

CRACKING THE CODE: A PRACTITIONER'S GUIDE TO GRANT WRITING
AND PROJECT MANAGEMENT FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEADERS

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation product explores a range of best practices for grant seekers and grant managers. It is geared toward community college professionals with a primary focus of funding workforce development activities through large federal grants. The document is organized to provide insight throughout the entire process. Chapters include finding and evaluating funding sources, grant writing tips and techniques, start-up, project management, leveraging opportunity, evaluation models, preparing for an audit, sustainability, and closeout. A glossary of terms is also provided.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Why External Funding is Essential

Community colleges occupy a vital role in the American higher education system. Combining theoretical and practical knowledge with innovative response to local economic conditions, the nation's 1132 community colleges currently enroll 8 million students annually, forty-five percent of all U.S. undergraduates (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013). Historically, community colleges have been known for providing low-cost, high-quality, post-secondary educational opportunities by maintaining a balanced focus on multiple missions (Bailey, 1998). Open access is provided to everyone with the ability to benefit, including the support services to upgrade academic skills to a college level. With tuition and fees a fraction of the cost of most four-year institutions, community colleges provide an affordable alternative to students or their parents. Students planning to transfer to a four-year colleges or research universities often begin at the local community college, enjoying smaller class sizes and more personal instructional attention as the transition is made from secondary to post-secondary education. Occupational students enroll at community colleges for certificates and associate degrees that lead directly to good jobs in high-demand vocational careers. Displaced workers turn to community colleges for career retraining or skills upgrades in order to recover from seismic shifts in the job market as the linkage between business and industry and community colleges embeds the workforce development mission into the

overall economic fabric of the community. Recently, political leaders and policymakers have championed the critical role community colleges play in fueling economic growth and recovery, noting the manner in which the institutions “connect the dots” and “change lives” (Flannery, 2012). However, despite increased public awareness, community college leaders face mounting challenges to find the revenue to sustain multiple missions in an environment of intense competition for resources, driven in large part by a pronounced and long-term trend of disinvestment in public community colleges by state governments. The funding trend in Michigan is documented in Figure 1, below.

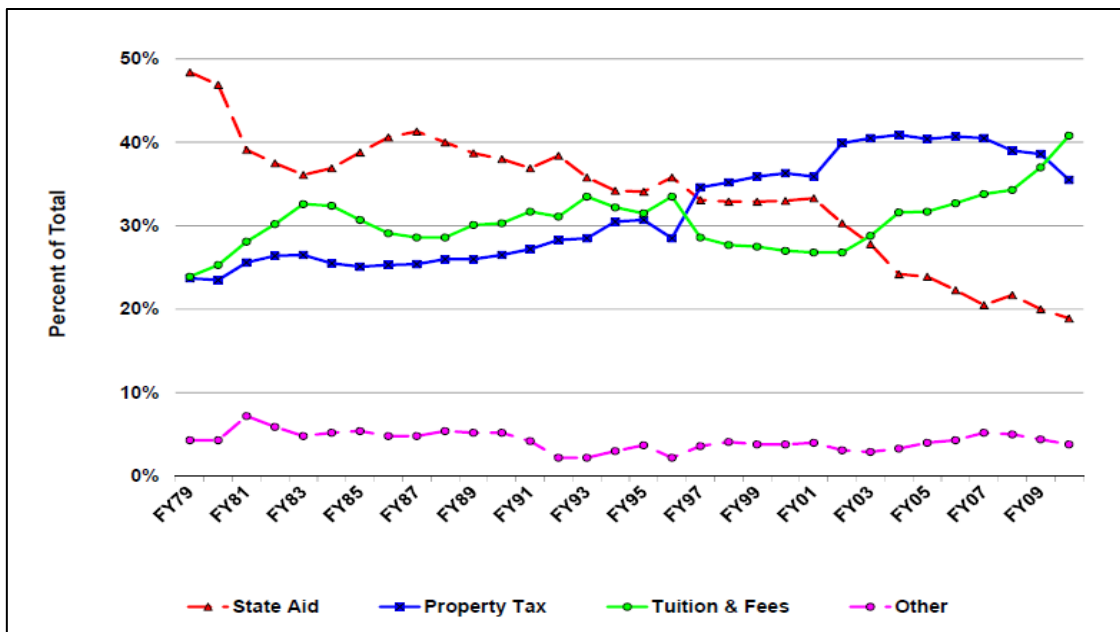


Figure 1: Community College Operating Fund Revenue
 Source: Michigan Community College Association, 2013

In light of these challenges, community college leaders increasingly are turning their attention to external funding sources on the federal level, more commonly known as grants. Since 1980, the fastest growing revenue category for community colleges nationwide has been government grants and contracts (Merisotis & Wolanin, 2000).

Policymakers note the challenging climate of limited expenditures for federal domestic discretionary programs, yet there are 26 federal grant-making agencies, 1000 individual grant programs, and over \$500 billion in grants available each year (Grants.gov, 2015). Consequently, grant making has become an increasingly valued-added component of many community college business models. The purpose of this dissertation product is to assist practitioners along a learning curve leading to better odds of landing substantial federal awards, while also providing a series of post-award checklist narratives for project directors to consider when managing large, complex federal workplace grants. Step one is learning to track the often-byzantine political headwaters from which federal grant funding ultimately flows. A recent example serves as an illustration of this process

A Transformative Moment

In July 2009, President Barack Obama rolled out the American Graduation Initiative at Macomb Community College in suburban Detroit, an ambitious \$12 billion proposal to reform and strengthen community colleges with the goal of helping five million Americans to earn degrees and certificates over the next decade. In the speech, Obama noted that not since the passage of the original GI Bill and the work of President Truman's Commission on Higher Education—which helped double the number of community colleges and increase by seven fold enrollment in those colleges—has such a historic step on behalf of community college in America been taken. Noting also that community colleges are an essential part of recovery in the present and prosperity in the future, he reflected on the economic downturn over the preceding 20 months in which 6.5

million Americans had lost their jobs, with Michigan having been hit particularly hard, as more than a passing crisis but rather a transformative moment.

The American Graduation Initiative called for the proposed \$12 billion investment in community colleges to be spread across the following deliverables:

- Build partnerships with businesses and the workforce investment system to create career pathways where workers can earn new credentials and promotions integrated with worksite education programs to build basic skills and curriculum coordinated with internship and job placements.
- Expand course offerings and offer dual enrollment at high schools and universities, promote the transfer of credit among colleges, and align graduation and entrance requirements of high schools, community colleges, and four-year colleges and universities.
- Improve remedial and adult education programs, accelerating students' progress and integrating developmental classes into academic and vocational classes.
- Offer their students more than just a course catalog, through comprehensive, personalized services to help them plan their careers and stay in school.
- Create a new research center with a mission to develop and implement new measures of community colleges' success so prospective students and businesses could get a clear sense of how effective schools are in helping students—including the most disadvantaged—learn, graduate, and secure good jobs.

The American Graduation Initiative proposal also called for funding to enhance access and completion, \$2.5 billion to modernize college facilities, and the creation of a national online skills laboratory giving students open access to free courseware leading to credentials arranged according to a competencies-based model.

Reality Sets In

Enthusiasm among community college advocates and practitioners ran high after the American Graduation Initiative proposal was announced. One education insider wrote that community colleges have been the “neglected stepchild” of federal higher ed. policy for so long, it was really a remarkable moment when the administration and the House moved to make a substantial bet on their future (Mellow, 2012). By March 2010, however, the Affordable Care Act had moved front and center into federal domestic policy debate. Support for the American Graduation Initiative began to erode, while concerns about its price tag, in light of calls for deficit reduction and uncertainties about the cost of expanding health care legislation, began to mount. Proposed increases in federal Pell Grant funding also presented political concerns while funding for the new program ran into political opposition from Senate Democratic centrists, who clashed with Obama over the government-run health insurance proposal known as the public option. By Dec. 2010, the \$12 billion President Obama initially promised to community colleges, a lynchpin of his strategy to increase their number of graduates by 50 percent, was siphoned off to help get the contentious health care bill passed (Luzer, 2011). As a compromise, \$2 billion was pledged for career training through a program administered by the U.S. Department of Labor called the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College Career Training grant, allocated in equal \$500 million increments over four years through a competitive grant process. The scaled back program looked like this:

- **Work with businesses:** Colleges could build partnerships with businesses and the workforce investment system to create career pathways through which workers will earn new credentials and promotions through step-by-step, worksite education programs that build essential skills. Colleges will work

closely with employers to design training that is relevant to the local labor market and likely to lead to employment and careers.

- Create education partnerships: Colleges could work with other educational institutions to expand course offerings and promote the transfer of credit among colleges.
- Teach basic skills: Colleges could improve remedial and adult education programs, accelerating students' progress and integrating developmental classes into academic and vocational classes.
- Meet students' needs: Colleges could offer their students more than just a course catalog through comprehensive, personalized services to help them plan their careers, stay in school, and graduate.
- Develop online courses: Colleges could create open online course materials such as interactive tutors, simulations, and multimedia software that can help students learn more, and learn better, in less time.

While community colleges were not completely left out of the bill, a Brookings Institute education policy analyst noted that the competitive TAACCCT grant program to help dislocated workers access training programs felt like traditional stuff and fell well short of the innovative potential that the AGI had for transforming the nation's two-year institutions, and valuing them as much as their four-year counterparts (Berube, 2010). Community college leaders were calibrated in registering their response to the demise of the AGI. Jane Wellman, founding director of The Delta Project on Postsecondary Costs, Productivity and Accountability, told *The New York Times* that community colleges should get more attention and more resources. She noted there is a big problem in that the public institutions that serve the most people have the least money, the poorest students and the greatest needs (Mellow, 2012).

Navigating a Way Forward

The demise of the American Graduation Initiative, while disappointing from the perspective of its unrealized potential to define a new normal of prosperity for community colleges, did offer substantial new opportunities for competitive grant seekers. Three rounds of workforce training grants have been funded to date: \$1.5 billion of federal investments in community colleges standing alone or working in consortiums to develop innovative delivery models and fund capacity-building in promising new program areas. While the purpose of *Cracking the Code* is to help college leaders locate and land funding opportunities such as the TAACCCT grants, and to help practitioners navigate the many complexities associated with managing them, maximizing the leverage federal grants provide to open new areas of growth for community colleges is an additional focus of the study. As Vice-President of Workforce Development at Alpena Community College in NE Lower Michigan, the author has twenty years of experience writing and managing federal workforce projects. Since 2004, \$8.865 million in federal workforce training grants have been awarded to ACC, including two TAACCCT awards totaling \$5.335 million (Alpena Community College, 2014). In 2007, Alpena Community College won a national workforce training award from the U.S. Department of Labor for excellence in the category of educating America's 21st century workforce, an honor also largely derived from grant-funded training activity. Just as community colleges are characterized by multiple, sometimes-competing missions, grant work also involves many variables for which a project director must be accountable. For the science-minded, consider a chemistry analogy in which the college is the nucleus and a large federal grant is the charged particle in various states of ionization orbiting in a cloud around the

surface. Beginning chemists often ask, “Where is the electron?” to define the fundamental elements at play in the atomic field. Heisenberg notwithstanding, that’s probably a good place to begin our discussion.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

A fairly robust body of literature exists around federal grant seeking. Guides for finding grants are easily located on the web using Google or a similar search instrument. YouTube videos and webinars also are plentiful, though in some cases they represent spotty quality and fairly pedestrian insights. It is rare to encounter sources in the literature that cover the entire life cycle of the grant process, from locating a funding source to obtaining an award, through startup, grant management, reporting, preparing for an audit, dealing with closeout issues, and project sustainability, a comprehensive approach that would provide the greatest value to grant seekers and their employers. The preponderance of sources in the literature focus on the process for locating promising funding sources, followed by a cookbook outlining the steps required to prepare a winning proposal. This two-step recipe most practitioners would likely agree is the most visible part of the process and also the place where the grant writer can most easily demonstrate expertise and the value he or she adds to the endeavor. Experienced practitioners fully understand that the succeeding steps do not occur unless the award is made; therefore, crafting a competitive proposal that is well matched to the intentions of a funding source is useful insight to share. However, success in the writing phase does not render the grant management steps that occur after the award is made less important or influential. On the contrary, management of large federal grants is daunting work even for experienced

practitioners. Much damage can be done through a myriad of portals that are not well addressed in the literature. Three possibilities are proposed in way of explanation: (1) the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) circulars that govern grant financial management on the federal level are written in a highly arcane manner, change frequently, and are largely impervious to common understanding, even among experts; (2) while terms and conditions don't vary greatly between federal departments, the discretion applied by federal project officers regarding an allowable level of grant management performance in the field often varies widely, and sometimes within the same office, an idiosyncratic tendency that makes common dictums regarding compliance hard to generalize; and (3) grant writers often do not manage the grants they write; therefore, they do not directly experience the implementation challenges rendered by their winning blueprint. Nearly all the literature references an axiom fairly common to grant writers and researchers: the actual writing of the grant should be considered only about 20 percent of the work. The remaining 80 percent of the process should focus on the many preliminary data-gathering and partnership formation steps required to build a competitive proposal. However, there appeared to be insufficient references in the existing literature to a related and perhaps more significant grant-management aphorism: getting the grant is only 20 percent of the work.

