GRANT WRITING TIPS & TRICKS

by Atomic Learning: Award-Winning technology training provider
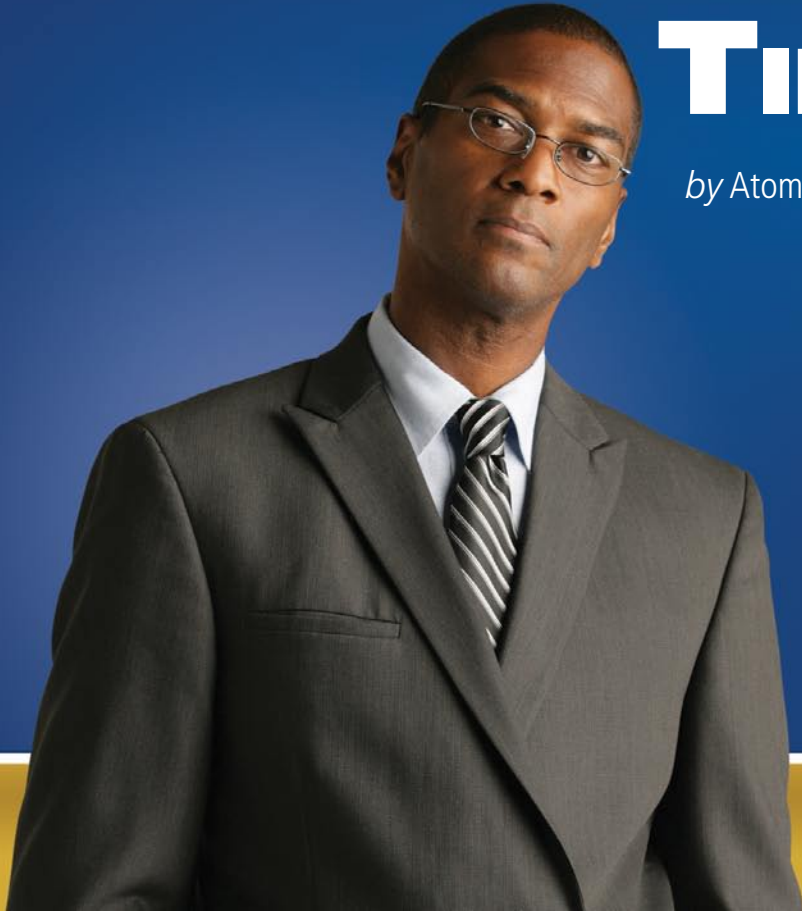
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FORWARD BY KARL SAMP

It is said the Chinese symbol for the word "crisis" is made up of two symbols. The first is the symbol for "danger" while the second is similar in meaning to "opportunity."

If we are honest, we know that change rarely happens when things are going fine. It is usually when times get tough or bad that change occurs. It brings to my mind the phrase, "good is the enemy of great." I last remember hearing that in a presentation in my hometown of Brainerd, MN, by national education reform expert Dr. Willard Daggett. Dr. Daggett was speaking about Minnesota having a greater challenge making needed education reform than many other states, because our current reputation is so good.

We would be naïve to think that all changes resulting from our current economic challenges are good for education. Larger class sizes, fewer support services, and decreased resources for upgrading texts and supplies are all having negative outcomes on student learning. Lack of job security for those in education is no ray of sunshine either. I write this knowing that I have been placed on lay-off notice from my position at a two year community college.

Forward by Karl Samp (continued)

Yet, having gone through a similar experience two years ago, I know that good often comes out of seemingly bad situations. I had always dreamed of owning my own consulting business, but thought it would come at least ten years down the road in semi-retirement. After a brief reassessment of my job options and career goals, I decided not to wait. The last two years have been among my most enjoyable and rewarding as a professional.

The point I am making is that while our economy is hurting and it is having a negative impact on educa-tion, we are also being presented with an opportunity to create positive change, especially with the additional resources being presented through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (stimulus bill) passed by Congress and signed into law by President Obama. At the same time foundation dollars are shrinking due to a decrease in endowments, the federal dollars available to education are significant, with increased funding available to upgrade your use of technology in teaching students and for professional development through EETT and IDEA funding.

