis for career advancement and future research funding. A research award presents the opportunity for the Primary Investigator to explore new and exciting opportunities for research and development. The intervention of a seasoned grant professional to mentor junior faculty members in the knowledge and skills necessary to write successful grant proposals is an essential component in the development of successful and experienced researchers.

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# Proposal Writers' Role in Creating and Managing Organizational Memory: Adding Value to the Grants Profession Beyond Fundraising

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*GPCI Competency 07: Knowledge of practices and services that raise the level of professionalism of grant professionals*

## Abstract

This article presents the results of a nationwide survey (n = 580) and interviews (n = 18) of members of four professional organizations for fundraising professionals. The study investigated proposal writers' processes for managing and creating institutional memory during the grantseeking process. Recent research has called for nonprofit organizations to strategically consider their intellectual capital to better seek funding in an increasingly competitive environment for financial resources (Kong, 2008; Rathi, Given, & Forcier, 2014; others). Proposal writers—often colloquially referred to as grant writers—serve as negotiators and liaisons among internal and external partners, developing mutually-agreed-upon narratives representing each party's values. Because proposal writers hear, translate, and transform organizational stories from executives, project managers, community partners, and constituents, they serve as a unique knowledge-management resource. Proposal writers are central to their organization's knowledge creation and sharing in twelve major areas (Rathi et al., 2014) and their value should not only be considered by the amount of funds raised, but also their long-term role in maintaining institutional memory. Furthermore, organizational leaders' awareness of proposal writers' roles in knowledge management may reduce turnover for the profession, build social capital, and increase leadership opportunities for writers.

## Introduction

The purpose of this article is to illustrate knowledge-management skills that proposal writers naturally possess and highlight the value that these skills bring to the nonprofit fundraising profession. Proposal writers should highlight the roles they play in the organization's culture when developing and managing their organization's institutional memory and leverage these roles for career advancement. Organizational knowledge is a commodity that is as important as the funds that proposal writers raise through their grant proposals, and nonprofit leaders should recognize this value. The paper proceeds to describe ways that proposal writers—often colloquially referred to as grant writers—may make this argument to their organization's leaders. This information may be particularly helpful for proposal writers who may be wondering what the “next steps” are in their career path or if they have reached the apex of job positions available in their department. The paper concludes with a summary of how institutional memory can increase social capital, improve the workplace environment, help reduce employee turnover, and facilitate the delivery of services within their communities.

### *The Social Role of Grant Professionals in Creating Institutional Memory*

A successful grant professional and proposal writer must be able to represent the organizational culture, core values, and goals. This culture is also known as an organization's cognitive dimension—“a shared code or paradigm of collective goals and proper ways of acting in a social system” (Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998, p. 465). Organizations are in a constant state of renewal, grounded in the social action of those involved in the daily operation. In the case of proposal writing, it takes time to learn the context of projects, the organization, the funder, project needs, and population served, and to discover what makes a proposal rhetorically effective. Learning about successful and failed projects can help orient new employees to the organization's culture. However, learning this information is difficult if a supportive team is not in place.

Over the past 15 years, funders have increasingly asked nonprofit organizations to leverage their assets, partner with complementary programs, and maximize their financial and personnel resources (Lettieri, Borga, & Salvodelli, 2004; Horstman, 2006). The funding landscape is increasingly competitive, and nonprofits continue to expand the support they provide to their community through education, social service, and other programs. Grant professionals are in a unique position to understand how the organization's daily processes intertwine with its long-term goals and survival. They must continually reflect on programmatic outcomes and translate how the organization's prior successes will meet the community's future needs. They not only bring value to their organizations through grants and donor drives, but

they contribute an even stronger, long-lasting impact: they build and maintain their organization's institutional memory.

Institutional memory is the history of an organization: stories of its past successes, failures, and major paths pursued during its existence. Proposal writers continuously draw on institutional memory to tell the story of their organization, illustrate its mission, and relate stories about the services rendered in their communities. They work closely with project managers to gather narratives, statistics, and storylines that help paint a picture in the program officer's mind, letting the funder imagine what the organization will accomplish if awarded funding.

Proposal writers are central to the knowledge-management process, perhaps even more central than the organization's director or president. Writers work with both written content, shared over intranets and e-mail, and oral stories from project leaders, partner organizations, and program participants (Gilbert, 2005; Roman-Velazquez, 2005; Kong, 2008; Gunning, 2014). Recent studies indicate that nonprofits work with twelve major areas of knowledge: knowledge about the community; trends and current events; policies and legislation; intellectual, financial, personnel, and intellectual resources; the external environment; funding and program benchmarks/ best practices; management and organizational practices; archival materials; sources of funding; a variety of tools and technologies; statistical data and narratives; and experiential knowledge (Rathi, Given, & Forcier, 2014).

