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**Grant Writing 101**

**An Introduction to Seeking and Writing Grants**  
March 26th, 2025

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**Instructor**



Lindsay Henderson  
Community  
Development  
Specialist



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**Who's here?**

- Name
- Organization
- Grant writing experience
- What do you hope to learn?

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## Objectives

- Introduction to grant terminology, components, and processes
- How to seek grants and determine eligibility
- Understand grant proposal requirements
- Increase confidence for grant writing



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## What is a grant anyway?

Definitions & Processes

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## Definitions

### Grant

An award of financial assistance to a group or organization to carry out a public purpose through addressing a problem or need in the community.

### Grant Proposal

Formal application from the grantee to grantor that outlines a proposed project, shows budget information, and requests monetary assistance.

### Request for Proposal / Grant Announcement

An invitation put out by a foundation or funding agency for bidders to submit a proposal (when money is available) for projects that reflect the funding entity's values, interests, or research priorities.

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### **Can't we just get a grant to pay for it?**

- Most grants come with strings attached
  - Cash match
  - Restrictions
  - Documentation
- More money = More Effort
  - Larger grants usually require more complex applications and reporting
- Competition is fierce
- Grants are not FREE MONEY

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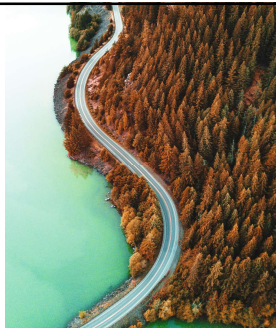
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### **Remember:**

- Grant makers are looking for the best projects to support THEIR MISSION
- The grant-making process is not always straightforward and objective.



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### **Before seeking a grant...**

Proposal Preliminaries

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## First Things First

- Before you even THINK about writing a grant application, identify your priorities and projects.
- Work within your organization, and with partners and stakeholders, to plan for solving problems.
- Develop a file of projects that you can match up with grant opportunities as they become available.

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## Know your Mission

### What is your mission and vision?

Can you clearly describe these to a grantor?

Will you be able to relate them to the funder's values?

The most successful programs and organizations are not grant driven, they are mission driven. Don't lose focus to chase a grant.



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## Know your Purpose

### What is the need?

Collect evidence through data and assessments

### What do you hope to achieve?

Identify your intended outcomes

### What is your strategy?

Research current and best practices

Define success



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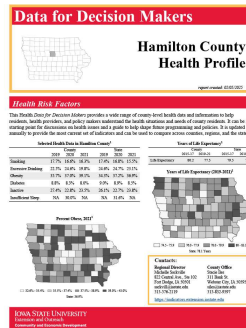
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## Know Your Context

- Needs assessment\*
- Survey
- Strategic planning process (that includes stakeholders, partners, board/council, staff)
- Focus group(s)
- Grassroots coalition
- Data (primary and/or secondary)\*



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## Data Gathering Resources

- Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Indicators Portal
- Iowa Finance Authority (housing)
- State Data Center
- Iowa Department of Public Health
- Iowa Department of Natural Resources
- Kids Count
- Census / American Community Survey

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## Narrow your focus

- Rarely is one proposal going to be enough to solve major issues like food insecurity, homelessness, etc.
- Keep your focus as local as possible.
- Choose a strategy that is manageable and can show measurable results within the life of the grant cycle.
- Think about how your project impacts the bigger picture, or break a very large project down into phases that still meet the grant objectives.

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## Seeking Grant Opportunities

Types of funders, search strategy, exploring an RFP

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## Now You're Ready

- You have a clear project idea with evidence of the need and strategy.
- Set your sights on locating potential funding sources for your projects – specifically grantors whose interests match your well-developed projects and ideas.

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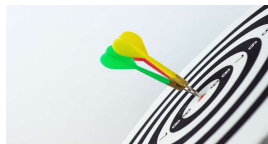
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## Know your Funders

What is their mission?

What do they hope to achieve?

