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# Intro to Grant Writing

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**ABSTRACT:** This workshop covered essential skills in crafting compelling grant proposals. Attendees learned to decode grant lingo, develop realistic budgets, write persuasive narratives, and overcome common application pitfalls. Practical examples from successful applications were shared, and interactive exercises fostered a collaborative learning environment. This workshop equipped attendees with the knowledge to navigate the grant writing process and secure project funding confidently.

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, many of our institutions and libraries have faced continual financial challenges, and many libraries have confronted significant staffing and budget cuts. One factor that may alleviate some financial pressure from our libraries is grant funding. Though it is important to stress that grants cannot be a substitution for sustained funding and stability, they can provide one-time funding for special initiatives, programs, and events. This workshop was designed to introduce Atla members to grant writing so they may more confidently and successfully pursue grant funding opportunities for their libraries.

Seven attendees, whose home institutions spanned the globe, participated in this workshop. Given the international perspectives of the group, the presenter attempted to make the workshop as applicable to all attendees as possible. Thus, less emphasis was placed on U.S.-specific opportunities, such as grants from U.S. federal agencies such as the Institute of Museum and Library Services or the National Endowment for the Humanities. Instead, the workshop focused on funding opportunities from professional organizations such as Atla. The running activities throughout the workshop focused on aiding attendees in developing a complete draft application for the Atla Library Impact Grant. Additionally, the presenter opened the workshop by acknowledging that she is not a professional grant

writer. However, she has had much success obtaining grants for her library, and she provided an overview of her experiences while acknowledging her limitations.

## **WORKSHOP**

### *Locating Opportunities*

The workshop opened by discussing the different types of funders, including government (federal, state, and local), private foundations, professional associations, and corporations. We also discussed various places to look for funding opportunity announcements. In addition to subscribing to email announcements from regular funders, the presenter recommended the Library Grants blog maintained by Stephanie Gerding (<http://librarygrants.blogspot.com/>). Attendees should check if their institution or local public library subscribes to a database of grantors and opportunities, such as GrantScape.

After locating an opportunity, the discussion turned to tips for deciding whether or not a grant fits their library and project. Attendees were encouraged to first read through the qualifications and confirm if the grantor funds private or public institutions of higher education, evaluate if the library's project aligns well with the grantor's funding priorities, and determine if there were any financial restrictions, such as the grantor only funding a portion of the total project costs. Attendees were encouraged to review recent press releases on the grantor's website for examples of what the grantor recently funded. The discussion concluded by acknowledging the time commitment in writing and submitting a grant application. The group discussed ways to evaluate the potential return on investment for completing a grant application. Factors included how soon the application deadline is approaching, the grantor's funding ratio, the length and complexity of the application, and how well the applicant's project aligns with the grant opportunity.

### *Budgeting*

While there are many approaches to grant writing, the presenter recommends budgeting first. She has found that budgeting first allows the applicant to determine early on if their numbers make sense for both the project and the opportunity. The applicant does not

waste time drafting a narrative if the budget numbers do not work. Additionally, when seeking approval to apply for a grant from institutional leaders, they often want you to show them the budget first.

The presenter provided an overview of common budget categories such as materials/supplies, equipment, salaries, consultants or contracted work, and travel expenses. She also provided a basic overview of direct versus indirect costs, with examples. While indirect costs are only common to U.S. governmental grants, the presenter wanted attendees to be familiar with this procedure.

The facilitator also discussed ways to craft a compelling budget justification. The group discussed getting quotes from vendors, providing screenshots from vendor websites, and citing credible sources that provide pricing estimates. Finally, the group discussed common budget hangups, such as the potential tax implications for awarding stipends, factoring multi-year grant budgets from projects that exceed 12 months in length, and navigating grants that require cost sharing.

### *Approvals*

Another important aspect we discussed was the necessity of seeking institutional approvals before submitting a grant application. Each institution typically has a policy or procedure regarding accepting funding from an outside organization. Therefore, attendees must engage with their institutional leadership before applying for a grant. This ensures the institutional acceptance of the grant, if awarded, and the support for the project that the funding backed.