All nonprofit employees must have access to the information needed to complete their job duties, especially those who are deadline-dependent. Proposal writers rely heavily on information-seeking processes, which require collaboration among many individuals with a wide range of subject matter expertise. Writers must work quickly under proposal deadlines: requests for proposals tend to have a six-week turnaround time. Within this timeframe, the writers must gather a budget, biosketches from subject-matter experts, and letters of support; work with an evaluator and develop an assessment plan; and gather results from prior studies in the field and within the organization. The writer then weaves this content into a compelling argument, strong enough to win approval over other proposals competing for the same funds.

Interviews with proposal writers revealed that nonprofit organizations' development departments rarely have procedures in place for the grant development process (Gunning, 2013). Many writers indicated they had their own procedures that worked for their situations. After gaining experience writing a few proposals, the writers developed their own routines that facilitated the process. However, many revealed that if they were to leave the organization, a new writer would need to invent their own processes. Coordinating multiple projects and working under tight deadlines did not leave the writers much time to reflect on their grant development processes, identify best practices, or find

areas for improvement. Their grant work plan would likely benefit from structuring, documenting, and implementing a centralized process (Hackos, 1997; Gilbert, 2005; Waggenspack, 2008; Gunning, 2014).

### *Benefits of and Barriers to Documenting Work-Related Processes*

Many studies highlight the value to corporations in documenting work-related content and processes (Hackos, 1997; Baehr & Brown, 2010), particularly in building trust on teams and identifying best practices (Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998; Sherif, Hoffman, & Thomas, 2006; He, Qiao, & Wei, 2009). More recently, studies in the nonprofit industry begin to echo corporate findings (Schorr, 2004; Roman-Velazquez, 2005; Vela, Forcier, Rathi, & Given, 2014). Other studies identify barriers to knowledge sharing in the nonprofit sector, such as difficulty embracing change, experiencing turnover, and having unsupportive management (Taylor & Wright, 2004; Roman-Velazquez, 2005; Merkel, Farooq, Xiao, Ganoë, Rossan, & Carroll, 2007).

This study will introduce how proposal writers can leverage their experiences in cross-departmental partnerships to negate the barriers noted in previous studies.

### *Prior Studies on Proposal Writers*

Large-scale studies about the proposal-writing profession largely focus on compensation, benefits, and job satisfaction measurements (Georgia Tech Consulting Services, 2004; Horstman, 2006; Healey, Bartolini, Maehara, & Williams, 2010). More recently, several small-scale studies investigate the proposal-writing process through interviews and case studies (Gilbert, 2005; Davidson, 2009; Gunning, 2013; Vela, Forcier, Rathi, & Given, 2014). These studies describe the information-seeking and storage processes that occur while the writers develop proposals, and all describe the problem of information “silos” within their writers’ organizations. A silo occurs when one individual has access to information that would be valuable to another employee or group (Gilbert, 2005). Silos are problematic when this information could be used to strengthen a proposal’s argument, especially if individuals leave an organization before sharing this content with other colleagues. Every time an employee leaves an organization, an institution risks losing a small part of its history (Gilbert, 2005; Horstman, 2006; Waggenspack, 2008; Gunning, 2014).

The nonprofit industry must be particularly careful about turnover of proposal writers, particularly if they are “lone writers” in their organizations (Horstman, 2006; Davidson, 2009). Often they work with partners outside their organizations as well, collaborating with institutions with similar values that provide complementary services (Hager & Pollack, 2002; Lettieri, Borga, & Salvoldelli, 2004; Lewis, Isbell, & Koshman, 2006). These partnerships can take years to research and develop and add to the potential consequences of employee turnover.

### *Purpose of This Study*

The purpose of this study was to investigate suggestions that proposal writers have for creating and storing knowledge within their organizations and what these procedures could do more broadly for the fundraising and nonprofit sectors. Prior large-scale studies investigated writers' job roles, and small-scale qualitative studies investigated how the fundraising process happens; this study examines the fundraising process in a large-scale study, using interview data to support the statistics.

The study addresses the following research question (RQ): What are some ways that proposal writers might leverage their role in their institution's organizational memory? It investigated proposal writers' perceptions of the knowledge-management processes and their relationship to job satisfaction and value.

### **Method**

The following section describes the study's plan, population characteristics, and sampling method.

#### *Participants*

The study's participants were members of one or more professional organizations for fundraisers and grant-development professionals: Grant Professionals Association, American Grant Writers' Association, Council for Resource Development, and Association of Fundraising Professionals.

#### *Procedures*

The researcher contacted 1,715 participants via personalized emails in February 2012 and received 580 responses. Participants completed a 154-question survey, which used demographic questions from industry salary surveys (Georgia Tech Consulting Services, 2004; Healey et al., 2010) to ensure comparable industry results. The survey included questions developed from recent literature about knowledge-management use in the corporate sector and proposal-writing processes from the field of technical communication.

The last question on the survey asked participants if they would mind participating in a phone interview about their job duties and fundraising processes. Respondents were categorized by their number of years in the grant field and by how confident they felt performing their job duties. In March 2012, twelve writers in varying stages of their careers were interviewed to gain insight to their daily duties, adding to six exploratory interviews that been conducted prior to the survey, for a total of 18 interviews.

