Section 2.4

Writing the Need Statement

Most grant-seekers begin their proposal with what they propose or want to do. It is much better to begin by focusing on why there is a need to do anything at all, including your proposed intervention. To gain the reviewer's respect, you must show that you are knowledgeable about the need in a particular area. You goal in this section of the proposal is to use articles, studies, and statistics to demonstrate a compelling reason or motivation to deal with the problem now.

The grantor invariably must choose which proposals to fund this year and which to reject or put on hold; therefore you must demonstrate the urgency to close the gap between what exists now and what ought to be in your special field….Your proposed project will seek to close this gap.

In a research proposal, need documentation involves a search of relevant literature in the field. The point of the literature search is to document that there is a gap in knowledge in a particular area. Currently in the scientific community it is necessary to enhance the motivation of the reviewer to fund your research by suggesting the value of closing the gap, in monetary terms or in terms of increased knowledge.

In proposals for model projects and demonstration grants, this section is referred to as the needs statement of need documentation. To be successful in grant-seeking, you must produce a clear, compelling picture of the current situation and the desired state. Grantors are "buying" a changed or better state of affairs.

Creating a sense of urgency depends on how well you document the need. Since not all proposals can be funded, you must make the funding source believe that movement toward the desired state cannot wait any longer. Those proposals that do not get funded did no do as good a job of

- documenting a real need (perceived as important).
- demonstrating what ought to be (for clients).
- creating the urgent need to close the gap by demonstrating that each day the need is not addressed the problem grows worse or that there is unnecessary suffering, confusion, and /or wasted efforts.

Documenting What Is

When documenting what exists in a research grant, include

- the latest studies, research articles, and presentations to demonstrate your currency in the field.
- studies that demonstrate the scope and sequence of work in the field as its current state, and the necessity to answer your proposed research question before the field can move ahead.
- a thorough literature search that does not focus only on the researcher or data that reinforces your research position. Show how the diversity or conflict in the field reinforces the need to search [for] an answer to your question.
- a logical flow of reference to the literature. The flow may consist of a chronological and conceptual documentation that builds to the decision to fund your work. Remember, the literature search should not be a comprehensive treatise in the field that includes references to every contributor, but rather a convincing documentation of significant works.

Documenting What Ought to Be

To establish what ought to be, proven statistics may be difficult or impossible to find. Using experts' statements and quotes to document what ought to be is much more credible than using your opinion. Do not put your opinion in the needs statement. In this section you are demonstrating your knowledge of the field and showing that you have surveyed the literature.

Stay away from terms that point to a poorly documented needs statement. They include the words many and most, and expressions like, a great number, and, everyone knows the need for. Make sure your needs statement does not include any of these types of words or expressions.

It is relatively easy to say what ought to be in areas such as family violence or drug abuse, but more difficult when dealing with bench research. However, it is still important to demonstrate the possible uses your research could be related to even if you are working in the hard sciences. Documenting the other side of the gap is a necessity if you want to close the gap of ignorance in your field.

Creating a Sense of Urgency

The needs section should motivate the prospective funding source. One way to do this is to use the funding source's own studies, surveys, or statistics. The same basic proposal can be tailored to two different funding sources by quoting different studies that appeal to each source's own view of the need. By appealing to the views of individual sources, you will appear to be the logical choice to close the gap and move toward reducing the problem.

If the proposal format required by the funding source does not have a section that deals with your capabilities, the end of the needs statement is the best place to put your credentials. To make a smooth transition from the need to your capabilities

- state that it is the mission of your organization to deal with this problem.
- summarize the unique qualities of your organization that make it best suited for the job. For example, your organization has the staff or facilities to make the project work.
- capitalize on the similarities you share with other organizations. For instance, "Our project will serve as a model to the other agencies that face this dilemma each day." Such statements will help the prospective grantor realize that the results of your project could affect many.
- emphasize that the needs are urgent and that each day they go unmet the problem grows. For example, "Each year that teacher education colleges put off comprehensive computer education, a new group of teachers with limited computer skills enter[s] our schools and the problem grows."

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