Management Matters

Gaining Skills to Write Winning Grants

by Pat Franklin and Claire Gatrell Stephens

Knowing how to write grants has become increasingly important at a time when school district budgets are targeting cuts for the library media center. But who has the time or the expertise? With a little information and a little practice, library media specialists can acquire skills to write winning grants quickly. All that is needed is an understanding of the who, what, when, where, why, and how of grant writing.

Who should write grants?

The library media specialist! Grants can be written for the library media center, for teachers’ classrooms, and for the entire school. Not only will materials be acquired for the library media center, but the efforts in other areas will garner kudos and recognition for the library media program and specialist.

What is a grant?

A grant is money given to individuals or organizations based on the criteria created by the sponsoring group.

When should the writing of grants begin?

Each grant has a different due date so once a winning formula is created, grants can be written throughout the school year. Deadlines are neither arbitrary nor flexible so grants should be written in a timely manner.

Where is information about grants available?

The Internet is a good place to start. A quick Internet search gives results that
include grants from businesses (such as Lowe's and Best Buy), organizations (such as the National Gardening Association and the Laura Bush Foundation), as well as government agencies. There are grants for inner city schools and grants for rural schools. There are grants for all content areas as well as library media centers. Some districts are lucky to have a grant-writing department to help with large grants. Other districts may have a group of local businesses or foundations that offer small grants to schools each year. These grants may range from $250 to $3,000. Although these are small amounts, they add up in materials and in PR when received! Library media specialists can check the school district offices to determine if there is someone at that level who investigates grants for the local district.

Why is it important to write grants?
These are especially difficult economic times, and grants may be one of the only ways to get new equipment and materials for the library media center and the school. Writing technology grants can garner much-needed items like multimedia projectors, visual presenters, and interactive whiteboards. Writing resource grants can add to book collections as well as provide much-needed supplies to keep the library media center running smoothly. In addition, helping teachers write grants is a great way to foster collaboration and open doors to get to know them better. The outcome could not only be collaboration on a project, but an opportunity to gain materials for both the classroom and the library media center.

How is a grant written?
That is determined by the criteria of the particular grant chosen. All grants, however, have the following basic elements in common.

- **Need**
  Most grants ask why the requested materials or financial support is needed.

  This is usually the most important part of the grant, because if it is not possible to prove the need, the grant will not be awarded. If computers are old and money is needed for equipment, this reflects a desire. However, if there are students who have not scored on grade level in a certain area on the state assessment exam and there is a new software program that will help improve their achievement level, this reflects a need. If the old computers will not support the new software, then this provides a compelling reason to ask for new equipment in the grant application. If students are learning about plants, but are having a hard time visualizing the life cycle of a plant, this reflects a need. Or, perhaps the school is in an urban area where children have never experienced gardening, reflecting a need for an indoor garden. Need must connect to student achievement. Statistics and observational data from state assessment exam scores, free and reduced lunch numbers, library media center circulation figures, and data from classroom surveys are only a few ways to demonstrate need in the grant. The district office may have additional data to make the need more evident.

- **Description of the Project**
  This section need not be long and detailed, but it should show the grant readers what is intended. It should be logical and organized so that the reader understands that there are goals, a plan, and a way to carry out the plan. It should list all parties involved and identify their responsibilities in the project. If there are commitments or contributions from businesses, parents, or school clubs, their involvement should also be described.

- **Expected Outcomes**
  This section should describe learning objectives for students and how the funding from the grant will enable student learning or impact raise test scores.

- **Materials Needed (Budget)**
  This section should establish the cost of the project. Grant evaluators use it to determine if the request for materials match the project goals. The exact costs of all items should be listed to show that the information was researched to include the best available prices. A budget should be created to use all of the money available in the grant. It is important to include peripherals for computers or other equipment as well as supplies for teachers and students.

**Evaluation methods**
This is one of the hardest parts to write in a grant application—determining how the results of the project will be assessed. Grant readers like quantitative measures so showing a gain in test scores is a great way to assess student learning for the grant. A culminating survey to show the outcome is also an alternative form of assessment. Observational data can be used, but it is not as strong an evaluation tool as actual test results.

Writing grants is simply knowing the who, what, when, where, why, and how! Library media specialists can use this guide to write grants that make teachers happy as well as gain much needed materials for the most important resources—the students.

**Resources:**

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