In interviews, participants answered questions about their daily work processes, how they gather information to do their job, their roles within

their organization, and the best and most difficult components of their jobs. The study received approval from Towson University's Institutional Review Board (Approval #15-X012).

## **Results and Findings**

The proposal writers' demographics echoed those of previous studies on fundraising professionals, indicating that this sample is representative of members of US and Canadian professional fundraising organizations. The following section will describe the role proposal writers play in developing social capacity and documentation processes in their organization; their perceptions of leadership and promotion opportunities; and how the proposal writers' role in institutional memory may provide new opportunities for career advancement.

### *Demographics*

The respondents' demographics echoed similar national studies on fundraising professionals (Georgia Tech Consulting Services, 2004; Healey et al., 2010). Seventy-nine percent of respondents were female, compared to 74.7% of Association of Fundraising Professionals' (AFP) salary survey respondents, and 72.3% were over the age of 41, compared to 73.0% of AFP respondents. Both studies reported more than 90% of members holding a Bachelor's degree or higher, with 57.8% of respondents in the current study holding a Master's degree or higher, compared to 47.6% of AFP respondents (2010). See Table 1.

Sixty percent of respondents are members of the Grant Professionals Association, 37.4% of the Association of Fundraising Professionals, 26.6% of the Council for Resource Development, and 4.7% of the American Grant Writers' Association. Many respondents reported membership in multiple professional organizations, hence the percentages do not total 100%.

### *Role in Organizational Structure*

Proposal writers reported that they are housed in a development department, even when they are the only grant professionals employed in the organization. An organization chart often shows this person in a separate department under the Executive Director, but alongside the Project Directors and Finance Department. See Figure 1 on page 102 for an example.

Most writers reported that they work alone in their department but that their job roles are very social. The writers are dependent on multiple sources of information. They reported spending a large amount of time discussing ideas with project managers, community leaders, and subject matter experts to gather background information for their proposals.

Table 1. Comparison of General Demographic Results in Prior Studies on Proposal Writers

Demographics of sample	Current study	AFP 2010 Salary Survey (Healey et al., 2010) US respondents only	Survey of Perceptions, Experiences of Fundraising Professionals (Georgia Tech, 2004) All respondents
Response rate	34.0%	14.4%	36.2%
n	580	3,057	111
N	1,705	21,747	307
<i>Gender</i>			
Female	79.0%	74.7%	78.2%
Male	21.0%	24.4%	21.8%
<i>Age</i>			
>41 years	72.3%	73.0%	59.1%
<i>Educational level</i>			
<B.S.	4.7%	7.8%	0.0%
B.S.	27.3%	39.2%	33.3%
Graduate degree	57.8%	47.6%	66.7%
<i>Organization's priority</i>			
Education	32.5%	24.0%	80.0%
Social services	27.1%	21.2%	0.0%
Health	12.4%	17.5%	8.0%

### *Writers' Social Roles Within Their Organizations*

The social aspect of proposal writers' jobs seems to be contrary to what many nonprofit leaders assume about the position. Many writers noted they did not feel their managers understood the importance of being involved in the project development process. One writer noted, "the leadership in my organization assumes I can write in my office, in a bubble, away from the programs as they happen. This could not be further from the truth. I need to be out in the action, seeing the concepts taking place." Another writer echoed this sentiment:

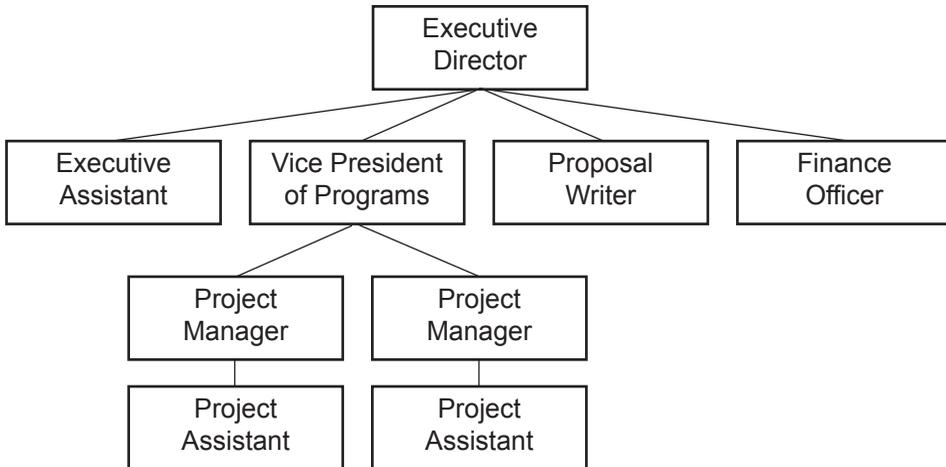


Figure 1. Typical Organization Chart For a Medium Nonprofit Organization

I need to see the people our programs help, gather those statistics and stories firsthand, and internalize it for the proposals. Writing grants is *not* about sitting at a desk, alone, writing away at my computer. Sure, I can complete some research that way, but I need to be out there, involved, writing it all down, absorbing, putting names to faces. I am not always sure my manager understands that. We come back to that [argument] a lot.