How well do you align with them?



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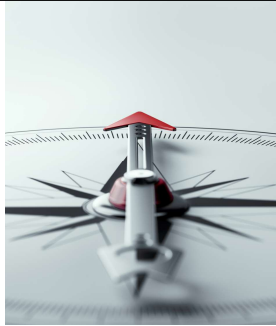
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## Look for Opportunities

- Topic/Issue
- Geographic Area
- Or Both!



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## Start close to home

- Local grants are generally less competitive
- Local grantors need less background information on your community
- Local grants, even small ones are a great way to demonstrate local support before going after more competitive grants.



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## Types of Funders

### Local Funds

Community foundations

- <https://iowacommunityfoundations.org/>

Local businesses or ones with a local footprint

City and County grants

### State Grants

lowagrants.gov for current grants

Search agency websites for past or upcoming grant opportunities

### Federal Grants

Grants.gov

Registration with sam.gov is required for applications. May take months to receive your Unique Entity Identifier.

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## Types of Funders

### Private Foundations

Family Foundations  
Corporate Foundations  
Financial Institutions

### Faith-based

Christianvolunteering.org  
(library.cityvision.edu)  
Faith groups are not eligible for government grants, but some faith-based foundations will fund non-faith affiliated projects

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## In addition

### Utilize grant search subscriptions

Larned A. Waterman Iowa Nonprofit Resource Center - The Iowa Grants Guide:  
[incr.law.uiowa.edu/iowa-grants-guide](http://incr.law.uiowa.edu/iowa-grants-guide)  
Iowa League of Cities Grant Finder Subscription.  
Candid.org Foundation Directory: [fconline.foundationcenter.org](http://fconline.foundationcenter.org)

### Sign up for relevant newsletters

State and Federal agencies and many nonprofits publish newsletters through which you can receive grant announcements and other agency news.

### Google it!

Search for grant opportunities by either topic or geographic location or both.  
Search for corporations with a footprint in your area to find out if they have any grant opportunities for you.

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## Word of mouth!

Hopefully, you are talking to people in your network about your project!

You never know what opportunities may get passed your way if people are aware of what you are doing and what you need.



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## Exploring a Request for Proposals

Determining eligibility, requirements & restrictions, and timelines

## What to look for...

### Are you eligible to apply?

One of the first things listed in an RFP will be what types of entities are eligible to apply.

If you are not, can you with a fiscal sponsor?

Do you have a partner on the project that is eligible?

### Is your project allowable?

Is your project or program clearly listed in the activities described in the allowable use of funds.

If not, could you make a case for how it may be? If not, move on.

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## What to look for...

### What is the timeline for the grant?

When is the deadline for the application? Are there pre-application requirements?

When will the grant be awarded, and how long until the grant project has to be completed?

### How complex is it?

What documentation is required for the application? What are the reporting requirements?

Do you have capacity within your organization to manage the grant?

### Are matching funds required?

Does the grant require you to have cash already committed to the project?

Is any of that match able to be "in-kind"?

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## Also look for

- Background Information about the topic, organization, mission development, list of previous grant awards
- How do past awards compare to the amounts requested?
- Q&A list and webinars
- Required Pre-Application Trainings
- What partners or official approvals are required?



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## Try a Letter of Intent/Interest/Inquiry

- If you want to gather more information to determine whether this grant is an appropriate match for your project, you may want to initiate contact through a letter of inquiry (LOI). **Some grantors require a formal LOI.**
- Components Outline: University of Massachusetts Amherst <https://www.umass.edu/cfr/grant-writing/guidelines-letter-intent>

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## Letter of Inquiry

### Introductory Summary

#### Statement

Who are you?

#### Statement of Need

Why are you requesting aid?

#### Project Activity

What are wanting to do and how?

#### Outcomes

What is your desired impact?

### Credentials

Why are you qualified and trustworthy?

### Budget

How much is the total cost, and how much are you requesting from the funder?