The literature on federal grants may be grouped according to the following categories:

- Finding Funding Sources
- How-to Guides
- Assembling the Proposal

- Involving Stakeholders
- Miscellaneous Best Practices

Finding Funding Sources

Eastern Iowa Community College demonstrates a best practice by providing a comprehensive list of selected federal departments and agencies. Selected Federal Departments and Agencies:

- U.S. Senate
- U.S. House of Representatives
- U.S. Census Bureau
- Bureau of Labor Statistics
- National Aeronautic and Space Administration (NASA)
- National Endowment for the Arts
- National Endowment for the Humanities
- National Science Foundation
- U.S. Department of Agriculture
- Office of Rural Development
- U.S. Department of Education
- Office of Postsecondary Education
- Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE)
- Institute of Education Services
- Office of Elementary and Secondary Education
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- Health Resources and Services Administration
- U.S. Department of Labor

- U.S. Department of State
- Corporation for National Community Service
- League for Innovation

Missing from the list, however, is a filtering function that would guide grant seekers to federal agencies more likely to invest in community colleges. Many federal agencies don't, which would be a good thing for novice practitioners to know before spending fruitless hours searching agency databases for non-existent funding opportunities. *Demystifying Grant Seeking: What You Really Need to Do to Get Grants* (Brown & Brown, 2001) mitigates this concern, providing a useful tool and a systematic way of searching for grants, including those funded by foundations, a significant source of external funding for public non-profits, though not the focus of this research.

How-to Guides

Grant writing guides are quite plentiful in number yet often limited in content and focus. The literature extends across a continuum ranging from basic concepts geared to beginners, more detailed resources for experienced mid-career community college grant practitioners, to highly prescriptive institutional protocols posted by research universities governing every nuance of the pursuit and management of high-end research grants awarded for activities in which community colleges do not normally engage. While the content of the literature is relatively homogeneous, considerable fragmentation toward specific niche markets exists, which tends to give the material an uneven quality. *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Grant Writing* (Thompson, 2007), *Fundraising for Dummies*

(Murray & Mutz, 2005), and *The First-Time Grantwriter's Guide to Success* (Knowles, 2002) all meet the criteria of introducing basic concepts to novice grant seekers and adequately cover the material. The best of these resources provides sample applications and proposals as templates for motivated beginners. Grant seeking is a time-sensitive activity on many levels; the field does not stand still. For example, Peterson's *The Grantwriter's Internet Companion* (2001), while a commendable resource, is mainly notable for its focus on a tool that was new when the guide was written yet now in the world of Google and comparable search engines is somewhat dated.

General resources reaching out to an experienced readership offer considerable value and insight. The American Association of Community Colleges offers many resources specific to issues affecting community colleges. *Reclaiming the American Dream* (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012) is a report from the AACC's 21st-Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges and provides a thorough overview of challenges and recommendations. Another AACC report, *A Sound Investment: The Community College Dividend* (2011) outlines the need for continued funding of Community Colleges and justifies strong public investment. In *Debunking Some Myths About Grant Writing*, a 2003 article in the Chronicle of Higher Education, Kenneth Henson, Dean of the School of Education at the Citadel, writes an informative article covering many of the myths and misconceptions about grant writing in higher education, including this insightful example:

Myth 6: Grants are awarded to those applicants with the greatest needs.

Most grants go to applicants whose proposals seem most likely to deliver services that meet the agency's goals better than all other applicants. So, instead of

focusing on your needs, focus on how your strengths can meet the grant agency's goals. What unique attributes do you, your institution, and your region have that can be used to excel at meeting those goals? (Henson, 2003).

Additionally, the College Board has a variety of archived webinars with topics ranging from foundation funding to project evaluation and sustainability. *Learning from Missed Shots* (Olwell, 2013) describes the process of learning from rejected grant proposals. *How to Apply for Federal Grants* (2012) is an effective video series from the Grantsmanship Center detailing the general federal proposal format and how to understand federal guidelines. Washington Strategic Consulting (WSC) (2013) offers two comprehensive webinars on federal grants: (1) *Federal Grants: Assessing Organizational Needs to Research and Track the Most Meaningful Opportunities*; and (2) *Preparing Your Organization to Submit a Winning Federal Grant*. Both provide useful and in-depth insight into the federal grant seeking process. Finally, *10 Errors Grant Proposals Teams Should Avoid* (Secor Strategies, LLC, 2010) focuses on the many ways proposal processes get slowed down and sidetracked before the proposal is even written. A distinctive characteristic of the best resources is noting how much can be learned on those occasions when an award is not won.

Assembling the Proposal

A number of sources in the literature detail effective processes for building a grant proposal. Sample proposals delineating timelines, deadlines, and guidelines contribute to the general guidance of planning ahead. *Winning Grants Step by Step* (Carlson, 2008) offers a comprehensive strategy for successful grant writing, breaking the

process down into its component parts very effectively while providing concise descriptive narrative scaled well and with accurate proportion.

Websites are another resource. *Writing a Successful PEP Grant* (Pelinks4u, 2002) is a very thorough and engaging journey through a presentation by a successful grant team to a group of aspiring colleagues seeking funding from the same source. Their insights are organized under subheadings such as Beginning the Grant Writing Process, Choosing a Project Title, Developing a Budget, Establishing Need, Incorporating State and National Standards, Collecting Data, and Barriers to Overcome, a structure that crosswalks effectively to the sequential nature of grant writing and grant management.

Seven Steps to Winning Grant Money (Peek, 2013) advises accurately that there are no secrets to getting grant money. Written from the perspective that grant writing is essentially a pragmatic search for external resources to accomplish a specific objective in support of mission, the seven steps reference commonsense axioms such as: verify your school is eligible for the grants you will seek (step 4); read the grant application carefully (step 5); write the application clearly and concisely (step 6); and get the application in a week before the deadline (step 7). The most useful resources in this section follow a similar template, offering insight that is pragmatic and oriented toward successful outcomes rather than ideology or commiseration.

Writing Style

Central Piedmont Community College (2014) produces a very commendable guide entitled, *Funding Your Best Ideas: A 12-Step Program*. Divided into Part 1, the before-writing phase, and Part 2, the while-writing stage, the document contains a

number of astute observations related to grant development and acquisition. The steps related to writing are particularly useful and notably playful, as referenced below:

Step 6: Use a journalistic writing style. Use the "W" words of journalism: Who, what, when, where, why, and how. Also use bullets, lists, outlines, diagrams, tables. Don't obsess on any topic, even if important. Make it interesting; let every sentence do a job. Assume that your reviewer is reading in bed, falling asleep—which is very likely true (Central Piedmont Community College, 2014).

Henson (2003) also references the importance of clarity in an effective way:

Tip 2: Clarity is everything. The best style is straightforward and simple. Avoid unnecessary jargon, long paragraphs, long sentences, and unfamiliar words. Consciously or unconsciously, many grant writers try to impress their readers with unfamiliar phrases, high-toned language, and complex writing. This is all wrong: By far, the best proposals are also the clearest (Henson, 2003).

The best resources also did not ignore formatting (Gittlin & Lyons, 2008), offering this general counsel:

- Write in the active voice whenever possible.
- Be very concrete and specific.
- Keep your sentences and paragraphs short.
- Use plenty of white space. Page margins should be at least one inch on all sides.
- Use bulleted and numbered lists to make your points.
- Use page numbers, headers, and footers.
- Break your proposal narrative into small units.
- Use pictures, charts, graphs, and tables to display information.
- Organize your proposal to reflect the grant guidelines.

- Include a table of contents, frequent headings and sub-headings, and topic sentences at the beginning of your paragraphs

Involving Stakeholders

A number of sources observed that many grant seekers make the mistake of finding a source of funding first, then trying to find or fit a project or program into the funder's priorities. Successful grant writers start with the identified need first, then seek the source of funding that best fits that need. Involving stakeholders, both internal and identified as an essential though often overlooked step. A federal website offered perhaps the clearest working explanation of the importance of engaging stakeholders, advising that community engagement in the form of letters of support is critical in the initial and subsequent review phases and that several months may be required to develop suitable letters of endorsement from top decision makers in the community. Engage them early was the best and most consistent advice. And don't surprise community supporters by not relaying all pertinent details, such as match.

Miscellaneous Best Practices

A number of sources included a glossary of terms, the most comprehensive of which was provided by Maricopa Community Colleges (2014). Posted on the college website, the glossary offers practitioners and novices alike a working list of key terms that apply to grant writing and grant management, such as allowable cost, award, budget, cycle, capital equipment, formative and summative evaluation, grantee, indirect costs and match. Accompanied by well-written definitions, the glossary items are concise, accurate, and accessible. An additional positive resource Maricopa provided to its internal

constituents was posting the College's Institutional Review Board structure and process. Long the province of research institutions and four-year colleges, IRBs are becoming increasingly part of the community college grant world, in part because some federal grant funding sources available to community colleges, most notably the National Science Foundation Advanced Technical Education program, mandate the creation and maintenance of an IRB as a condition of funding. IRBs are intended to protect the safety and privacy rights of human subjects in research; Maricopa does a good job explaining what their IRB is, what it isn't, and how it works. In a similar fashion, the Florida Department of Education (2014) posted links on its website to a series of bullet points primarily focused on budget management and business office procedures, a good model for practitioners to understand and to follow. Because higher education in Florida is organized according to a statewide system, federal grant management is a more centralized operation than it is in many other states, such as Michigan. Accordingly, the bullet points below represent best practice from the perspective of informing and standardizing practice across the entire district:

- Contracts, Grants & Procurement
- Auditing and Monitoring Resolutions
- Contracts, Grants & Procurement Links
- Contracts & Procurement Forms
- Grants Management
- Grants Management System (GMS)
- Green Book

Several community colleges provided links to their entire portfolio of active grants, including the award amounts, award cycle, and funding agency. Lansing Community College (2013) was a notable leader in this regard. LCC also included a grant-planning link, a fairly current list of grant funding sources, general grant-related resources, and a contact link for grants, along with the list of successful awards. The awards link did not reveal a remarkable track record of institutional grant activity or funding success, yet the aggregated list constituted a best practice from the standpoint of transparency, stewardship, and accountability to the public. It is surprising how few community colleges in the literature organize their resources to accomplish this function.

Many community colleges have established a grant development process to assist faculty and staff in the development of proposals from conceptualization to final submission. Grand Rapids Community College (GRCC) was notable in this regard, primarily due to a well-designed Grants Development Flowchart which documented the process and the key players involved (see Figure 2, below).

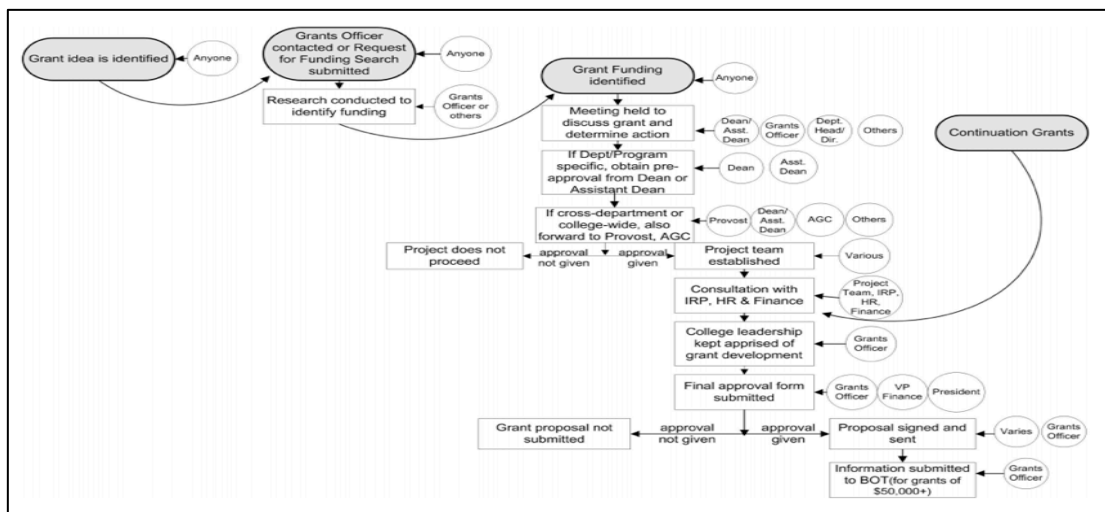


Figure 2: Grants Development Flowchart
 Source: Grand Rapids Community College, 2014

GRCC also publishes a comprehensive institutional Guide to Grant Management, with its most recent revision dated April 2013. Organized sequentially in six logical steps, the guide begins at the Award Letter and Contract Processing stage, and is perhaps the best example of similar institutional guides that focus more on post-award considerations than the process of writing and winning a grant. It is also interesting the manner in which the GRCC grants department narrowly defines its overall grant administrative responsibilities, confining its operations to a limited role.