While writing federal grants is no walk in the park for most, this e-book is full of ideas, resources, and tips

Forward by Karl Samp (continued)

on how you can be successful in funding your school or organization's ability to integrate technology in the classroom and provide solid, ongoing professional development. Through grant funding, I have seen numerous other nonprofits and businesses take advantage of the forces of pressure and support to create the change they desire and need to thrive in the 21st Century.

In Michael Fullan's book, The New Meaning of Educational Change, the author states, "Successful change projects always include elements of both pressure and support. Pressure without support leads to resistance, and alienation. Support without pressure leads to drift and a waste of resources." With the pressure coming from the economy, and the support provided from Atomic Learning's products and resources they've provided in this e-book, you may find your school district in a position to greatly advance its use of technology.

I wish you well in your work and fund development efforts.

Karl Samp

STEP 1: GETTING STARTED

The grant writing process can be very intimidating. Where do you start? The first step is to have a good idea! Collaborate with colleges and members of your community to come up with an innovative plan to integrate technology into your classrooms. The foundation of any successful program is a good idea and careful planning to put it in action. That foundation also provides your school or organization with a roadmap for the grant writing process.

To move your idea forward, think of some basic questions that will come up. Always answer the primary question that grant reviewers ask: "*So what?*"

Why does your project matter? Keep asking yourself, "*So what?*" at every stage in the grant writing process to ensure what you are planning is relevant.

While in the planning process, make sure prospective clients of your program are involved. If you are planning a professional development program, make sure teachers are involved. If students are central to your success, engage them in the process as well. What else should be considered in the planning process? Check out our first step worksheet for additional questions.

Click here to download
The First Step Worksheet

Step 2: Researching Funders

Once you have worked through the basics of your plan, it is time to decide which funders are the best fit for your project. Be diligent in your research. Review the prior projects that have been funded by an organization as well as the dollar amount typically awarded. If you are unsure if your program is a fit with the organization, contact the funder to verify. Do not try to force a fit; it will greatly reduce your likelihood of receiving the funding. The good news is that around 25% of all grants made by foundations are funding education projects. The grants are out there; you just need to find the right one.

As your research into funders develops, start a spreadsheet with any applicable information. Important things to track include applicable deadlines, specific requirements, upcoming grants, funder reports, and grants denied. Being organized will prevent overlooking important details that could result in your project not being funded.

Remember, the funders need you as much as you need them. Their objectives can not be accomplished without the hard work you are willing to do. By partnering with the funder, you are giving them the opportunity to achieve their goals.

Click here to
Locate Funders

Step 3: Letter of Inquiry

You have found a funder that seems like a perfect fit with your project. They are asking for a letter of inquiry. Not all organizations will ask for a letter of inquiry, but if one is requested use the opportunity to give a great impression of your school or organization. First and foremost, check to see if any specific requirements are requested by your funder.

The letter should be as brief as possible. Important details will be included in your proposal, not the cover letter. Primarily, you want to make a good first impression and emphasize why your school or organization aligns with the funder's objective.

Basic information that should be included in your letter includes:

1. A description of your organization
2. An explanation of why the foundation is a fit with your program
3. A statement explaining how you will help them accomplish their goals
4. An explanation of the rational and purpose of your program
5. A total amount you are requesting in funding

STEP 4: WRITING THE PROPOSAL

Once you find the right funder and have a request for a proposal (RFP), the next step is actually writing your proposal. Prior to typing a thing, your first task is to read the RFP in its entirety. It is important to follow all of the requirements in the proposal exactly. Following all of the instructions is the most important thing to remember when preparing your proposal.

Some grants are going to require a more in depth proposal, others will be more basic. On occasion, there will be redundancy in the RFP, which will cause repetition in your proposal. If the funder is requesting the same information in multiple areas of the proposal, oblige them. When a specific format is requested, make sure you follow the guidelines. The two key aspects of grant writing are having a good idea and following the directions!