### Closing

Share alignment, appreciation, and follow-up contact information

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## You're the Grant Reviewer

Read through the four grant Executive Summary sections, rate each one from 1 (very poor) to 5 (excellent).

After the 20 min. break, be prepared to share why you rated each one how you did.

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## Grant Proposals

Components that make up a proposal narrative

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## Need Statement

Grantors may not always explicitly ask for one, but a solid need statement is key to making a compelling case for funding.

- Document evidence of the problem
- Examine root causes, circumstances, risk factors, and concerning behaviors
- Document evidence of community concern




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## Goals and Objectives

- Vision for the community and the mission of the specific initiative
- Overall goals and objectives of the community project or initiative
- Include process (tasks) and outcome (results or impact)
  - Process Objectives: What you will do (hold classes, rehab houses, purchase food ...)
  - Outcome Objectives: What change that will bring about (increase employment, decrease homelessness, increase food security ...)

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## Program Plan

### Human resources

Who is doing the work? Paid or volunteer?

### Partnerships

Who else is involved with the project?

### Marketing

How will you promote the project and its results? How will you give credit to your funders?

### Targets of Change

Who are you focused on serving?

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## Program Plan

### Overcoming barriers

Have you thought through potential challenges, and how will you respond?

### Linking strategy to outcomes

What examples do you have to support your claim?

### Timeline

what will you do and when?

### Evaluation

How will you evaluate both your process and your outcomes?

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Budget Request

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Your budget should be as accurate and honest as possible.
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It should reflect the true cost of the initiative, along with an accounting of those costs that are being requested from the funding agency.
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Even costs funded from other sources should be reflected in your budget spreadsheet and budget narrative.

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Budget Request

Budget Worksheet

Anticipated Project Expenses	Hotel/Motel	Cash Match	In-Kind Contribution	Total Project Costs
1. Personnel - Salary	\$	\$	\$ 2,854	\$ 2,854
2. Personnel - Fringe	\$	\$	\$	\$
3. Outside services	\$ 15,000	\$ 15,000	\$ 12,000	\$ 42,000
4. Rentals	\$	\$ 2000	\$	\$ 2000
5. Travel	\$	\$	\$	\$
6. Marketing	\$	\$	\$	\$
7. Capital Purchases	\$ 100,000	\$ 50,000	\$	\$ 150,000
8. Other:	\$	\$	\$	\$
TOTAL (Sum of 1-7)	Total H/M \$ Requested \$115,000	\$ 67,000	\$ 14,854	\$ 196,854

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Budget Request

**Budget Detail or Narrative**  
explains each line item in the spreadsheet

- Outside Services: \$42,000;
  - \$15,000 from Grant,
  - \$15,000 Cash match,
  - \$12,000 in-kind.
- Local contractor XYZ has agreed to donate \$12,000 in labor to grade the surface for the playground and pour concrete.
- \$15,000 is requested for the concrete material, with a 100% cash match from other sources.
- \* See contractor invoice in Exhibit A.

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## **Budget Request**

### • Indirect Costs

- Represent the organization's operating costs that support the project but are not directly reflected in the proposal.
- Most grant programs will not allow you to include indirect costs such as overhead or they limit the percentage of the total award that can be directed towards them.
- If unsure, speak to your granting agency.

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## **Appendices**

- Common items in the appendices might include:
  - Proof of nonprofit status
  - Letters of support
  - Financial statements,
  - Organizational chart
  - Cost estimates for labor or materials
  - Maps of location impacted

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## **As a grant writer**

**Never go it alone**

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## As a grant writer

## Don't dawdle

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## As a grant writer

## Be organized

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## As a grant writer

## Be Friendly and Courteous

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**As a grant writer**

**Check the “syllabus”  
(A.K.A. grant guidelines)**

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**As a grant writer**

**Be Tech Savvy**

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**As a grant writer?**

**Be aware of internal politics**

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### As a grant writer



#### Focus on the big picture



#### Avoid mission drift

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## Thank you

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