According to the website boilerplate, management of grant projects is conducted by the project director assigned to the project during the development process. Financial management is provided by the business and financial staff. The Human Resources Department is responsible for the hiring process of new employees supported by grant funds. Time permitting, the Grants Department will assist project directors in solving problems ranging from interpretation of funding guidelines, funding agency nuances, and providing feedback on required reports.

Similar disclaimers by community college grant development staff limiting its role in the day-to-day management of grants post-award are seen periodically throughout the literature, representing perhaps an awareness of five factors well-known to practitioners on the ground: (1) general fund positions are more solid than soft money positions; (2) federal grants are highly time-consuming to manage; (3) grants can go awry in large and unpredictable ways; (4) funding eventually runs out (see #1); and (5) the high point in terms of local engagement, institutional optimism, and unfettered favorable response is often the day the award is announced. The hard work of untangling the details and breathing life into a new project starts the following day and extends through the end

of the funding cycle. References to strategies which project directors might employ to mitigate the effect of the sugar rush at the front end of the project in order to deliver inspired, sustained, long-range leadership to a federal grant project were not widely found in the literature.

Ivy Tech Community College demonstrated another example of miscellaneous best practice, offering to students, staff and the community three grant writing courses: *The Art of Grant Writing*, *Becoming a Grant Writing Consultant*, and *Grant Writing A-Z*. One of the course descriptions invites students to enter the exciting field of grant writing by learning how to raise needed funds and where to look for potential funders who are a good match for your organization. *Grantwriting 102: Tips from Successful Grantwriters* provides perhaps the most useful and succinct cautionary advice to aspiring federal grant seekers, noting that because it is the funder's money the grantee must follow their rules (Coffman & Dutro, 2006).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Research Framework

Because of the pragmatic intent of this dissertation product, a mixed methods research is implemented. Creswell (2003) describes in detail the features of mixed methods research as a pragmatic hybrid between the quantitative and qualitative paradigms, offering an attractive alternative that builds upon the strengths of both frameworks without the potential limitations associated with a single research methodology. Johnson and Onwuebuozie (2004) define mixed methods as a class of research in which the researcher combines qualitative and quantitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts, or language into a single study. Philosophically framed as a “third wave” that transcends paradigm wars by offering a logical, non-dogmatic solution, Cherryholmes (1992) and Murphy (1990) pragmatism consists of the following attributes:

- Pragmatism is not committed to any one system of philosophy and reality.
- Individual researchers have freedom of choice to choose the methods, techniques, and procedures that best meet their needs and purposes.
- Pragmatists do not see the world as an absolute unity. In a similar way, mixed methods researchers look to many approaches to collect and analyze data.
- Truth is what works at the time.
- Pragmatists look to the “what” and “how” to research based on its intended consequences.

- Pragmatists agree that research always occurs in social, historical, political and other contexts.
- Pragmatists are less concerned with reality and the laws of nature than identifying and studying sequential, concurrent, and transformative procedures within a research study.

Clark and Creswell (2008) describe mixed method research as both predetermined and emergent, involving open and close-end questions, multiple forms of data gathering, and statistical and data analytics. The researcher occupies a central role as a primary data gathering agent and bases knowledge claims on pragmatic grounds that are problem-centered, pluralistic, and outcomes-oriented. Data collection involves gathering quantifiable data as well as text information or narrative, thus creating a final database consisting of both quantitative and qualitative information. The primary focus of mixed methods research is describing how a process works, rather than documenting why or quantifying to what extent. Advocates for pragmatism reference its balanced approach, accommodation of empirical observation, and orientation toward a useful problem-solving application as notable characteristics all contributing toward a valuable capacity to generalize findings to a larger population or process. Critics find the approach too vague and too provisional in nature, arguing that the framework does not possess the philosophical foundation to disregard useful but non-true beliefs, nor does it present sufficient rigor to support any more than incremental change or insights. However, one could argue that it is not philosophically untenable for a pragmatist to concur with both advocates and critics, and that the most salient point is to move ahead. In this way the approach is well suited for the how-to guide proposed. Grant management requires

forward movement based on the best information available at the time. It aligns well with the pragmatic purpose of grants and the changeable environments grants create in which immediate and practical results are highly valued.

Research Design

Qualitative Elements: A Case Study framework with Ethnographic and Phenomenological elements is proposed. Inductive logic coupled with thick description throughout the document is employed, the purpose being to convey the programmatic language and mandates associated with federal grants as well as the self-contained, practical, problem-solving, application-oriented, human side of the process. Both aspects are important to understand in order to fully grasp the challenges and opportunities associated with obtaining federal training grants and documenting their effectiveness on trainee outcomes and learning.

Quantitative Elements: Federal training grants contain accountability metrics, all of which need to be defined as part of the grant development process. Formulating these metrics consists of a deductive thought process that correlates well with quantitative research methodology. Additionally, the tracking and reporting attainment of these measures, both formatively and summatively, generate data that allows a robust evaluation of the project to be conducted. Sorting through the details surrounding how trainee data is obtained, stored, processed, evaluated, and reported necessitates application of quantitative measures.

Mixed Measures Methodologies

The research approach is also informed by the principles outlined below:

Checklist Manifesto. In his bestselling treatise, *The Checklist Manifesto: How to Get Things Right*, surgeon and author Atul Gawande (2009) posits the fundamental and transformative significance of a deceptively simple technique, namely developing and following a working checklist to reduce the common problem of managing proliferating operational complexity. Inspired by a surgical case study in which chronic and deadly post-operative infections were dramatically reduced by the introduction of a simple checklist bringing proper hand cleaning procedures to a consistent, conscious level, Gawande illustrates through a range of additional case studies the simple, cheap, and transmissible power of following a checklist to achieve the following institutional benefits: (1) documents the minimum necessary steps; (2) verifies process flow; (3) creates discussion, discipline, and sign-off responsibilities among team members; (4) leads to a higher level of baseline performance; (5) prevents communication failures; (6) forces function, which is the action leading to the next step; (7) provides a structure to decentralize decision making; (8) allows the team to anticipate the unpredictable; (9) functions as a cognitive net; and (10) subverts the “Master Builder” role in which the sole possessor of the big picture allocates details to team members only on an as-needed basis, often leading to damaging, preventable mistakes due to distraction, taking shortcuts, faulty memory, or fatigue. The checklist structure applies to grant management for a number of similar reasons. Additionally, federal grant projects are notable for their timelines, deliverables, and multiple operations, all of which must be done concurrently if the project is to be managed effectively. A checklist developed by key team members and

widely distributed across project stakeholders is a highly effective tool for keep the project organized and on track across its entire life cycle. A working checklist also correlates well with the bullet point structure common to most grant applications. Similarly it is an adaptable working document very amenable to the purpose of embedding key concepts commonly associated with grant preparation, grant management, grant reporting, and grant closeout.

Leadership and Vision. Thought leaders such as Collins, Senge, Covey, and George each articulates leadership themes with vision as a central component. In *Good to Great*, Collins (2001) argues that greatness is a matter of conscious choice and discipline inspired by motivated leadership with vision. Self-described as an Idealistic Pragmatist, Senge's *The Fifth Discipline* (1990) describes five characteristics of a learning organization—systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, and team learning—with inspired leadership providing the capacity to understand the component parts of the larger, more complex system. In *The Seven Habits of Highly Successful People*, Stephen Covey (1989) advises leaders to start with the end in mind. In *True North*, George (2007) debunks the myth of the superhero top executive, focusing instead on interviews with leaders who describe how their failures, personal tragedies, and setbacks shaped them as leaders.

Former Maricopa Community College Dean Dr. Gary Filan (2004) outlines a path to transformational leadership through his popular Chair Academy seminar series for post-secondary educational leaders. Delivered to thousands of trainees worldwide, topics covered include the complex role of the organizational leader, leading and managing effective teams and work groups, strategic planning, managing conflict and engaging in

crucial conversations, and leadership strengths and dimensions. A notable feature of the series has each trainee creating an Individual Professional Development Plan; a similar constructivist strategy is often built into the trainee learning plans of many federal workplace projects.

Constructivism. There is no denying that Behaviorism is firmly rooted in the instructional mainstream. Carlile & Jordan (2009) observe that learners at all levels have experienced the traditional classroom instructional pedagogy in which teachers direct the learning process requiring the correct response, doling out external rewards (grades), the learning process is sequential and linear, and planning comes from the top down. Experts of the knowledge are critical in this paradigm and the goal is delivery of pre-selected knowledge. Though observation and experience makes the empirical case for Behaviorism, it does not necessarily follow that widespread use of a commonly applied learning methodology makes it the proper tool for every circumstance. Constructivism has its place and it resides at the center of learning. Within the Constructivist model, learners are not passive recipients but actively participate in their learning process with the instructor as the mediator or facilitator of the process (Carswell, 2001).

Constructivists believe that independent exploration by students will lead to a deeper understanding of the material and so represents a learner-centered approach, a primary goal of which is to create a meaningful environment that includes communication and collaboration. Gold (2001) notes that though we may more or less share one reality, each of us conceives of it in different ways based on our prior experiences, belief structures and perspective.

Doolittle (1999) observes that Constructivists believe that knowledge acquisition occurs based upon four assumptions:

1. Learning involves active cognitive processing.
2. Learning is adaptive.
3. Learning is both subjective and objective.
4. Learning involves both social/cultural and individual processes.

Many researchers note that a Constructivist model is highly applicable to adult learning theory, a body of knowledge very applicable to working with trainees on a federal workforce training grant. Online delivery is also a prominent feature of many federal workforce investments, including the TAACCCT grants. The Constructivist teacher focuses on the process of learning and gives many opportunities to express understanding, considering that a primary goal in constructing knowledge is the application of the learning in an immediate and meaningful way. For example, discussion board posts serve as learning artifacts, collaborative springboards for additional learning, and shared development of a learning community, all characteristics of Constructivist theory. Factual knowledge is important, yet passing an exam is secondary to the products of learning that are shared in the learning community (Gold, 2001).

Doolittle (1999) also stresses the importance of an active learning environment for online students, built on these recommendations:

- Learning should take place in authentic and real-world environments.
- Learning should involve social negotiation and mediation.
- Content and skills should be made relevant to the learner.

- Teachers serve primarily as guides and facilitators of learning.
- Teachers should provide for and encourage multiple perspectives and representations of content.
- Content and skills should be understood within the framework of the learner's prior knowledge.
- Students should be assessed formatively, serving to inform future learning experiences.
- Students should be encouraged to become self-regulatory, self-motivated, and self-aware.

In summary, Constructivism has a place at the center of online instructional design and delivery, as it does in the traditional classroom, and it aligns with the learner-centered model advocated by O'Banion (1997) and others.

Transformative Teaching

Federal workforce training grants, particularly those funded by the United States Department of Labor, are traditionally focused on stimulating innovative solutions for retraining hard-to-serve adults such as displaced workers, then tracking workers back into employment according to common measures applied across their range of investments. Consequently, effective projects should possess working knowledge of adult learning theory and practice, a body of literature built largely on constructivist models. For example, Mezirow's *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning* (1991) presents a theory of adult learning that derives from learners making meaning of their experiences. In *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning* (1994), Cranton describes pedagogical strategies designed to engage adults in transformative learning, including

questioning techniques, consciousness raising exercises, experiential activities, and facilitating the development of cohort models. In *Transformative Teaching*, Johnson and Chesley (2013) elevate the discourse related to fundamental transformative concepts by framing a productive debate model in which influential thought leaders make arguments in favor of or opposition to key pedagogical issues. Reflection in the form of weekly web postings and journaling is encouraged as a key component of transformative engagement by these two researchers. In support of transformative teaching, or perhaps as an early champion of it, Dewey stated that in order to discover the meaning of an idea, its consequences must be studied (1948).

Grants are intended to be transformative and disruptive to the status quo. Studying the consequences of that idea is the purpose of this dissertation.