### *Narratives*

The facilitator underscored the importance of crafting a compelling and persuasive grant narrative. Narratives, often structured as answers to the grantor's questions outlined in the funding opportunity, are a key tool for effectively communicating the project's value and impact. The facilitator provided examples of common questions and the strategies she has used to answer each question type, supported by examples from successful grant narratives.

*Why do you need funding for this project?*

The answer to this question is very situational. It may include a variety of factors, such as staffing limitations, a lack of institutional resources, or the implementation of an innovative idea that is outside the scope of the library's regular budget. One strategy is to outline the full scope of the project plan. Acknowledge what steps you have completed already with your limited resources, and then explain why external funding is needed to complete the next steps and bring the project to fruition.

*Why does this project matter? What are the implications beyond the institution?*

Quantitative data can be a helpful tool in projecting the potential impact of a project. What internal library data have you been collecting that could be helpful? For example, can you quantify how often researchers have used a specific special collections resource? External data sources can also be beneficial. Surveys such as those from ATS and IPEDs can be used to benchmark or demonstrate current trends in the field, and [WorldCat.org](https://www.worldcat.org) can be used to provide an estimate of the uniqueness of specific holdings. Acknowledging if your library is open to the public or other groups outside your institution can also demonstrate a broader impact.

*How can the grantor trust you to be a good steward?*

Grantors want to know that you will be a good steward of the funds provided to you. Answers to this question should describe your qualifications. Attendees were encouraged to list their degrees, relevant coursework, and work experience. Attendees were encouraged to acknowledge that while their institutional resources are limited, they are competent professionals with appropriate experience and training.

Depending on the nature of the actual work to be undertaken in the project, attendees may consider inviting others to join the project team. These team members may include a more senior member of library staff to serve as an advisor. It may also include relevant campus experts. For example, a grant focused on space planning might include the institution's facilities director on the project team. Or a grant focused on a specific collection might include a discipline faculty member whose research aligns with the collection's focus.

### *Supplemental Materials*

The facilitator discussed how supplemental materials beyond the grant budget and narratives might be added to an application. Specific supplemental materials might be required for some opportunities per the opportunity guidelines. Additional materials may be optional but helpful for other opportunities if they strengthen the application. Examples of supplemental materials might include a brief resume for the project leader and a letter of support from an institutional leader. This letter can demonstrate the institution's commitment to the project and speak to the institution's intention of being a good steward of the funding. The facilitator also noted the common phrase that a photo is worth a thousand words. She provided examples of recently using photographs in grant applications to demonstrate need and illustrate the situations she described in the narrative. Relevant documentation or outcomes from previous projects can also be helpful supplemental materials. Examples of such documentation may include a report of a prior consultant or an environmental monitoring of a special collection area.

### *Getting the News...*

*That you were not awarded the grant.* Attendees were encouraged to ask the grantor for feedback on their applications. Many are willing to share an application's strengths and weaknesses. Based on this feedback, applicants may consider revising and resubmitting the application during a future funding cycle. The facilitator also acknowledged that various factors might not be awarded and provided examples of grant applications she submitted that were not awarded for factors outside the strength of her project and application that were beyond her control.

*That you got the grant!* After being awarded a grant, the facilitator provided steps to take, including celebrating your success. Attendees were then encouraged to share the news with relevant stakeholders, including library and institutional leadership, their marketing office, and accounting. Many grantors will require the institution to write a press release or publicly acknowledge the award. Attendees should then implement the grant project according to relevant guidelines and their project plan, saving their receipts and completing reporting as required by the grantor.

## **ATLA GRANT OPPORTUNITIES**

The workshop also included a presentation by Alexis Weiss, Atla Member Engagement and Education Librarian. Alexis provided a thorough overview of Atla's many grant opportunities, including Consultation Grant, Digitization Grant, Open Educational Resources Grant, and Library Impact Grants. She provided examples of successful projects and common application pitfalls to avoid. Attendees are encouraged to visit Atla's website (<https://www.atla.com/member-benefits/>) for a full explanation of each opportunity and to apply. Questions regarding Atla's grant opportunities may be submitted to the Membership and Engagement team by emailing [connect@atla.com](mailto:connect@atla.com).

## **CONCLUSION**

This workshop provided attendees with knowledge and strategies for pursuing grant applications. The facilitator hopes this session will increase the number of members awarded grant funding and that future Atla conferences will include presentations by members on their grant-funded projects.