Most of the work in the proposal development process takes place before the actual “writing” begins. Grant professionals reported spending around 75% of their time preparing to write the proposal, and only 25% actually writing and typing the proposal, echoing the literature (Martin, 2000). Knowing “who knows what” takes a considerable amount of time. A writer’s ability to locate and extract that information quickly and efficiently is the responsibility of that role, as is building goodwill with those colleagues and partners who can be called upon to provide that information at short notice.

Most writers reported a positive experience working with their colleagues, which is important to creating a trust-based, sharing culture (Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998; Coppola, Hiltz, & Rotter, 2004; Alberts, 2007). Thirty-five percent agreed with the statement, “I have confidence in the abilities of my colleagues” and 67.8% reported “I feel [my colleagues] appreciate my role in the organization.” Personal communication with colleagues via e-mail was “very important” to writers; all survey respondents indicated that this was very important to their job duties. Within the interviews, several writers noted the importance of playing a role in the long-term strategy of building partnerships. Partnership

development might be an area for grant professionals to discuss with their leaders if they seek to expand their roles beyond fundraising.

Based on the study's interview results, nonprofit leaders may need to reconsider or realize the importance of the social aspect of proposal writers' job duties and allow them more flexibility in allocating their time to maximize proposal arguments.

### *Leadership Roles and Opportunities for Promotion*

Many proposal writers feel they do not have many opportunities for career growth or promotions within their current organizations (Horstman, 2006; Healey et al., 2010; Gunning, 2013). A majority of them enjoy their positions, but many indicate they would be interested in promotion opportunities and career advancement. Although writers discussed their leadership roles in organizational culture and community partnership development, they did not note a lot of opportunities for promotion in their organization. In fact, the largest reason that writers would consider leaving their jobs is "lack of opportunities for career advancement"—41.5% of respondents noted this problem, and only 26.5% indicated they had opportunities for advancement. Another 22.9% cited "lack of recognition for work contributions" as a second reason for leaving, and 21.5% reported "lack of promotions." At the time of the study, 14% of full-time proposal writers felt like leaving their current positions, and another 16.1% felt like changing job positions within their organization, with 17.1% feeling "stagnant" in their current positions.

While most writers were satisfied with their careers in development ( $M = 4.20$ ,  $SD = 1.07$  on a 5-point Likert scale, with 5 = *Very satisfied* and 1 = *Very dissatisfied*), many were "somewhat dissatisfied" with their chances of promotion ( $M = 2.64$ ,  $SD = 1.56$ ). Proposal writers might look elsewhere for employment if they are looking for opportunities for advancement or feel stagnant. Nonprofit leaders should think about ways to provide additional challenges and career paths to their fundraising professionals to avoid turnover.

Proposal writers generally reported good relationships with their managers, usually the executive director or president. Over 81.9% of writers reported "my supervisor appreciates the contributions I have made to my organization" and 61.2% reported their manager "supports me in my career goals." When asked about their career goals beyond their current positions, several more-experienced writers noted that they are at the pinnacle of their place within the organization. One writer said, "well, there's just no place to go; I am in my own department, just me, and there isn't really any other options in my organization unless I don't want to work in fundraising." Based on the overall job satisfaction results, most proposal writers enjoy their jobs very much and do not want to leave their positions, but the same writers would like to have growth options and chances for promotion.

By working within the context of documenting institutional memory, proposal writers may gain additional career opportunities and highlight the value they bring to an organization beyond dollars raised.

### *How Documentation Can Help the Grants Profession and Contribute to a Positive Culture*

Proposal writers also have a role in the implementation of an organization-wide knowledge management system. How do writers maximize the organizational memory so it can be used quickly and effectively when writing proposals? How do they share stories, statistics, and expertise across departments, rather than in silos? Proposal writers are at the forefront of the short- and long-term plans of the organization and likely have strong suggestions for determining what information is important to store and share, and how information would be most accessible (Merkel, et al., 2007). This is another area where they have a powerful connection to multiple departments and can use their experiences to strengthen the organization (LaDuc, 1994; Kent-Drury, 2000).

Documentation processes are not commonly in place in most nonprofit organizations; many writers reported moving on to a new project as soon as submitting a proposal. About half (52%) of writers wished that their organizations' fundraising processes were documented better prior to their hiring, but 47.1% were unsure when they would have the time to document their work. Interviews indicated that writers were usually the "lone writer" in their organization, and if they wanted to document their processes and identify best practices, they would need to do so on their own time. Debriefing, or identifying "what worked, what didn't work well, and what could have been better," was rare. However, 72% of writers said that documenting their processes would allow them to perform their jobs better—considering only 52.2% felt satisfied with the amount of time allotted for proposal production.