CHAPTER 4: GETTING STARTED

Introduction

In 2011 Alpena Community College was awarded a \$2,835,000 three-year TAACCCT grant from the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment, and Training Administration. It was one of a handful of stand-alone (non-consortium) awards nationally and represented the largest non-construction federal grant ACC had ever received in its 60-year history. The focus of ACC's proposal was creating five curricular tracks in sustainability and green jobs, an expressed priority of the Obama administration, and it was the natural culmination of two other sizeable DOL/ETA national grants—a \$1.9 million Community-Based Job Training Grant (2007) and a \$1.5 million H-1B Technical Skills training grant (2004)—obtained and managed by the college. In 2007 DOL awarded its national recognition of excellence award for training the nation's 21st Century workforce to ACC, which fit well in the section related to project management. The TAACCCT proposal took about 10 weeks of fully focused effort to pull together. Having been funded before by DOL helped considerably, though the TAACCCT SGA, being a highly-visible Obama Administration initiative, involved a sort of arranged hybrid marriage between traditional DOL metrics of trainees served, trainees entering employment, trainees entering employment related to training, wage increases, and Secretary Arne Duncan's U.S. Department of Education-led priorities such as establishing control groups to evaluate program success and referencing pertinent

workforce development research in the proposal. The proposal was very challenging to construct. Within the RFP there were at least 125 bullet points to address, each representing a required component of the project, with five points available if a case could be made regionally for significant TAA impact—TAA being the federal program that pays for worker retraining if a case is made that an employer closed due to foreign competition.

One hundred points were available in five categories and the entire document, minus the budget and budget narrative, had to fit in a 30-page limit. Writing a grant proposal of this size and complexity is less about a writing exercise—maybe 20 percent of the effort—and more about integrating a vision for what an applicant is committing to do and how it aligns with the funder’s vision, thinking through all possible internal and external impediments that may arise if funding is awarded, pulling a coalition of the willing together, keeping that group together through a sort of force of will and credibility, matching the budget request to the scope of work, feeling the urgency of getting going and getting it done, and understanding the peril of managing large amounts of federal dollars with little or no safety net.

Here are some common mistakes to avoid: (1) committing to something in the grant that an applicant has no intention of doing or capacity institutionally to pull off, just to make the proposal sound more substantial; (2) committing other partners, such as employers, to activities that don’t suit their needs; (3) being loose on match, especially as it relates to the very important distinction between in-kind (i.e., “non-cash”) and hard or cash match; (4) failing to think through the equipment line item and falling short there; (5) not budgeting enough to cover fringe costs on all grant-funded personnel; (6) not

being realistic about meeting timelines for deliverables—the project director has to assume that each of these mistakes, or some combination thereof, will be revealed at some point along the way to the attentive federal project officer or even worse to his more scary relation, the aggressive federal auditor, when it’s too late to do anything about it; (7) not being sensitive to the disruptive effect a large, well-funded grant project welded onto the internal functions of the college has on general fund staff and processes; (8) not preparing for the end of the grant, especially as it relates to grant-funded personnel; and (9) losing heart and running out of steam.

Below is a table outlining federal workforce training grants obtained by ACC since 2004.

Table 1: Alpena Community College: Federal Workforce Training Grants

FEDERAL GRANTS AWARDED TO ALPENA COMMUNITY COLLEGE	FUNDING SOURCE AWARD AMOUNT
U.S. Department of Labor, TAACCCT grant (2014-2018)	\$2.5 million
U.S. Department of Labor, TAACCCT grant (2011-2014)	\$2.835 million
National Science Foundation, ATE grant	\$200,000
U.S. Department of Labor, CBJTG grant (2008-2011)	\$1.83 million
U.S. Department of Labor, H-1B grant (2004-2007)	\$1.5 million
Total (2004-present)	\$8.865 million

Source: Alpena Community College, 2014

The advantages of getting a large federal grant can be numerous. Federal grants can fund development of a new program. ACC piloted a new Associate in Applied Science degree in Marine Technology that has created considerable local, regional, and national interest, for example. In partnership with Consumers Energy, DTE, Michigan Works!, and the Michigan National Guard and Reserves, the College using TAACCCT

funding piloted a national training model for retraining veterans in the gas and energy sectors. This project received national attention, including interest from a White House committee on veteran's training issues. The Consumers Energy and DTE foundations are both donors to ACC's Electrical Power Technology Center capital campaign, a case for support that is easier for the College to make based upon institutional efforts on behalf of business sector partners in development of the unique training program referenced above. Additionally, equipment dollars can be substantial in a federal training grant; ACC's TAACCCT grant had \$450,000 in equipment, for example. A large federal grant allows the introduction of brainpower, ambition, and urgency into the target areas written into the proposal, an infusion of talent and energy, which can be beneficial to any organization. An approved indirect cost recovery rate between 8-15 percent helps the business office. On a multi-million dollar grant, that adds up. Finally, aspects of the College mission can be addressed in a focused, robust way using federal seed money that leads to further opportunities that may not have been part of the original grant proposal but reveal themselves during the funding cycle. Large federal grants present many challenges to the community colleges that successfully land them. Here is just a short list:

- They require ongoing management attention, and sustained focus on details, deadlines, and deliverables.
- They are not free money.
- Grants fund what the funding agency wants to fund, not a wish list generated by the College.
- Much time and energy can be spent on landing a grant, with the odds against success.
- They often exist on the far edge of the College's core mission and activities.

- Because grants sometime do not operate at the core of the College mission, their operation and management can lead to a sort of bubble activity on the periphery that does not alter College DNA as much as it might.
- Transition for staff at the end of a grant can be very challenging.
- Innovation funded under the grant costs money to sustain and many resource-strapped institutions do not have the General Fund dollars available in the budget to support grant-stimulated growth after grant funding goes away.

As noted in the introduction, over \$350 billion in grant funding is available each year, just on the federal level alone. With traditional sources of revenue on the decline, grant writing and grant management has become an increasingly important component of many community college business models. A common understanding of grant-related terms is helpful to this process.

Glossary of Terms

Advisory Committee

Definition: An advisory committee is comprised of high level stakeholders and currently active practitioners who provide guidance on key issues such as grant implementation, curriculum development and validation, marketing, resource allocation, and trainee recruitment.

Personal reflection: Advisory committees are the preferred oversight structure on federal grants.

Allowable Cost

Definition: A cost for which an institution or agency may be reimbursed under a grant or contract with a governmental agency.

Personal reflection: The boundary around this concept is the definition of compliance. A good project manager wants to stay within its borders. Beyond the perimeter lurks the menacing disallowed cost (see under item D).

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

Definition: Enacted in 1990, The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in employment, transportation, public accommodation, communications, and governmental activities.

Personal reflection: Project managers of federal grants need to understand ADA requirements and comply with them. Developers of online content funded by a federal grant should review Section 508, a range of accommodations for the visually and hearing-impaired.

Appropriation

Definition: Legislation enacted by U.S. Congress that establishes a federal activity.

Personal reflection: The source of a grant-funding stream. Anglers of federal grant funding need to become familiar with this watershed.

Audit

Definition: A formal examination and verification of financial accounts.

Personal reflection: Audit is one of those rare words that functions as both noun and verb. It's a noun when the audit is scheduled, a verb when the auditors are here.

Award

Definition: Funds provided by an external funding source for support of a project. This term applies to both the original award and supplements.

Personal reflection: The focus of all activities, then the fulcrum for subsequent work after the award is made.

Award Letter

Definition: Written notification from the funding agency indicating that a project has been funded, start and end dates, and amount funded.

Personal reflection: Nothing starts until this letter arrives.

Basic 9130

Definition: The quarterly financial reporting form used by the United States Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration's grantees.

Personal reflection: A practical form of good design.

Best Practice

Definition: An audit term used by federal monitors to describe a unique and favorable practice.

Personal reflection: Best practices are the currency and reward of good grant work.

Budget

Definition: The spending plan for a proposal or award, submitted to and approved by the funding source. After the award, the approved budget becomes a spending guide for the project.

Personal reflection: Start every grant proposal with the budget.

Budget amendment or grant modification

Definition: Changes made to the project budget, generally requiring funding source written approval.

Personal reflection: Federal grants often follow an unwritten rule allowing project directors to reallocate resources as needed between non-personnel line items without having to submit a formal modification request if the dollars involved account for less than 20 percent of the line item in either direction. Personnel expenditures are exempt from this general rule.

Budget Category

Definition: A portion of the budget designated for certain types of expenditures such as salaries, fringe benefits, travel, equipment, materials and supplies, contractual support, other miscellaneous charges, and indirect costs.

Personal reflection: Start with personnel. Also, if the College doesn't have a federally approved indirect cost rate, get started on obtaining one.

Budget Cycle

Definition: The annual fiscal year, which often correlates to when funding sources will make their grants.

Personal reflection: Misalignment between the fiscal year of the funder and the grantee often leads to transition complexities on the back end of an award.

Budget Narrative

Definition: A written description providing context to grant line item requests.

Personal Reflection: Keep the budget narrative clear and concise.

Carry forward or carryover

Definition: An unobligated balance from a prior award year which the funding source approves to be added to the subsequent Award budget.

Personal reflection: Many federal grants are multi-year projects, often three years. Carryover becomes a key concept allowing unspent funds to roll over into the next budget year. Carryover does not extend beyond the award cycle, however, unless an extension is obtained.

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA)

Definition: A numbering system that tracks federal grant and loan programs available from federal agencies.

Personal reflection: Keep track of the CFDA number on all promising programs. If you get to the point of completing a Standard Form 424, a mandatory step in applying for a federal grant, you will need to list the CFDA number.

Certification

Definition: Awardees are required to provide signed assurance of compliance with certain grant requirements as part of the grant submission package. Federal grants, for example, require certifications related to conflict of interest, debarment and suspension, delinquent federal debt, drug-free workplace, lobbying, and misconduct in science.

Personal reflection: Signing off on certifications feels like federal boilerplate, yet periodically the stipulations snag grantees that ignore them. Don't make this mistake.

Collective bargaining

Definition: A negotiation between an employer and union representatives.

Personal reflection: Depending upon contract language, personnel funded by a grant may or may not become members of a bargaining unit. This status becomes an important point especially at the end a grant when bumping rights may be activated by staff seeking to stay on after the grant funding cycle ends. To the degree possible, the aspiring grant writer should think through these issues before and during the grant-writing phase.

Co-mingling of Funds

Definition: Mixing funds from more than one source in the same grant budget account.

Personal reflection: Not an allowable activity, easily caught by an auditor.

Competitive Grant

Definition: Competitive grant programs require applicants to submit an application to obtain funds. Depending on a range of factors, including the quality of the application and its alignment to the program goals of the funder, the grant may be funded.

Personal reflection: The process at times can feel like a total crapshoot. Thinking that way, however, doesn't help you get funded.

Conflict of Interest

Definition: Using a vendor who is a member of your family or a personal friend.

Personal reflection: Not as easily caught by an auditor, but an area of early inquiry during most federal audits. The best firewall against accusations of conflict of interest is a robust procurement process with clear and objective criteria.

Consortium Project

Definition: A partnership in which key personnel from different institutions have substantial involvement in the development and performance of the project. The funding source makes only one award to a lead institution that issues subcontracts or sub-grants to the other collaborating institutions.

Personal reflection: A signature feature of the TAACCCT grant program. Ambitious design, large scale, challenging to manage.

Consultant or Contractor

Definition: An individual whose expertise is required for the project.

Personal reflection: See #18. The reason many auditors look at the Contractual line item first is to get a quick read on the judgment and integrity of the project director. Audit concerns revealed early on tend to spread across the full span of management control.

Continuation/renewal proposal

Definition: Additional funding for projects beyond the original grant period.

Personal reflection: Not common on federal grants. No-cost extensions, in which no additional dollars but up to one additional year is granted, are more common.

Contract

Definition: An agreement to acquire services that benefit the project.

Personal reflection: Contracts normally contain: (1) detailed financial and legal requirements with a specific statement of work to be performed; (2) specific set of deliverables; (3) time-based parameters for the delivery of service; (4) rate of compensation; and (5) a clause relating the benefits of the project to the funding source and the college in the case of federal grants. Contracts take time to properly execute. Project managers need to keep this in mind, particularly as employer partners seek to move ahead quickly and use grant funds on trainers they favor.

Copyright

Definition: A statement of legal control over a document, video, or piece of intellectual property (usually by its author) that requires anyone seeking to reproduce the document to first obtain permission of the copyright holder.

Personal reflection: Intellectual property is complicated ground for non-attorneys to travel. Fold in the stipulation that many federal agencies now mandate open sharing of content developed by grant funding, and you have very murky terrain. Proceed cautiously.

