

Describing the Need for Grant Funding



There seems to always be a need for more money and resources in schools. The daily newspapers report the struggles of school leaders in meeting academic goals as well as recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers, librarians and staff, “If only there were more funds, maybe then needs of students and staff could be met,” is a common cry.

One of the first sections of any grant proposal and possibly the most important portion in appealing to the grant reviewers is the “Needs” section. This is where you truly begin stating your case in a compelling way that appeals to the funding agency. Depending on the focus of the grant funding, you may need to describe student academic performance as well as student demographics, the professional development needs of teachers and staff, and the level of technology and other resources that are available or are lacking.

There are two primary sources of grant funding- government grants and foundation/corporate grants. If you are writing a foundation proposal or one where only a page or two is allowed for this section then you will have to state the “highlights” of your school needs concisely. A government grant proposal typically allows more space to fully describe your organization’s needs. Depending on the focus of the granting agency, it may also be appropriate to include any conditions in your community that impact the school and students.

For federal, state, and other more complex grant applications, a more formal assessment of the school needs will help to develop this section. A needs assessment allows you to gather and analyze information required for planning and provides valuable data upon which to base your grant program design. Kaufman and Herman in their book *Strategic Planning in Education* define needs assessment and needs analysis as follows:

A **needs assessment** identifies gaps between “What Is” and “What Should Be” (needs), places them in priority order, and selects the needs to be reduced or eliminated.

A **needs analysis** finds the underlying causes and reasons behind the needs by examining linkages between educational processes and societal factors and student outcomes.

While this may seem daunting, more than likely you have much of the information already available. This includes the work of curriculum planning committees, budget planning processes led by the business office, and other district and school wide planning efforts. If you are interested in pursuing grants to help meet the needs you have identified, then a first step is to learn about the existing planning processes and the results of this work. Request a copy of the district and campus strategic plan. Ask if there are any trends that have been noted such as declining test scores in a certain area or changes in student demographics. Your school district may have a website where this information is posted.

Since the advent of NCLB, much of the academic planning for American schools is based on yearly state testing in the core academic areas. In many states schools become eligible for grants offered through the state education systems based on these tests. While the results are an extremely important part of determining a school’s needs they reveal only part of the big picture. Provide this information in your proposal to give the big picture of student performance but also utilize other data such as AR, AM, STAR testing and STAR-Early Literacy to show that teachers are using data to make instructional decisions. Your purpose in pursuing grant funding may be to purchase additional Renaissance Learning products to allow teachers to make timely, accurate information on

student achievement. If you are requesting to purchase hardware, software, or training in the budget section of your grant then you must show in the Needs section why this is necessary to improve student learning. Always tie your needs and program ideas to the budget request.

Here are steps to develop an effective Needs Section:

1. Study the purpose of the grant to fully understand the specific needs the funding agency is most interested in addressing. The local needs you identify and the program you design around those needs should reinforce to the grant reviewers that you are meeting the purpose of the grant funding.
2. Depending upon the scope of the grant you are pursuing, envision a funnel with the world and national needs at the top, state and regional needs near the middle and your community, school system and school building as the funnel narrows. Gather information that relates to the purpose of the grant from this perspective. There may be regional issues in your community that make it unique (i.e., expansion of a military base which has resulted in more students moving into the community; closing of a large business resulting in lower family incomes and more students who are economically disadvantaged; a community based on tourism with seasonal work and highly mobile families.)
3. Identify the sources of information in your school district. If you are a teacher you may want to ask your principal to assist you in contacting the right person at the district level in the area of curriculum, technology, business services or other office that directly relates to the grant opportunity you are pursuing. Contact the appropriate individuals to request assessment information or other planning documents that might help you with your development of the grant proposal. Check the district website.
4. Collect and analyze quantitative data which may include state testing or standardized tests. You can then disaggregate or break apart the data to determine student achievement in each subgroup, subject area, grade level, and by campus and teacher. This breakdown of results will reveal gaps in student performance and allows you to analyze trends at a campus.
5. Collect qualitative data which might include surveys of teachers, parents, administrators and in some cases the students. You may want to conduct focus groups where groups of teachers (by grade level or subject area, for example) or other appropriate individuals discuss the results of testing or conditions at the school that have created needs which could be addressed through the grant funding.

After the data has been collected and interpreted, organize it into a format that is clear, concise, and easy to read. Wherever possible, use charts and tables to present the information. This usually takes up less space and provides a clear picture for grant reviewers to see when grading this section of your grant proposal.

Remember: The Need section provides the groundwork for your proposal and is the first impression that grant reviewers have of your school and your need for funding.

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