The study asked if writers felt that management valued the process of identifying best practices. One writer said, "I don't think [leaders] feel we have the time. It's always on to the next RFP, due in another few weeks. I think they'd think documentation was a waste of time." One writer who worked closely with her Executive Director (ED) noted that the ED suggested that she do what she thinks is necessary [for documenting her work] and that the ED gives her ample time to make the recordings because they had a good relationship.

Nonprofit leaders may be unaware of the helpful role that documentation and debriefing may play in their organizations, particularly with the added pressure of deadlines and funding shortages within daily tasks. If proposal writers think documentation is necessary to their jobs, they should argue for the benefits that documentation could bring to the organization: documentation helps identify and improve

best practices, train new employees, and bridge cross-departmental partnerships.

Career advancement and recognition of contributions might be more attainable if proposal writers were eventually elevated to “Knowledge Officer” positions, which are common in the corporate sector (Okoli & Oh, 2007; Ribiere, 2007). Management’s support for career advancement in positions that are otherwise “terminal” may lead to greater job satisfaction and benefit the organization’s long-term health; proposal writers naturally often hold informal leadership roles (LaDuc, 1994; Kent-Drury, 2000).

Often, professional writing positions may not receive long-term recognition due to the writers’ names not being included on a document. The writers represent the voice of an organization, but only the executive director or project manager typically serves as a principal investigator on the proposal. This practice is common in the technical writing industry (Slack, Doak, & Miller, 1993; Battaglia, 1995; Wick, 2000; Hughes, 2002), and writers must seek representative value through those who do connect the writers’ roles with the final product: the organization’s leader.

Most writers indicated they would prefer to continue writing grant applications a majority of their paid time. Perhaps 20% of their time could go towards documentation efforts and institutional memory development and debriefing the proposal writing process. This would help avoid the “ceiling effect” on career growth in grant positions, and would also allow the writer to write stronger proposals and identify best practices to share with the rest of the organization. Proposal writers should work closely with their managers to ensure they are supported, both in their role as a fundraiser and in their advancement in their organization.

## **Conclusion**

Proposal writers possess a high level of value to their organization in terms of their social capacity and institutional memory, and they must make those connections clear to organization leaders. Proposal writers are excellent at establishing best practices, quickly identifying the appropriate partners and subject-matter experts, and working under tight deadlines. By combining these skills in the context of institutional memory, they avoid reinventing or duplicating existing services in their communities and write better proposals.

Proposal writers should be prepared to illustrate these values with examples of successful efforts to build opportunities for career advancement. They are central to moving their organizations forward by communicating visions to funders. This role brings the potential for additional leadership opportunities in the field. Writers should make the arguments for the value of these institutional memory traits

to organizational leaders to prove that the value of a proposal writer is far beyond the total amount of funding raised and that turnover helps no one. Instead, proposal writers can leverage responsibilities in institutional memory, as social gatherers across departments, to build trust throughout the organization, encourage employees to contribute to the knowledge base, and translate the short- and long-term value that documentation can bring to the nonprofit sector and to communities.

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# The Rapid Growth of Social Media and Impact on the Grants Profession: Social Media as a Tool for Grant Professionals from Research Through Grant Management

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*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 08: Knowledge of methods and strategies that cultivate and maintain relationships between fund-seeking and recipient organizations and funders*

## **Abstract**

Social media is an increasingly important advancement in grantseeking and grant management. Many government programs, nonprofits, and grant professionals are unsure of how to harness the power of social media to improve grantseeking and grant outcomes. The power of social networks and the impact of the mobile world are current realities as grantseeking organizations interact with stakeholders and funders. Grants frequently require innovative partnerships between stakeholders, government, nonprofits, and business. A decade ago, funders largely did not require such collaborations; today, a competitive grant seeker must establish partnerships and networks and work across many levels of government and community. Social media is one tool that removes barriers and opens opportunities to connect, engage in dialogue, and build networks. As social media evolves, it transforms

philanthropy and advocacy, including grantseeking and grant management. Being competitive for grant funds requires understanding the continuous evolution of best practices at the intersection of grants and social media.

## **Introduction**

Social networking is not new to the grants profession. As technology evolves, professionals integrate new tools to increase productivity, build relationships, improve communication, connect with stakeholders, and identify best practices. Over the past 20 years, technology evolved from listservs to websites to present-day social media and social networks. As Marshall McLuhan points out, new technologies do not simply replace the old (McLuhan, 1964/1994). Old technology persists, and new technology fundamentally alters our relationship with the old. For example, social media tools like Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Facebook, and Google Plus are not replacing websites, but rather alter the way people design and use websites.

Grant professionals utilize social-media tools to assist their grant work by enhancing their research efforts, building relationships with grant makers, increasing data and transparency, and offering easy access to timely and relevant professional development. The tools available for grant professionals' use continue to expand.