Costs, Fixed

Definition: Institutional costs that are known, consistent, and generally predictable, such as the salary schedule and fringe benefits established in a collective bargaining agreement.

Personal reflection: Grants may involve unpredictable costs that are not fixed. This is part of the reason why Chief Financial Officers view them very warily.

Costs, Mandated

Definition: Costs borne by an institution that are required by statutory mandate, such as contribution to the State public school employee retirement pension fund.

Personal reflection: In 2004, Alpena Community College's contribution to the Michigan Public Schools Employee Retirement System (MPSERS) was 12 percent of total employee wages. By FY13, it had risen to 27 percent. The College has a statutory mandate to contribute the same share to the public school employee retirement system on personnel employed by the College on a federal grant as it does on General Fund employees. This means that the fringes line item on a federal grant represents considerable downside financial risk to the College if all mandated (and non-mandated) costs are not accurately factored into the budget.

Cost Share

Definition: Portion of project or program costs not borne by the funding source

Personal reflection: A complicated area with many accounting complexities. See "Match."

Deadline

Definition: Date and time by which grant applications must be submitted.

Personal reflection: Grant writing can become a superstitious business. For a number of years, for example, this author chose to drive 14 hours one way to deliver federal grants to the appropriate Washington agency by hand, rather than submit via grants.gov or trust the mail. Because the outcome on those grants trended favorably, the practice became embedded and part of the deadline process. For those less obsessed, pay attention to whether the deadline is to be received at the agency or postmarked by the deadline. If an overnight delivery service is used, always gets a receipt, just in case the document goes missing or is delivered to the wrong office. Arguably, there is no worse feeling than spending hundreds of hours on a proposal and missing the deadline. There are many unfortunate ways this can happen, but most boil down to not planning ahead with the deadline in mind.

Direct Cost

Definition: Expenses which can be itemized to a particular line item, such as salaries, supplies, travel, equipment, etc.

Personal reflection: The most manageable aspect of grant management.

Disallowed Cost

Definition: Expenditures questioned in an audit as not allowable for the project that may result in repayment to the funding source.

Personal reflection: Trouble.

Dissemination

Definition: A plan to let colleagues, peer organizations, and stakeholders know about the results of a grant project.

Personal reflection: Think big. Getting the word out can help lay the groundwork for the next grant.

Double Dipping

Definition: Obtaining revenue from two different sources, typically in an illicit way.

Personal reflection: Use common sense. For example, a grant program that covers all expenses associated with developing and delivering a new training program is unlikely to allow the grantee to charge tuition reimbursement to the grant. It happens, but rarely. Don't be greedy.

DUNS Number

Definition: Identification number required for federal proposals that allows the College business office to draw down funds electronically. Each college has a unique DUNS number.

Personal reflection: The Standard Form 424 has a box for the DUNS number; therefore, obtaining the number is mandatory for submitting a federal grant. Consult the Business Office, which should have the number on file.

Encumbered

Definition: An accounting term meaning a liability, contract, purchase order, or payroll commitment that is chargeable to an account. It ceases to be an encumbrance when paid-out or when the actual liability amount is determined and recorded as an expense.

Personal reflection: Encumbrances become tricky near the end of the grant cycle, particularly if a project manager attempts to expend remaining funds in a flurry of last-minute purchases to avoid turning money back to the funder. This is poor practice that creates stress and audit vulnerability for the Business Office.

Environmental scan

Definition: Identification of outside forces that will influence the budget.

Personal reflection: A SWOT analysis is a good strategic planning tool to assess the fit between an institution and a funding opportunity.

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)

Definition: The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) is responsible for enforcing federal laws that make it illegal to discriminate against a job applicant or an employee because of the person's race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy), national origin, age (40 or older), disability or genetic information.

Personal reflection: Refresh yourself on College policy regarding EEO compliance before a monitoring visit.

Equipment

Definition: An article of property not permanently attached to buildings or grounds that has an acquisition cost of \$5,000 or more and a life expectancy of more than one year.

Personal reflection: Equipment is an area of considerable opportunity for community colleges operating federal grants. However, the opportunity needs to be thought through carefully during the proposal development stage because it is far easier to obtain equipment line item approval as part of the overall budget approved in the initial award than it is to modify the grant after the award has been made.

Evaluation Plan

Definition: An evaluation plan explains how an applicant plans to measure the results of their proposed program.

Personal reflection: The evaluation plan is built into the proposal in most cases.

External Evaluator

Definition: External evaluation is required by many federal grant programs. External evaluators are professionals or a team of professionals external to the project with the background and credentials to evaluate the project based on the Statement of Work.

Personal Reflection: Not your friend, not your foe. A considerable amount can be learned from a good evaluation team.

Federal Project Officer

Definition: The federal field officer assigned to oversee the grantee's day-to-day management of a federal grant.

Personal Reflection: An important relationship to cultivate and maintain.

Federal Register

Definition: Contains the final guidelines and administrative regulations of federal programs.

Personal Reflection: A federal grant opportunity is not official until it appears in the federal register. Deciphering the text contained therein is an acquired skill.

Financial Reporting

Definition: A quarterly report generated on a standard federal form called a 9130, which documents grant-funded expenditures accrued during the quarter.

Personal reflection: Don't be late submitting the 9130. It is generally due 45 days after the end of the quarter.

Finding(s)

Definition: Any error, exception, deviation or deficiency noted by an auditor as a result of an examination of audit evidence.

Personal reflection: On federal grants, findings require corrective action.

Formative Evaluation

Definition: Project evaluation that is conducted during the implementation of the project activities. Results are used to assess progress, identify potential or actual problems, and formulate and implement corrective action.

Personal reflection: A good evaluative structure that helps to establish benchmarks and baselines.

Fringe Benefits

Definition: The personnel cost to an institution beyond wages and salary paid to employees, often including benefits such as life and health insurance, retirement, unemployment compensation and workers compensation.

Personal reflection: Benefit packages change yearly which presents a challenge to the grant writer. Fringe benefits on grant-funded projects is a key area and one in which budgeting mistakes often are made. The goal should always be to build enough into the Fringes line item that the general fund of the College is unaffected by payroll to grant-funded personnel.

Fiscal Year

Definition: A period that a company or government uses for accounting purposes and preparing financial statements.

Personal reflection: The federal fiscal year runs from October 1 through September 30.

General Fund

Definition: The checkbook of the College.

Personal reflection: Grant accounts reside in the Restricted Fund. A management error requiring general fund dollars to be transferred to cover grant expenditures is bad news.

Grant

Definition: An award of financial assistance, the principal purpose of which is to transfer a thing of value from a federal agency to a recipient to carry out a public purpose of support or stimulation authorized by a law of the United States.

Personal reflection: A contract with the federal government to provide a service both parties deem useful. Whether or not the applicant is awarded grant funding will depend on the quality of the application and alignment of the proposal to the priorities of the funder.

Grant Application

Definition: The instructions developed by a funding source.

Personal reflection: For federal projects, the grant application package is found in the Federal Register.

Grants.gov

Definition: A web portal for use in electronic submission of grants to federal agencies.

Personal reflection: Get registered early. Don't wait until the deadline.

Grantee

Definition: Recipient of a grant.

Personal reflection: The offspring of a successful union between vision and effort.

Grant Proposal

Definition: A technical document written to secure funding to accomplish a predetermined set of objectives. Typically, grant proposals are written in response to a grant application or set of instructions and must be submitted by a specific deadline.

Personal reflection: Most grant competitions are very competitive, especially on the federal level. It takes skill and persistence to win an award in this environment, plus an element of good luck.

Grantor

Definition: The funding source that provides funds to carry out projects.

Personal reflection: Learn all you can about the funder.

Grant Writer

Definition: The principal author of a grant proposal.

Personal reflection: Try to approach each project as an interesting challenge.

Human Subjects Research

Definition: Research and grants projects involving human participants. The protection of Human Subjects is overseen by the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Personal reflection: IRBs are required by National Science Foundation, Advanced Technical Education grants.

Indirect Costs

Definition: Overhead and administrative costs which cannot be identified specifically with a particular line item or grant activity, such as library resources, building maintenance, procurements, payroll, and related business office functions. A negotiated indirect cost approved by a cognizant federal agency is used for all federally funded projects, and is generally allocated as a percentage of specific direct costs.

Personal reflection: Low fruit for the College.

Implementation Plan

Definition: A management tool that illustrates critical steps in project start-up, also a map or a guide to identify and respond to early challenges.

Personal reflection: Approach this carefully and realistically.

Institutional Review Board

Definition: Responsible for Human Subjects Research protection by reviewing, making determinations, and certifying exempt and nonexempt grant funded projects and research studies.

Personal reflection: Good templates for creating IRBs are available at larger community colleges.

Key Personnel

Definition: Primary leadership in a grant project such as the Project Director or Principal and Co-Investigators.

Personal reflection: Funding agencies want to deal with a single point of contact.

Match

Definition: Cash or "in-kind" support contributed by the grantee or other project partners, such as employers, to help fulfill objectives of project. The amount needed varies with the program.

Personal Reflection: On programs in which a substantial percentage of match is required, in-kind match versus hard match (cash) often makes or breaks the deal with project partners, especially employers. Look at the RFP for match requirements early in the process. Above all, be straight with employers about their expected commitment in this regard.

Modification Request

Definition: A formal request in writing by the grantee to changes the terms of a grant agreement.

Personal reflection: Use sparingly but judiciously.

Monitoring Visit

Definition: The ongoing assessment of the progress of grant-funded activities by a representative of the funding agency with the objective of determining if the terms and conditions of the grant are being met and if the goal of the grant is likely to be achieved.

Personal reflection: Picture a very thorough physical exam.

National Office

Definition: On federal grant, the group responsible for implementing a grant program at the national level.

Personal reflection: Due to their proximity to Congressional oversight, urgent requests for data occasionally come from the National Office, and not always through the project officer field structure. Don't play one side against the other.

Needs Assessment

Definition: A process for identifying and quantifying problems and critical areas.

Personal reflection: Need is more than whining.

No-cost extension

Definition: A request to extend the grant period with no additional funds.

Personal reflection: This request makes sense when there is a substantial fund balance left in the award.

Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circulars

Definition: Regulatory circulars issued by the Office of Management & Budget (OMB) that govern federal grant compliance.

Personal reflection: The most pertinent to managers of federal grants is likely OMB Circular A-21 which defines allowable costs as those that are the following: (1) reasonable, (2) allocable to the project, (3) given consistent treatment by the generally accepted accounting procedures, and (4) conform to any limitation or exclusions set forth by the sponsored agreement or OMB Circular A-21.

Other

Definition: Other direct costs refer to expenditures that are allowed as a direct charge to a sponsored project.

Personal reflection: A line item allowed in federal grants in which miscellaneous costs, such as marketing or outreach, which do not fit into other categories may be placed.

Personnel

Definition: People employed in an organization or engaged in an organized undertaking.

Personal reflection: The most important resource in a grant-funded project.

Procurement

Definition: The act of obtaining or buying goods and services.

Personal reflection: An activity requiring a consistent, defensible process and careful attention to detail, particularly in the development of specifications and the evaluation of vendor bid documents.

Program Income

Definition: Revenue, such as tuition and fee income or tuition reimbursement, deriving to a grantee from grant-funded activities.

Personal reflection: Exercise caution and restraint. Ensure that program income from a grant can be distinguished from other non-grant revenue streams. It is often advisable to segregate grant-funded program income from General Fund pools for the duration of the award cycle because National Office rulings on tracking program income occasionally are issued after awards are made.

Project Abstract

Definition: The purpose of the abstract is to describe succinctly every major piece of the proposed project.

Personal reflection: Sometimes used interchangeably with the project summary, sometimes not, the abstract contains tag words that show up as unique identifiers on web searches. Keep this application in mind while writing the abstract.

Project Director

Definition: A project manager is responsible for the planning, organization, resource management, and successful completion of a specific project or grant.

Personal reflection: Also referenced as the Principal Investigator in programs involving research such as NSF grants, the Project Director has the primary responsibility for providing project management on a grant, along with members of the advisory team, other key personnel involved in the grant, and senior administration from the organization receiving the grant. It is a challenging, multi-faceted role.

Project Management

Definition: Project management is the application of knowledge, skills, and techniques to execute projects effectively and efficiently.

Personal reflection: Very challenging, interesting work.

Project Narrative

Definition: Commonly referenced in federal RFPs as the non-budget component of a grant proposal.

Personal reflection: Always keep in mind that the proposal will be read by a reviewer. If the proposal is boring or poorly written, the reviewer will likely see it the same way and judge accordingly.

Project Summary

Definition: A two-page synopsis of the proposal required by many federal grant programs.

