



Moving Beyond The "Budget Stress" Request BUILDING GRANT-ELIGIBLE PROJECTS

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With what seems like a never-ending saga of budget cuts, organizations across the country continue to seek out alternative sources of funding such as grants from different government sources or private foundations. Many of these requests, perhaps unsurprisingly, tend to be for basic operating expenses, salaries, or equipment such as new computers or technology. Even as more organizations line up to compete for grants for basic purposes, funders are actually seeking much more comprehensive projects beyond these kinds of requests.

Most often, these funders break down along two overarching themes to their grant programs: they either seek out the most promising innovations or seek to sustain and scale-up evidence-based practices that are not yet widely adopted.

For the former group, the notion of what constitutes a promising innovation goes far beyond the mere implementation of the latest technologies such as an iPad. Rather, the innovative approach tends to push a re-imagination of what could be compared to what currently

exists. Replacing textbooks with text on an iPad is not a fundamental shift in reshaping how students are educated. The paradigm is still the same, albeit with a different tool.

Applying for these kinds of grants can bring an additional layer of challenge as it requires leadership at the creative level, as well as at the fiscal, technical, and logistical ones. Since there is no standard definition of what can be construed as "innovative," there is a greater reliance on the subjectivity of reviewers. Grantseekers should challenge basic assumptions and models when trying to think of an innovative project, especially those that may involve some considerable risk. In many ways, these types of projects are akin to an entrepreneurial endeavor - without the typical profit motive in a corporate environment.

Innovation should not be mistaken for completely untested or undeveloped, however. An innovative project is most likely to be competitive if it draws from supportive research and investigations that would lead to a reasonable hypothesis that the proposed project would yield real

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Resources for Evidence-Based Practices

- **What Works Clearing House:** <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>
- **National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practice:** <http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov/>
- **COPS Office Resource Information Center:** <http://cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/ResourceSearch.aspx>
- **CDC Prevention Research Centers:** <http://www.cdc.gov/prc/prevention-strategies/index.htm>
- **Find Youth Info:** <http://fyi-iwgy.org/ProgramSearch.aspx>



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benefits. For example, existing research provides evidence that students suffer a severe drop-off in retention of skills and knowledge during the academically-inactive summer months. Based on this existing research, a school or nonprofit organization may propose any number of initiatives that keep students active during the summer in applying lessons learned from the previous school year. The innovation would be in taking the results of previous research and developing them into an actionable project.

In contrast, a grant program that seeks to support evidence-based practices may be less interested in "what's new" than in "what works." Grantseekers interested in pursuing these streams of funding should seek out initiatives and models that have already been implemented and researched. Research, in this case, refers usually to causal studies that compare control and test groups of students to analyze the actual statistical significance of the initiative. These are much more rigorous than a longitudinal study that is more likely to illustrate correlation between the initiative and student performance, instead of more reliable scientific proof.

When pursuing this kind of grant program, there are many resources that have documented evidence-based practices. Within education, the Institute of Education Sciences provides a public database on these kinds of projects related to everything from literacy instruction to character development. Other government agencies also provide additional resources, such as the Center for Disease Control (see side box on previous page for website URLs).

Innovation and evidence-based practices need not be mutually exclusive, however. Innovative programs can encompass a variety of evidence-based techniques, blending previously proven interventions into a new model or project. The most important thing to remember is that funders are not usually interested in making up for lost revenues or enabling purchases of equipment without a credible project attached.

Understanding GRANTS:

One of the most important things we emphasize to grantseekers is to approach grants with ideas for projects, not just requests for products. For many grantseekers, moving beyond this mindset can be difficult. To help get you started, here are a few key items you should consider for your organization:

Goals: What tangible end-results do you want to accomplish? You should not think of a goal as a list of items to buy. Rather, goals should be actual measurable results, such as number of patients seen, improved academic performance, etc.

Rationale: Why has your organization identified this as a priority for funding? You must be able to demonstrate a need for the grant beyond just a restricted budget. A rationale could be an indicator like increasing poverty rates.

Audience: Who are the people you are serving? Many grant programs specifically seek to help the most disadvantaged populations such as the poor, elderly, youth, individuals with disabilities, etc.

Novelty: Are you seeking funding to launch a new initiative or expand your services? General operating expenses are among the least fundable types of requests. Many funders prefer to see something new and promising for your organization or functional area.

Timeline: How and when are you planning to implement your project and track the results? Winning a grant is hardly the end of a grant cycle - funders will maintain close ties to monitor spending and survey the results.

Sustainability: How will you continue the project after funding has ceased? If you do not have a credible plan for how to sustain the services and benefits of your project (beyond seeking more grant funding), funders will be much less interested in your proposal. They want to have a lasting impact and not be a constant source of revenue.