This article will explore the role of social media and social networking in increasing data and transparency; the importance of developing social-media goals, selecting social networks, and establishing social-media plans and policies; the benefits of social media in professional development; and strategies for utilizing social media and social networking in pre- and post-award relationships with grantmakers. First, grant professionals need to be aware of the definitions of *social media* and *social networks*.

### ***What is Social Media?***

According to the National Institute for Social Media (NISM), social media refers to the means by which people interact and connect on various virtual communities and networks (NISM, 2013). People access social media sites and applications via the web and on mobile devices, such as smartphones and tablets. Participants in social media sites share, create, co-author, modify, and discuss user-created content.

### ***What is a Social Network?***

Tredinnick (2006) defined social networking sites as those sites driven by user participation and user-generated content. Social networks provide opportunities for users to engage and connect with other users, as individuals and as organizations. Waters (2009) found that nonprofit

organizations use social media to streamline management functions, interact with volunteers and donors, and educate others about their programs and services. Through connections with stakeholders on social networks, organizations strengthen relationships and facilitate communication and management strategies.

## **Data and Transparency**

Social media provides an opportunity for transparency for both grant seekers and grant makers. Initiatives to increase access to data and improve transparency are at the forefront of all levels of grantmaking, including federal and local governments, institutions of higher education, and research and private foundations. Grant makers, grant seekers, and grant managers share in the need to capture, analyze, and share relevant data. Social media is used to increase data collection, augment data utilization, and expand transparency in government agencies as well as in private, family, corporate, and public foundations (Duggan, 2015).

### *Government*

On May 9, 2013, President Barack Obama signed an executive order making open and machine-readable data the new default for government information. Increasing the availability of information about government operations is also core to the promise of a more efficient and transparent government. Since 2011, the administration has launched a number of Open Data Initiatives aimed at scaling up open-data efforts across the health, energy, climate, education, finance, public safety, and global development sectors (Office of Science and Technology Policy, 2013). These efforts have unlocked troves of valuable data—that taxpayers already paid for—and made these resources more available and accessible to innovators and the public.

Many local governments, cities, and counties use social networks to communicate with residents. The combination of the pervasiveness of social media platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook, and open source computing (software for which the source code—used by computer programmers to make the software work—is available for anyone to modify or enhance) changes the way citizens, visitors, and workers access local government information and analyze data. Cities and counties engage in “hackathons,” often in support of the National Day of Civic Hacking, an event backed by the White House’s Office of Science and Technology. This event leverages public-private-people partnerships to improve access to public data. Cities that seek to improve access to public data find that open data delivers greater transparency and offers significant opportunities for internal users to improve analysis, streamline processes, and enhance services (The Open Government Partnership, 2013).

## ***Philanthropy***

Simultaneously with changes in government agencies, foundations are making ongoing operations more transparent through their own websites and other online communications tools. Foundations are adopting open licensing policies for the digital outputs of their grantees, effectively lowering the barriers for grantees to access and use grant-funded content produced by other grantees. Additionally, philanthropic support groups support transparency by utilizing social media. For example, GlassPockets, a program of The Foundation Center, champions philanthropic transparency and promotes social media as a mechanism for foundations to become more transparent to the grantseeking community, as well as to internal stakeholders (GlassPockets, 2015).

Grant-funded organizations also face increased external pressure to collect beneficiary-perception data. Charity Navigator rates nonprofits based, in part, on whether their programs collect or share beneficiary feedback (Charity Navigator, 2015). Another organization, GreatNonprofits, offers a crowd-sourced review and social networking platform where stakeholders share anonymous feedback about nonprofits (GreatNonprofits, 2015). These rating systems rely on social media to collect and then share the rating of each group. Consequently, grant makers and other savvy donors are now able to access more available information about potential grantees when conducting due diligence before making awards.

Social media mobilizes resources in larger community settings in a way not previously possible. In 2014, an Android mobile app, *Help Homeless Twin Cities*, began providing a directory of resources and websites for homeless people living in the Minneapolis-Saint Paul area (National Day of Civic Hacking, 2014). The application code is designed to accommodate changes, so users can adapt it to any community and easily add local resources to the directory. This is an excellent example of social media tools addressing an issue and improving a community.

## **Identifying Social Media Goals**

The utilization of social media in grants is most effective in grantseeking organizations when employed strategically. Grantseeking organizations widely accept the value of their organizational strategic planning process. The planning and goal-setting processes related to social media are equally critical to ensure the maximum return on investment for time spent using social media for grant-related work. Before a grant professional selects the specific social-media tool to support his or her efforts, the first critical step is to identify the goals for the use of social networking. The social media logic model, illustrated below in Figure 1, provides a visual mechanism to evaluate individual or organizational goals for using social media as part of social networking (Miller, 2014).