Personal reflection: Write this piece last, but take time and care in crafting it because the summary sells the proposal to a reviewer. It likely will be what the reviewer reads first. If a grant writer finds it difficult to boil down the proposal to a concise two-page summary, it is a sign that the proposal is too complicated or unfocused. Heed that sign.

Reporting Requirements

Definition: Performance and fiscal requirements established by the funding source. On most federal grants, quarterly performance and financial reports are required. The project director is responsible for the performance report and the Controller is responsible for producing and submitting financial reports.

Personal reflection: Reporting is a key management function. The project director must pay close attention to this essential task.

Request for Proposal (RFP)

Definition: Also known as an SGA (Solicitation for Grant Applications) an RFP is an announcement by an agency that it is soliciting grant proposals. The RFP typically contains detailed information about the program and guidelines for developing the written proposal.

Personal reflection: Learn the language of the RFP at a deep level.

Quasi-Scientific Research Model

Definition: Evaluation methodology used by some agencies that requires comparison of program participants with a similar non-participating group.

Personal reflection: Commonly referenced as a comparison cohort methodology, the approach is part of the TAACCCT evaluation process.

Restricted Funds

Definition: Funds that must be kept segregated from the General Fund and only be used for specific purposes, such as grants.

Personal reflection: Restricted funds often carry risk that the Business Office cannot fully grasp or manage.

Revenue Streams

Definition: Revenue sources that fund the institution, the services it provides, and employment of the staff providing those services.

Personal reflection: Finding new funding streams is an enticing challenge, not easily accomplished, and the source of much grant chasing activity.

Reviewer(s)

Definition: A group or panel that evaluates the quality of proposals and scores them for the funding agency.

Personal reflection: Visualize reviewers as fair-minded readers familiar with the RFP and prepare the proposal accordingly. The rest is out of your control.

Single Point of Contact

Definition: Under Executive Order 12372, some states require federal grant applicants to submit a copy of their application for state government level review and comment.

Personal reflection: Check how your state handles this early in the process. It is a very bad surprise to realize a few days before deadline that your state requires this review. In Michigan, on non-construction federal grants, single point of contact sign-off is not required. However, on federal grants involving construction and facilities upgrades, sign-off is required.

Soft Money

Definition: A term commonly used in reference to grant funds and grant-funded activities.

Personal reflection: Not a term many grant-funded personnel use, however, due to its occasionally pejorative application by General Fund-supported personnel.

Standard Form 424

Definition: The Application for Assistance form required for all federal grants.

Personal reflection: There are 18 blocks of information on the SF-424. It is not an overly complicated form to complete; yet the smart grant writer should not wait until the last minute to get started.

Standard Form 424a

Definition: The budget form required for all non-construction federal grants.

Personal reflection: The budget narrative and the line items in the SF-424a must match. Make sure this is the case. Because reviewers often start with the budget, if the budget narrative in the grant proposal and SF 424a line items do not align, the entire proposal is compromised.

Start-up Conference

Definition: First meeting between the funder and grantees.

Personal reflection: A great opportunity to meet other grantees and to identify and connect with key personnel from the National Office. Don't waste time fretting over the challenges ahead. Stay positive and network.

Stakeholder

Definition: A person with an interest or concern in the project.

Personal reflection: Stakeholder sounds like a jargon term, but picture all the key players and those are the stakeholders.

Statement of Work

Definition: The contract statement between the funder and the grantee negotiated after the award is announced.

Personal reflection: Depending on the grant program, negotiating the SOW may be fairly straightforward or take considerable time. Take the time it requires and stay professional.

Stewardship

Definition: The obligation to be a responsible caretaker of grant funds

Personal reflection: The primary responsibility of the Project Director.

Summative Evaluation

Definition: Final evaluation completed at the conclusion of the entire grant period. It focuses on whether project goals and objectives were met.

Personal reflection: If the relationship between the project staff and external evaluator has gone well, the final report should contain few surprises.

Supplanting

Definition: Illegal use of grant funds to pay for ongoing non-grant activities.

Personal reflection: Easily caught if key personnel allocated to fulltime on a grant document less than fulltime hours to that purpose. Less apparent if key personnel continue to perform some or all of the key functions they were performing prior to the grant award, but now are funded by the grant.

Supplies

Definition: An allowable expenditure defined as costing less than \$5000 per item.

Personal reflection: In many ways the most straightforward grant management practice, complexities occasionally arise when grant funding is overlaid across existing benefit programs. In the TAACCCT grants, for example, course texts using the supplies line item cannot be purchased with grant funds because TAA-eligible recipients already receive that benefit.

Title

Definition: A major section of a piece of legislation.

Personal reflection: For example, Title III, Part A, Section 311-315 of the Higher Education Act of 1965, created funding for institutions of higher education which includes community colleges to submit competitive grant applications to the U.S. Department of Education for innovation, facilities upgrades, and enhancement to student services.

Travel

Definition: Funding to travel on official business.

Personal reflection: Travel has a high audit profile. Extravagance in this area is not wise.

Unfunded mandates

Definition: Orders that induce responsibility, action, compliance, or procedure imposed by constitutional, administrative, executive, or judicial action.

Personal reflection: A requirement without dollars by an agency with teeth. Federal stipulations that apply to the General Fund operations of an applicant, such as ADA and EEOC, extend to grantee activities as well.

Unsolicited Proposal

Definition: A proposal to perform tasks that are not the results of an RFP announced by the agency.

Personal reflection: At least in regards to federal grant opportunities, generally a waste of time to pursue.

Workforce Development

Definition: A core community college mission focused on delivery of training, retraining, career preparation, and local and regional economic development.

Personal reflection: Connecting the dots.

Workforce System

Definition: The public workforce system is a network of federal, state, and local offices that function to support economic expansion and develop the talent of our nation's workforce. In order to meet the challenge of the 21st century global economy, the public workforce system works in partnership with employers, educators, and community leaders to foster economic development and high-growth opportunities in regional economies. This system exists to help businesses find qualified workers to meet their present and future workforce needs.

Personal reflection: When Higher Education and the Workforce System work effectively together, everyone wins.

Environmental Scan: Aligning Grand Funding with Institutional Mission

Grant writing guides consistently reference as best practice linking the pursuit of a grant to advancing institutional mission. This is absolutely true. Chasing external funding should be tied to the goals of the college with mission driving the activity, not the other way around. A number of effective environmental scanning tools can help determine whether a funding opportunity aligns with the strategic goals and mission of the College. A traditional Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) approach provides a good framework for this situational analysis. Here's one from Alpena Community College.

Strengths:

Alpena Community College has numerous and significant strengths.

- Sixty years of service.
- The College has served NE Lower Michigan for 60 years with thousands of graduates still in the region or connected to the College through alumni outreach.
- History of community engagement, pass millage campaigns.
- The College has consistently passed millages, most recently a 10-year operating millage by a 60-40 margin.

- Capital campaigns.
- The College has engaged in four capital campaigns during the past 15 years, each reaching or exceeding its community fundraising targets.
- Remote location, only institution of higher education within 100 miles. The College has no real competition in this region. A small branch campus, located sixty miles south of main campus on the former Wurtsmith Air Force Base, is operated by the College.
- Premier occupational programs in concrete technology, utility technology, nursing, and marine technology. These programs are part of the College's brand and represent key and ongoing outreach into business and industry and the community at large.
- High graduation rate, good success as transfer students.
- Third highest graduation rate among Michigan community colleges, evidence of good performance by transfer students at four-year universities compared to native students.
- High degree of personal investment by the community in the college. Qualitatively, many metrics suggest a deep and abiding regard by the community for the College. There is a widespread perception is that the College is the most important resource in the northeast Michigan region.

Weaknesses:

- Aging population, fewer traditional college-age students. Over the past three decades, the number of high school graduates has dropped 50 percent throughout the five-county service district, making recruitment and retention of students very important activities.
- Low level of bachelor's degree attainment in the area. Regionally, the level of bachelor's degree attainment is sixty percent of the state average with significant long-term impacts on the region's economic development and business attraction initiatives.
- University Center. The College has struggled to sustain a solid University Center presence, as four-year institutions seek more central locations with a larger number of students.
- High tuition reflective of relatively uncompetitive cost structure. The College maintains a high proportion of full-time faculty relative to most other Michigan community colleges. While beneficial to students in many important ways, the ongoing cost to the institution, particularly in benefits such as health care and pension contributions, creates a substantial burden on available resources. Over the past decade, much of this burden has been passed on to

students in the form of higher tuition and fees, particularly in light of the state's cuts to funding support to higher education.

Opportunities:

- Wurtsmith Air Force Base. Since WAFB closed in 1991, the College has struggled to maintain a quality branch campus on the southern edge of its service district. Due to the lack of taxing power in Iosco County, resources have tended to be allocated to main campus in Alpena, located within the College's taxing district. As employers are established on the base, however, opportunities for growth and engagement arise and the obligation of the college to be responsive increases.
- New industries. New partnerships related to green energy and sustainability are providing new opportunities for growth in the region. Competition for a drone aircraft manufacturing and research production center has focused the community on outreach and the future.
- Military connection. A commercial airport connected to an Air National Guard Base in Alpena provides opportunities for the College to partner with the military in credit-generating and partnership-building education and training activities.
- Business and Industry. For decades the region has been built upon manufacturing, mining, and construction, sectors which have been highly impacted by the prolonged economic recession. College leadership has tried with some success to stay connected to key local employers in these sectors, and as the economy begins to improve, maintaining these partnerships appears to be leading to new positive growth opportunities.
- Listening to the community. College leadership has channels to the community, but community engagement could always be improved. Based upon the communications theory that more is learned by listening than talking, the College seeks to enhance engagement at all levels.
- Favorable media relationship. The local media treats the College fairly and without a great deal of latent skepticism.

Threats:

- Demographic challenges. The steady loss of traditional-aged high school seniors over the past four decades is perhaps the biggest threat to the long-term future of the College. With fewer students available, extensive efforts must be made to attract a larger proportion each year in order to maintain steady enrollment, a difficult numbers challenge for the institution to overcome year after year.
- Struggles to establish University Center or 4-year Baccalaureate. As noted above, the College has had limited success in establishing a solid University Center on its campus. As a result, ACC has become one of five community colleges seeking baccalaureate-granting status from the legislature, a fight that

has been joined in earnest by a consortium of universities seeking to block the legislation. The polarizing effect of this debate has migrated in unexpected directions, in some cases straining relationships with other community colleges which don't have much interest in altering the landscape in such a dramatic fashion or the incentive to rock the boat in their relationships with transfer institutions.

- **Economic Development.** As perhaps the key economic development player in a region with unemployment rates traditionally exceeding the state average, the College must always strike a balance between aspiration and caution in its commitment of resources and human capital. There is little cushion to allow for overreaching by the College on behalf of employers or industry sectors that show promise but little revenue to support college operations.
- **Complacency.** As the only post-secondary institution within a 100-mile radius, College leadership in all work groups must guard against the complacency that comes from widespread perception of a monopoly position. In fact, competition for students exists all around us, from for-profits, online institutions, and university outreach, for example. However, the immediate risk for the College is striking a long-term balance between innovation and ongoing engagement that serves the educational needs of the community and region, while managing costs and commitments to staff and student success that keep the institution on solid ground moving forward.

Mission vs. Expediency

On the ground, however, conditions are sometimes more hazy than this premise would imply, and it not uncommon for the funding opportunity to drive the decision to move ahead rather than a deliberative process of fitting the grant into the long-term strategic vision for the College. This dichotomy generally plays out this way. A grant is found that has the potential to fund something the community college wants to do but doesn't have the resources for, such as building out a new program, upgrading a facility, supporting the workforce needs of a new employer or industry sector, providing seed money for innovation, or keeping a staffer, such as a grant writer, employed. A quick internal assessment is done by the grant writer regarding the likelihood of funding. The deadline looms. The urgency of day-to-day College activity creates a decision-making

vacuum among internal stakeholders who tend to be busy people and do not have extensive time to devote to a project that is speculative in nature and may not be funded. Indeed, it occasionally may be the case that particular stakeholders hope the potential project is not funded due to its disruptive impact on their area of work. Consequently, it falls to the grant writer to sort out the most salient answers and figure out a way to move ahead. For sensible grant writers who expect to become managers of the successful projects they write, a built-in governor restraining the range of deliverables and complexity of the project they devise should activate during this idea formation stage. They know if they can't make it work, trouble will likely appear down the road. For grant writers who will not be obligated to manage the project post-award, no such moderating influence exists, thereby rendering them relatively unencumbered to devise a proposal they deem most appealing to a funder and thereby most likely to be funded, without consideration for the management entanglements that may result after the award letter lands on the desk of the College President. However, regardless of the motivating impulse, grant writing boiled down is about finding a funding source, making a fit between the funder's priorities and the college, fleshing out a competitive proposal, getting the application done on time, and winning an award letter. The aspiring grant writer should not overlook this last point. Unsuccessful grant writers have a short shelf life. The bottom line is to win funding.