Common components requested in a proposal include:

1. Cover letter
2. Cover Sheet/Summary
3. Narrative
   - Organizational information
   - Need statement
   - Program goals and objectivity
   - Project description
   - Budget
   - Evaluation
4. Conclusion
5. Supplementary information and attachments

STEP 5: THE COVER LETTER

The cover letter should be short–two or three paragraphs paragraphs that describe the purpose of the program and emphasize how your organization's goals align with those of the funders. Mention your organization's background and the amount of funds you are requesting. Give a timeline for implementation and indicate you hope to speak with them regarding the project. Always remember to thank the reader for their time and consideration as well.

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My organization's goals align
with yours by:

Section 1
Section 2
Section 3
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Step 6: Summary

The summary should be short, giving the highlights of your proposal. Write it last to make it easier to determine which points of your proposal are most important to include. Like any summary, you want to review a bit from each section of your proposal. Give a high level summary so the grant reviewer is able to get a general idea of what your program entails.

Include important points
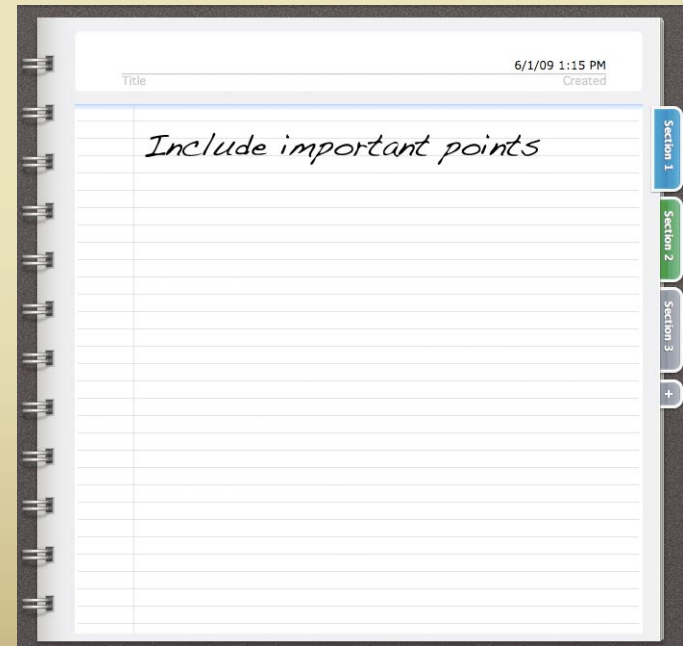
Step 7: Organizational Information

The organizational information section is your chance to write a commercial for your school or organization. In one to two pages describe your history, the mission of your organization, whom you serve, your programs and past successes. Now is the time to lay the groundwork for explaining why your program is necessary. By showing your history and demonstrate past success, the funder will see your school as a good steward of their funding dollars. In addition, explaining the school demographics and describing the need for your project will increase your likelihood for funding. Include statistics of children in your district who receive free and reduced lunch, at risk youth, gifted and talented, or any other demographic information on those who would benefit from the success of your project.

Step 8: Need Statement

The need statement justifies why your program is worthy of funding. Start by describing the situation as to how it relates to those being served. Do not focus on the needs of the organization or institution. When writing, do not assume that the person reading your proposal has any previous knowledge of your area. Sell your program by explaining the benefits and why your organization can not reach students without assistance. Emphasize current assets that you may already have that you will be using to complete the project to draw attention to your capabilities contributing to the overall success of the project. Employ the importance of your "*So what?*" objective. How will your program affect your students? A clearly defined statement of need will help make your project stand out to a grant reviewer.

**Click here for
Resources
for Research**

Step 9: Project Description

The funder now understands your school or organization and why your project is needed. The project description area of your proposal allows you to convey how you will reach students by explaining the who, what, when, where, and how of your project in detail. In describing your project explain how your project will meet the needs of your community. Include specific activities and methods you will use. Explain the planning process to date and how the target audience will be reached. Also define who is responsible for completing the various tasks outlined in the description. It is also important to include the start and end date of your project. Include your long-term funding strategies for sustaining your project.