Inputs	Outputs	Project Level Outcomes	Community Level Outcomes	Community Impact
Staff	Launch	Increased Reach	More Informed Greater Civically Engaged Communities	Changed Public Policy or Awareness
Planning	Content and Tools		<b>Information Ecosystem Changes</b>	
Networks	Build Partnerships and Relationships	Increased Engagement	Increased Media Attention	Changed Individual's Behavior
			Greater Collaboration Improved Information Access or Media Capacity	

Figure 1. Social Media Logic Model (Miller, 2014)

For individual grant professionals, whether employees or consultants, common goals for social media utilization include the following:

- Increase the number of colleagues that know about grant development and management
- Increase the number of organizations that understand and value the nine competencies identified by the Grant Professionals Certification Institute
- Increase community knowledge about a topic
- Increase access to professional development and learning opportunities
- Increase understanding and knowledge of what is important to others in a specific network.

For grantseeking organizations, whether pursuing private foundation or government grants, common goals for social media utilization include:

- Increase the number of partners that know about the organization's work
- Increase the number of donors that know about the organization's work
- Increase the engagement of the organization's supporters in policy efforts

- Increase the engagement of the organization's supporters and/or clients in programs
- Support a behavior change by the organization's supporters and/or clients.

## **Selecting a Social Network**

As illustrated above, the reasons for grantseeking and grantmaking organizations to adopt social media vary as widely as the types of available social-network platforms. Increasingly, organizations are more aware of the capabilities of social media to meet their stakeholders' needs, reach a targeted or broader audience, and connect with partners, communities, and constituents in real time. Grant makers are active in a wide variety of web-based and mobile networks. Their presence on various social networks influences grant seekers' selection of social networks.

## **Social Media Plans and Policies**

A social media policy is the foundation of an organization's social media governance model. Its purpose is to guide an organization's employees and to protect the organization and stakeholders from risk. Key elements of social media governance for an organization include the following (NISM, 2013):

- Social media policy and crisis management plan
- Social media strategy
- Training and adoption
- Monitoring and analysis.

An effective social media policy provides clear guidance and consequences and serves as a foundation for the organization's social media strategy and a guide for the organization's stakeholders. For a grant professional, a social media strategy is similar to a grant project strategy. When designing a grant strategy or a social media strategy, the grant professional begins by identifying key outcomes. After identifying key outcomes, the grant professional then identifies inputs and outputs (see Figure 1, above). Once the grant project or social media strategy is designed and put into practice, elements may change within the strategy, such as staff and partners, and ongoing evaluation of and adjustments to the strategy are necessary. An organization's social media strategy outcome may be grant funds, a campaign, an overarching organizational goal, or a combination of outcomes. Grant professionals are an important part of a grant seeking organization's strategic plan and social media strategy.

## Professional Development Using Social Networks

Social networks are a powerful resource for supporting individual professional development. Thought leaders typically participate in social media by using their unique expertise to answer questions and provide insights. Thought leaders actively participate in group discussions, forums, or question-and-answer groups by providing compelling questions, engaging comments, and expert answers. In addition, thought leaders use social-media platforms to consistently provide their socially-networked communities and audiences with timely and relevant content.

Professional development has evolved along with web technology and social media usage. In the past, people and organizations interacted with their local community or traveled to industry or topic-specific conferences to invest in their professional development and to build their professional networks. Social media takes this approach to professional development and delivers it to scale. Social media allows individual grant professionals to connect on a macro level and to find topics and communities based on individual professional development needs and interests. For organizations and communities that provide professional development, the reach of social media opens opportunities to global participation.

Traditional in-person training is no longer the only option for grant professionals to consider. Online weekly Twitter chats, live or on-demand webinars, and participation in groups on platforms like Facebook and LinkedIn provide less-expensive and more time-sensitive information to support professional development.

## Social Media to Support Pre-Award Grant Work

Since social networking sites, such as Google Plus, Facebook, and LinkedIn introduced organization- and business-specific pages, grant-making and grantseeking organizations have incorporated social networking strategies into their mission-driven work—throughout the full grant life cycle.

### *Grant Research*

The information a grant seeker gathers about a grant maker on social media goes far beyond the organization's basic profile data. Social networks give grant seekers the opportunity to gather a wealth of information and insight about a grant maker, and most important, to gain a better understanding of the grant maker's priorities in practice beyond its website and formal guidelines.

Pay-by-subscription grant databases utilize the rapidly increasing presence of grant makers on social media in order to provide the most up-to-date information for their subscribers. For example, the Foundation Directory Online, the Foundation Center's grant-funding database, added

a social media tab on all pages with funder records. The social media tab content is a work in progress, as the information changes and expands constantly. While not all-inclusive, the tab allows the grant professional to identify which potential funders are on social media and to go straight to those accounts as part of the initial research process. Grantseeking databases allow grant professionals to identify which social media tools current or potential grant funding partners use.