Prepare for Disruption

The first premise of federal grants is that funders don't fund the status quo. Funders intend for their awards, particularly those of considerable size and scale, to become disruptive forces for change and innovation at grantee institutions. Grant writers

and the institutions that employ them need to get on board with this fundamental concept before moving ahead. Large, discretionary grant awards drive change. Grant dollars should not be perceived by College leaders as a supplementary source of funds to keep the status quo alive while providing relief to the General Fund. This approach is not only shortsighted; it is doomed to failure and destined for disappointment. Funders want their dollars to motivate change and inspire innovation at grantee institutions. If a grantee is not willing to hold up that end of the bargain, they should decline the challenge that change represents. A large grant award forces an institution to make a choice—get on the side of shaping change by strategically building on its assets or stay the course and hope for the best. In many ways, orchestrating change and bringing vision to life is the work of the grant writer. So how is this done?

A Visioning Model

A number of models exist to help grant writers frame vision. As in most grant-related operations, the simpler the model, the more useful it is. An intuitive template devised by Hay and Craddock (2012) known as Creative Ideas and Innovative Projects Cycle fits the criteria very effectively. Their five-step model provides a framework for the development of innovative projects from idea through evaluation stage, ultimately forming a productive continuous improvement loop that provides structure and consistency to what many might regard as a fairly abstract, right-brained process vulnerable to all manner of false starts and missteps. Hay describes the model as a mechanism that allows ideas to be dropped in almost in a “plug and play” manner. Without question there is power in structure and consistency, but the quality of the idea or ideas inputted on front end matters substantially as well. Taken together, a good idea

and good process form the basis of a promising start to the grant writing process. Hay and Craddock's five steps are outlined below.

Hay and Craddock's Stage 1: Scanning the Universe

- Identify the problem
- Do research, both qualitative and quantitative
- Brainstorm

In a perfect world, grant seekers would have ready access to a seamless system of environmental scan reports. Fresh data would be as plump and available as shrimp on party tray, ready to be plugged into a rubric of comprehensive analytics updated on a consistent basis reflecting key metrics deemed important by all stakeholders served by the institution across a longitudinal platform. With this data in hand, grant seekers from the institution then could venture forth with confidence into the wilderness of funding sources in search of the perfect fit, thereby aligning the institutional needs identified in the data with the priorities of the funder. In fact, it's not a perfect world at most community colleges. Environmental scanning is not always done on a consistent or comprehensive basis, and at many institutions the scanning process is motivated by five impending activities: (1) accreditation; (2) a millage campaign; (3) a capital campaign; (4) strategic planning imperatives; and (5) a promising grant opportunity. Best practice tells us that ongoing environmental scanning is virtuous and should be regularly done for a number of good reasons, but budget shortfalls often present a more compelling short-term perspective on human resources and strategic allocation. Regardless of whether an institution is well-positioned or scrambling for data, once a promising grant opportunity appears the grant writer tasked with chasing the funding dragon must dispense with the

deep cause and effect imponderables and get busy pulling together the framework of a winning proposal. In other words, it doesn't take confirmation on whether the chicken or egg came first to make an omelet. All that's required is an appetite, an egg, and the capacity to cook.

Hay and Craddock's Stage 2: Idea Formation

- Forming thoughts
- Abstract
- Not linear

Say the opportunity is a workforce training grant solicitation from U.S. DOL/ETA involving innovative delivery modalities designed to reach hard to access populations with a variety of training deliverables leading to industry-validated credentials in high-demand, high wage occupations. Additional factors addressed in the scoring include online models, scaling deliverables from regional to national focus, implementing student success services such strategies for accelerated migration from developmental level learning to credential-bearing coursework, and sharing coursework developed across a Creative Commons platform. A following checklist of questions might derive from the solicitation:

- Which employers in our service district fit the profile of providing high-wage, high-demand occupations? Which sectors? Which potential future sectors?
- Where is there innovation in the region and how does that fit into the high-demand model?
- Where are these employers and employment sectors in the business startup/hiring cycle?

- Is there innovation and demand across multiple employers or employment sectors that could be folded under a rubric of current interest to the funder, such as green jobs or sustainability?
- What's our track record working with these employers? Who are the key contacts? How do we most productively engage them in a grant-writing project? What questions are they likely to ask? What do they need to know, even if they don't know enough to ask the questions that get to their concerns?
- Where will the trainees come from that meet the funder's criteria?
- How difficult will it be to recruit trainees?
- How many trained based on the size the funding request is a reasonable target number?
- What happens if the project falls flat in terms of attracting trainees and delivering services?
- Are there ways to hedge against this outcome by building in multiple tracks, ranging from some that are more readily accomplished and represent only slight deviations from current practice to highly ambitious, more long-shot projects involving considerable institutional stretching in hopes of accessing new markets or sectors beyond the scope of internal stakeholders?
- How would the project benefit the college, the region, and the stakeholders?
- What pieces and parts of the grant would benefit the College, such as equipment, staffing, supplies, and indirect?
- Who will run the project?
- If it's you (the grant writer), are you willing to devote the next three years to breathing life into the project, dealing with all the compliance and financial entanglements federal grant management involves?
- If it's you (the grant writer), how does that affect your employment security long-term at the college? In others words, will going on a soft money project be comparable to walking out on ice during winter—then finding the situation more fluid underfoot when warmer weather arrives?
- Do you trust your employers not to throw you overboard when the grant funding ends?
- Who will you get to help in key technical areas if the project is funded?
- How likely are the partners to stay engaged?

- Where is the workforce system in the process? Are they required partners?
- Is an outside evaluator required? If so, where do you find an evaluator you can work with?
- How much time do you have to get the proposal written and submitted?
- Can it be done?

These are a short list of questions for a motivated grant seeker to consider. All deserve consideration, but think through in particular the nexus between employers, innovation, high-demand, high-wage occupations, and the range of deliverables that will form the spine of the proposal. It takes time for the best ideas to percolate to the surface. Start your brainstorming in this region. Looking around at what works elsewhere often helps in a pinch. Be open to the formation of new connectives between seemingly unrelated employers, employment sectors, and training deliverables. That's often where innovation resides.

Hay and Craddock's Stage 3: Convergent Thinking

- How will it be done
- Steps, activities, timelines, processes
- Map the processes

Managers must become comfortable working projects with multiple tracks evolving along different timelines, and grant management is no different in this regard. Let's look at the training deliverable component first. On large workforce projects, multiple tracks are generally required to build a competitive proposal. It won't do generally to commit to building out a single curricular track as the lone deliverable in a

workforce training grant, even if projections are solid that large numbers of trainees will migrate through the training program. Multiple curricular tracks built around a convergent theme make the most competitive proposals, and for grant writer to pull this off beyond putting it down on paper, some serious groundwork is required. As referenced in the previous section, the grant writer should give some thought to building out multiple curricular tracks that share some broad commonality or sector connection, but (1) mature at different rates, (2) ratchet up the ambition scale from attainable to difficult to really a stretch, and (3) demonstrate innovation in content delivery and scale. Let's look at the first point first.

Picture the project management job as comparable to spinning plates on the end of cue sticks. First job is getting all the plates spinning, then keeping them spinning once they're balanced and rotating there. There's no perfect number of plates, but in developing complex projects in competitive funding environments, five distinct deliverables is a good starting point. Assuming five is the number, think very carefully about what these five curricular tracks are from these standpoints:

- Which can be up and running first and how long will that take?
- Which track is likely to deliver smallest number of trainees?
- Which track will likely deliver the most number of trainees?
- Which will take the longest to get up and running?
- How will the implementation timeline of each track need to be staggered to integrate with non-grant institutional processes and timelines?
- How will getting each track up and running affect the other tracks, if at all?
- Which track will require equipment procurement for delivery?
- Which track will require hiring new staff?

- Which track will involve curriculum committee approval before instructional content can be delivered?
- Which track will involve accreditation review and approval, such as offering a complete program online, and how will that affect the timeline and implementation of that track?

The implementation plan section in the proposal often makes a grant writer document these considerations in rubric format. However, at this point in the process these questions fall into the brainstorming framework and should be considered not in isolation but rather as pieces of a puzzle that need to align with the priorities of the funder.

Regarding point two, or the difficulty of implementing each track, a grant writer needs to combine a realistic appraisal of institutional capacity with savvy leadership and a burning urgency to deliver transformative change. Federal workforce grants provide these opportunities. In fact, one could argue that ratcheting up institutional aspiration is ultimately what funders are seeking. Certainly they seek it in their evaluation of grant proposals. So the heady grant writer should look for opportunities in the proposal to balance the fairly attainable against the really ambitious, figuring that the ambitious quadrant is where growth and opportunity for the College likely reside. For example, taking a popular non-credit offering into credit-bearing activity is relatively uncomplicated and likely may be where you net most of your trainee target number. Build that in as a safety valve, something you know you can do if all else fails and still meet the grant minimum requirements. Creating a new program in a content area of some promise is more challenging, not easily done in most places but still possible. Build that in as a mid-range, moderately difficult track that will take more time, more engagement,

with more pieces to figure out, but can and should be done within a fairly predictable time frame. It may not generate huge trainee numbers, but can stimulate considerable excitement across multiple stakeholders and create opportunity that was unknown or unforeseen when the idea first hatched. On the far end of the ambition continuum, taking a unique, highly regarded, hands-on occupational program with local reach and putting it into an online format including the lab component for scale to national and international audience is difficult. It will be hard to do. Build that in as a reach, something difficult to do, and get started right away, realizing that pulling it off will take time, persistence, stubborn resolve, and maybe even a little luck. Perhaps it's superstition, but there exists an unwritten grant management rule that seems to apply: early success in one track leads to positive momentum and greater likelihood of success in subsequent tracks.

Conversely, getting bogged down by running into problems early on implementing difficult tracks is bad news. Try to sidestep or at least mitigate the damage. And one way to do that is by thinking through your array of deliverables during the brainstorming process.

As for point three, innovative delivery today often involves some iteration of online. Factors that need to be considered at the outset are these: (1) accreditation, (2) course design expertise, (3) content expertise, (4) video capacity and software savvy, (5) faculty receptiveness to the concept, (6) access to a seasoned online coordinator who has the capacity to think realistically and progressively, (7) timeline, (8) the connection (or lack thereof) between online content development and the marketplace, (9) competition from industry providers, and (10) marketing.

Hay and Craddock's Stage 4: Communication

Grant practitioners know, or soon realize, that communication is the lifeblood of any project. It must be delivered in proper proportions at timely moments in accurate measure or the entire operation begins to shut down. Former Macomb Community College president Al Lorenzo, a nationally-recognized and widely emulated community college leader, has written a set of personal observations he calls *Lessons From Life*, which qualify as project management best practices:

- There is simply no substitute for effort.
- Never assume – act only on what you know to be true.
- The truth is the strongest argument.
- When given a choice, go for the long-term payoff
- Doing things right is better than doing things over.
- The pendulum always swings equally in both directions
- Reputation will determine what the facts cannot.
- There will be more trade-offs than perfect solutions.
- When you stop learning, you stop living.
- The first one to get angry usually loses.
- Listen at least twice as much as you talk.
- If you've never failed, you've probably never really tired.
- We always walk the fastest when we're lost.

*Albert. L. Lorenzo,
President Emeritus, Macomb Community College*

Engaging stakeholders so they know what's going on and how they fit into the big picture is a critically important step in the process. Poor work here leads to big problems later. Here is a communications checklist for consideration:

- Be straight with employers about the opportunity and their commitment.
- Treat stakeholders as equal partners, not as customers to whom you're selling a product.
- Keep stakeholders in the loop on timelines and next steps.
- Don't treat communication as a minefield; yet steer clear of he/said she/said entanglements.
- Share details of the solicitation with all affected stakeholders, especially internal faculty and staff.
- Offer up your vision for discussion and modification.
- Use communication as a means for developing trust.
- Be consistent and clear.
- Write it down.
- Don't ignore or filibuster misunderstandings.
- Listen well, seek to understand, forgive, move on.
- Resolve to under promise and over deliver to all stakeholders.

Good communication overcomes many obstacles. And many obstacles are created by poor communication. The aspiring grant writer should keep this in mind as he or she migrates through the early stages of the grant development process.