Click here for the Project Description Worksheet

Step 10: The Budget

The budget section of your proposal should focus on the project you are requesting funding for, not the organization as a whole. Create a table listing all of your revenue, including earned income and other contributions. Make certain you include in-kind contributions under income, such as classroom space, instructors, and administrative costs. The project expenses should include personnel, direct project expenses and administrative overhead. The amount you are requesting should not be more than 50% of your total project costs. In a classroom environment, make sure you are noting the in-kind contributions to show the total financial burden of your project is not being laid at the feet of your funder.

Once you have completed the budget, your next step is the budget narrative. In the narrative, describe each line item in your budget. This will give you an opportunity to clarify any expenses in your budget table.

Click here for a
Sample Budget

STEP 11: EVALUATION

Funders want to know how their dollars have been used. What will be different as a result of your program? How will you know your program has been successful? When determining your evaluation process, be sure to focus on the full impact of your program: What will be different because of your program? The outcome levels will vary; the initial outcomes from a technology integration project will be a change in knowledge, skills, and attitude. Intermediate outcomes will include things like a sense of self confidence in learning something new, as well as additional confidence in using technology. Long term outcomes include the ability for your students to attain more based on their new skill sets. The evaluation process gives you a chance to once again focus on your "*So what?*" statement and prove why your program is vital.

Atomic Learning's 21st Century Skills Collection provides you with access to a Tech Skills Student Assessment and a 21st Century Skills Teacher Assessment. These may be given at the beginning of your program and again at the end to gauge the skill attainment of teachers and/or students. Evaluating subjective

STEP 11: EVALUATION (CONTINUED)

results may include student or teacher evaluation once the project has completed. With a strong evaluation process, you are assuring the funder that you are focused on achieving results in the completion of your project.

In this area, you should also explain the sustainability of the project for the future. Indicate that you will be seeking future grants or other methods of funding your program. Additionally, let the grant reviewer know that even if the program is only funded for one year, the results will still be sustained in those who had the opportunity to be served by your program.

STEP 12: CONCLUSION

Your proposal conclusion should make sure to sum-marize any important points in each area of your proposal. It is your final opportunity to write why your program is important. Answer the "*So what?*" question one final time. Now is not the time to introduce any new information. Simply recap your proposal.

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So what?

Section 1

Section 2

Section 3

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Step 13: Supplementary Materials

There are items that are always required when submitting a grant, and other things which may be asked for occasionally. Verify from the RFP which supplements are required to make sure that you are sending everything requested. Do not send supplements that are not requested.

Normally Required Supplements:

1 IRS Determination Letter

2 List of board members and their affiliations

3 Financial report for last year

4 Budget for this year (if you are more than half-way through the year, the budget should include year-to-date actual figures compared to the budget)

5 Budget for next year (if you are less than three months away from the new fiscal year)

6 Letters of commitment (consider teachers as well as community, school and business leaders; anyone who will be affected by your program)

Occasionally Requested Supplements:

1 Organizational literature

2 List of funders

3 List of programs and services

4 Program statistics

5 Resumes of key staff

6 Documentation that the board approved request

Last Thoughts

Atomic Learning realizes that teachers and administrators are very busy people. We hope that this guide will take some of the mystery out of grant writing. The grant writing process takes time and dedication, but the benefits to your school or organization will reward your students for years to come. They are lucky to have someone who cares enough to help them have the best program possible. Happy writing!

Karl has given Atomic Learning a list of grant tips to help you produce a successful proposal. Check them out to make your proposal stand out to your

grant reviewer. And when you decide to start the grant process, give us a call. We'll work with you to draft a grant for our professional development resources. Good luck, and happy writing!

Click here for
Karl's Tips

Click here for tips
After Submission

Click here for
Other Resources