However, in order to fully utilize social media in grant research efforts, a grant professional needs a few additional tools to help create a complete picture. To avoid becoming overwhelmed with the data available, the grant professional must have tools available to support and monitor efforts as a significant time and energy-saving approach. One key tool is a web alert, such as Google Alerts, which allows the grant professional to monitor the activities of current or potential grant makers across all of their social media platforms. Another example is the search function through each social media platform. Each operates with a slightly different nuanced approach to a general search versus an advanced search, but regardless, the results are powerful. For example, since Twitter is a micro-blogging tool which serves as a real-time news and link sharing service, a grant professional can create advanced searches to flag when grantmaking organizations and grant professionals post links to new funding opportunities.

### ***Grant Maker Relationships***

While social media impacts all three elements of the “3 R’s” of grant seeking (Research, Relationships, and wRiting), the most untapped potential lies with grant maker relationships (Leonard, 2015). While quietly watching or researching grant makers on social media is an important part of a grant professional’s research strategy, grant makers show an increasing preference toward engaging in dialogue and creating a connection with grant seekers.

For some grant makers, a small staff limits the capacity for pre-award communication with grantees. Social media enables small grant makers to speak with a larger voice and to interact more vigorously with current and potential grantees. Social media allows small grant makers to meet the organization’s goals for communication in a stronger way, since the organization itself controls the mechanism and media.

Interacting with grantmaking organizations on social media is both a pre-award and post-award activity that grantseeking organizations should engage in to maximize the return on investment in their grant-seeking efforts. In the pre-award stage, grantseeking organizations can begin by interacting with posts, tweets, and shares posted by the grant-making organization. For example, when a grant maker posts about an upcoming funding opportunity, the organization or grant professional can thank the funder for sharing the opportunity on social media and ask

if the funder is planning to provide any technical assistance about the opportunity or is willing to answer any potential grantee questions.

As a dialogue opens between a grantmaking and grantseeking organization on a social-media channel, a grant seeker can like, retweet, or share information that the grant maker provides, which helps to build the relationship further. For example, when a grant maker shares a report of a community needs assessment it funded, the act of commenting on the results of the assessment and sharing it with the potential grantee's community, along with commentary, promotes the grant funder's work while also increasing the funder's awareness of the potential grantee organization.

### **Social Media to Support the Grant Project**

Traditionally, government agencies and nonprofits such as housing, health, education, and social service agencies pass information to the public. This traditional model is declining in popularity as a result of emerging technologies that simplify and expedite information sharing and its utilization in grant-funded projects that seek to serve the public. For example, public health professionals use social media to surveil populations, gauge public opinions, disseminate health information, and promote beneficial interactions between public health professionals and the lay public. Social media is being explored as a means to deliver selected interventions, although the full potential of these strategies remains to be demonstrated (Bennett, 2009). Some grant makers encourage, and in some cases require, the use of digital media in their funded projects. Recent examples are a NIH R01 grant opportunity, "Implications of New Digital Media Use for Underage Drinking, Drinking-Related Behaviors, and Prevention Research" (NIAAA, 2013) and the US Department of Health and Human Services' "Build a Youth Program" grant opportunity (Family and Youth Services Bureau, 2015).

### **Social Media to Support Post-Award Grant Work**

Social media also provides the grant professional with multiple opportunities to support post-award work.

#### *Grant Award Promotion*

Grant professionals are no longer limited to promoting a new grant award by issuing a traditional press release to local and regional media channels, hoping for print coverage or to be aired. Through social media, grant recipients now control how and when they promote grant awards as well as provide ongoing success stories and thank grant makers. These ongoing efforts to promote a grant-funded program's success and recognize the grant funder help create strong grant-funding partnerships.

### ***Grant-funded Program Implementation and Management***

When awarded a grant, an organization's use of social media in grant-related efforts should not end; in fact, it may increase significantly after the award. Numerous methods for using social media in grant work post-award include the following:

- Social media engagement data and related search engine optimization (SEO) data and reports to support outreach efforts as output data in evaluating grant funded efforts
- Promoting new grant-funded programs via social media to increase program enrollment
- Social media as part of a funded activity or as part of an awareness-building campaign
- Sharing information about new or ongoing collaborations or partnerships via social media to assist a grant-funded organization in leveraging additional support to share with current grant-funding organizations.

### **Conclusion**

Successful implementation and strategic use of social media by grant professionals involve a combination of grant professional competencies and best practices in social media strategy. As the tools available through social media change, the way that grant professionals use social networking will also continue to shift.

With the constantly changing landscape of tools available to grant professionals, the critical best practices for a grant professional to consider when utilizing social media and social networking include the following:

- Utilize information shared by grant makers in the initial grant research efforts to round out what is learned through traditional research
- Engage with potential and current grant makers on social media after first reviewing how the grant makers interact with communities and follow the tone set by the grant maker
- Before posting or sharing any content, carefully consider its value to an organization's social media community on a specific network
- Promote both grant-funded work as well as a grant maker's work beyond a specific funding award.

Understanding the continuous evolution of these best practices at the intersection of grants and social media is crucial for the grant professional to be competitive for grant funds.

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## **Biographical Information**

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