Hay and Craddock's Stage 5: Mature/Decline

- Evaluate the process to determine whether or not to move ahead

This stage in the process can be overlooked in a grant writing cycle, especially when considerable effort has been expended in moving ahead. But there are times that pursuing a grant is a bad idea for an institution. Maybe the fit isn't right. Or perhaps the grant writer or staff is too inexperienced to know what they're getting into. Possibly the proposal is being crafted in opposition to internal stakeholders who don't see the project as aligned with their program priorities. Sometimes all three are the case. Here is a checklist of warning signs for an institution to consider before moving ahead:

- A timeline that can't be met
- An idea that can't or won't be done
- A poor track record with the funder
- A poor track record of internal grant management
- A poor record of grant financial management
- Open issues left over from previous grants
- Sustained internal opposition from faculty or staff
- Indifferent employer commitment
- Poor internal vetting of the budget and budget assumptions
- An overwhelmed staff incapable of engaging with change

At the earliest stages, particularly to those not directly involved or affected by the process, pursuing a grant may seem as distant as next week's weather forecast. The smart grant writer begins by forming a vision of institutional response that matches what he or she knows about the potential funding stream. Seldom do these pieces all align, but a couple significant deliverables may emerge as particularly promising and so worth further investigation. As this visioning process coalesces into the beginnings of a strategy

for moving ahead, the grant writer should feel the enticement of potential success but more the urgent pressure of the work ahead. It is the obligation of the grant writer to understand the myriad network of institutional connectives that will be affected by a successful grant writing effort, to loop them in before the decision is made to move ahead, and to do the legwork of fully informing all internal players of the implications of an award.

Consider using the Hay-Craddock model as a template to think through the formative stages of the grant process—that is, the process for deciding whether or not to move ahead. Let's assume at the end of that process, the decision is to go forward. What then?

CHAPTER 5: THE GRANT WRITING PROCESS

Surveying the Federal Funding Landscape

On the federal level the best grant funding sources for community colleges are the United States Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, the United States Department of Education, National Science Foundation, Advanced Technical Education, and secondarily the United States Department of Commerce and United States Department of Agriculture. The latter two are known primarily for grants and loans for construction. The first three offer grant programs focused on training. While each agency has its own characteristics, some general search principles apply.

Go first to the agency website. Meander there awhile. Look for highlighted programs and linkages to agency priorities. Be attuned to elements in the funder's range of programs and priorities that fits your institution and institutional need. Spend time learning about agency history and how they convey milestone accomplishments. Look for connections. Trust your instincts. Roam a little and use your imagination. Pay attention for opportunities in which your community college could stand out from the rest. Get a feel for the agency language, specifically the terminology they use. Get a sense for how they measure success. Invest time and energy on this background research. Seek out past grantees. Participating in peer groups and listservs of grant seekers is also productive, but realize that these colleagues will become competition moving forward. Bottom line, get used to doing your own research. Assuming that these lines of inquiry begin to converge

into a promising lead or series of leads, move directly to a process of aligning the funding opportunity to the College based on the checklist below:

- What are you trying to accomplish with external funding?
- Does it align with the college mission?
- Where are trouble spots and entanglements likely to occur?
- How will an external funding opportunity integrate with existing college processes?
- Who needs to know, internally and externally, before a funding opportunity is pursued?
- Where is your internal and external support for this process?
- How solid is that support?
- What do you have to do to maintain and grow internal and external support?
- What's the institution's track record with grants and grants management?
- What are the grant management expectations for the grant writer at your institution?
- What resources do you have at your disposal?
- Who does the institution have on its bench if you win the award but move on sometime during the funding cycle?
- How much downside risk can the institution tolerate?
- Does the business office have enough accumulated experience and confidence to withstand federal monitoring and the scrutiny that comes with a large award?
- Can you carry the management load by yourself?

The process will begin to narrow as the grant writer moves ahead.

Scouring the SGA

Let's assume that the aspiring grant writer has found a promising funding source on the federal level that fits the institution. Significantly, he or she feels good about the

fit. Fighting the impulse to view this opportunity as a sort of artesian well of found money, the grant writer should consider some version of the following process to stay grounded while moving forward.

When the SGA comes out in the Federal Register, the clock starts ticking. Depending on the complexity of the program, which is often though not always correlated to the size of the award, the grant writer needs to know time right from the beginning. The first thing to do is scour the SGA from front to back. Use a highlighter if necessary to make notes. Don't rely on memory. SGAs are dense with boilerplate, often several pages long in a 10-point font. Some are better written than others, but ideally the SGA should contain all the detail a person should need to know to write a competitive proposal. Prepare to spend several weeks poring over this document. The language appears impenetrable at first sight and unfortunately will not improve as the grant writer seeks to parse meaning from the content therein. The SGA provides a number of important parameters, however, but does not tell a grant writer how to write a winning proposal. That comes later, as the writer lets the boilerplate percolate around possibilities and deliverables, and a vision emerges. During the first reading, the practitioner should nail down the following details:

- Deadline for submission
- Eligibility parameters
- Program focus
- Scoring methodology
- Reporting requirements
- Funding amounts and award duration
- Program officer contact information

- Solicitation number
- Required partners

Once these details are well understood and documented, a productive exercise may be for the grant writer to read the SGA a second time, focusing on more big picture items related to alignment of the program to the grantee institution. This second reading is dot connecting at a high level—a very right-brained brainstorming activity yet with left-brained detail orientation. Two fundamental questions should be the focus of this second pass through the SGA:

- Are the deliverables and timelines attainable?
- If funded, does it fit with the college culture?

Assuming that the answer to these two questions is yes, the writer should begin to break down the process into its component parts. One key activity during this phase is tracking how many process pieces there are and how they fit together. In most federal grants of some complexity, however, there may be 50-75 data generating activities that need to be delineated in order to write a competitive proposal. Some may be readily available in the file from the last proposal. Regional demographics, for example, or local unemployment rates by county or industrial sector. Some are harder to get. Before he or she gets too far down the road, the smart grant writer should dwell awhile on how each of these data points will be obtained and how long that likely will take. For those of a visual orientation, a storyboard approach may be productive with individual data points outlined and a timeline attached to each. This works well because it focuses the writer early in the development phase on the multiple timelines at play in the construction of a competitive

grant. Experienced grant writers know that it does not work to wait until the last minute. Cramming for the final is not a workable solution for this process. If the SGA gives the writer 8-10 weeks, the writer should clearly measure each component or data point required against the time anticipated to accomplish it. Begin early to work through the process of plugging that information into the proposal. Don't start writing too early. Plan to spend considerable time and effort gathering information and laying groundwork. Writing comes later, once those pieces are in place. The writer who fails to lay proper groundwork and instead gilds the lily to make the proposal appear more substantial faces two bad outcomes:

- A good reader will spot the mushy spots in a proposal and downgrade it accordingly.
- A distracted reader doesn't spot the mushy spot, the award is funded, and the grantee then is obligated to deliver a plan that won't work.

While it may be tempting to conclude that the second bullet would be a good problem to have, managers on the hook to make it happen after the award generally don't share this view. Responsible managers want more than anything to be able to meet the deliverables in a project. If the goals aren't real, management of the grant begins behind the eight ball and sometimes never recovers. Don't make the mistake of wasting time up front. It's your most valuable, limited commodity. Picture the process as comparable to building a house. Developing the plans, determining the time and materials required, excavating the site, pouring the foundation, building the infrastructure, framing in the walls, installing the plumbing, electrical and HVAC systems, hanging drywall, framing windows and doors, putting in bathroom fixtures, painting, bringing in kitchen

appliances, flooring, and furniture—just as in writing a complicated proposal sound enough to stand out in a highly competitive environment, these are all discrete steps that must happen in sequence. A homeowner doesn't want a builder to cut corners or skip steps. The same holds true for a professional grant writer.

One additional point to consider: review the scoring metric in some detail, correlating it to page limit requirements. For example, SGAs on federal grants outline the total number of points available, generally 100; though sometimes up to five bonus points can be ascribed if an important criterion is met. Examine the scoring in minute detail. Assess where your proposal will score well. Look at the areas where gaps exist. Is the proposal thin? What data do you need to make it stronger? How will you get it? Start with this analysis the first time you read the SGA and revisit it obsessively. Some call this fleshing out the proposal and it's not an inaccurate analogy. A limit of 30 pages for the project narrative, defined as the work plan minus executive summary and budget pages, is commonplace. Within that 30-page limit, there will be several sections, each with corresponding points available. If need is worth 10 points on a 100-point scale, a grant writer might consider confining need to about 3 pages. If work plan is 50 points, 15 pages might be a reasonable estimate of length for the section. On large, competitive federal grants, the SGA often contains more than 100 bullet points that must be addressed within the 30-page limit. Honing the document so all the required points are addressed in the proper proportion tests even the most experienced grant writer. Don't expect to hit that sweet spot the first time through, no matter how confident you might be about your capacity to perform on deadline. The point here is that the writing job is too big to get done on deadline. It needs to be thought through at length and integrated with the

required data and baseline factors. Maintaining the focus, motivation, and stamina to generate multiple drafts will likely be the greatest challenge.

Developing the Budget

As noted in the previous section, managing multiple timelines is fundamental to grant writing success. Once the process is underway, and the plates are all spinning, the grant writer should hone in first on building a budget. Most large federal grants run three years with a possibility of a no-cost extension for a fourth year out there as a carrot to the grantee. A no-cost extension means the grantee gets no more money than allocated in the award, but may get an extra year to spend it if a good rationale exists to persuade the national office to bestow an extension. It is not something that is granted automatically and sometimes is extremely hard to obtain. Of course if all the money is spent during the three-year cycle, no extension is necessary and no resources exist to fund more time. Grant managers need to keep a close eye on the burn rate on grant expenditures vs. the grant timeline. Field Program Officers will most certainly monitor this metric. But during the grant construction phase, the astute grant writer should not budget anticipating more time than is allocated in the SGA. A good checklist for building the budget is referenced here:

1. Personnel
2. Fringes
3. Match
4. Equipment
5. Indirect
6. Supplies

7. Travel
8. Contractual
9. Other

1. Personnel. The Personnel category consists of the staff required to attain the deliverables in the project. It starts with the project director, generally a fulltime position for all three years. Support staff such as office management, tech support, video or online course development, compliance or document management support, all may be built in as fulltime staff all three years. Full-time faculty are often written in as well, especially on workplace training grants. The prevailing institutional wage for all these full timers should be nailed down by the responsible grant writer. Estimating, or guessing as it is known by the business office, leads to problems down the line. Part-time instruction can become a big Personnel expenditure for two main reasons: (1) adjuncts can supply teaching and curriculum development flexibility that fulltime faculty can't find in their schedules, and (2) part-time instructors do not invoke contract bargaining issues that attend to fulltime faculty in most states. The project director should break out the calculator and add up all the fulltime personnel costs, add in the projected adjunct costs factored in as a number of hours times rate of pay, then see what the budget looks like. Before making any adjustments, the project director should move on to calculating fringes.

2. Fringes. Fringes are the trickiest Personnel line item by far, and it's here that mistakes are most commonly made, leading to budget shortfalls not easily addressed after the funding award. Fringes represent benefits the grantee institution pays to its employees—items such as health care, long term disability insurance, social security,

payment into the state employee retirement system, etc. Fringes may vary widely from full-timer to full-timer, particularly in the health care arena, and the rate of increase in both health care and pension contribution an institution pays per employee can easily be underestimated. If the rate is calculated incorrectly, a sufficient amount of dollars to fund these contributions may not be built into the fringes line item, and the grantee institution will be required to make up the difference with General Fund dollars. This drives business officers crazy, and for good reason. Make sure also to include fringes on adjuncts as well. Check with the business office on the most current fringes rate as the budget is developed. If for no other reason, conferring with the business office lets them know a grant is being pursued, a good move for maintaining domestic harmony.

3. Match. “Match” is an elastic concept. Sometimes it is not required and so is nearly invisible to the process. On other SGAs, match is mandatory, and figuring out how to structure match so it works in the budget can take much time and proportioning. The first question to ask related to match is if cash is required or can it be in-kind. The second is how much, often measured as a percentage of the federal request. Cash, obviously, is a much more difficult match. If 30 percent cash match is required on a \$1 million proposal, for example, the sum of cash kicked in by stakeholders has to amount to \$300,000. This is a deal breaker in many situations, so one of the first SGA details a grant writer should check is the status of the match requirement: is match required, and if so, is in-kind allowed? In-kind is comprised of factors such as release time paid by employers for trainees in training, equipment or facilities provided to the project in support of training, employer planning time, participation in advisory committee meetings, and utilities. Intermittently, grant monitors get fussy about match. This attention takes the form of

requiring the project manager to document match in a way that would withstand an audit. In other words, project managers should anticipate having to account for each piece of in-kind match as if it were a direct entry that shows up on a balance sheet.

4. Equipment. Equipment is a fairly straightforward line item when preparing a budget during the proposal-writing phase. The most complicated aspect is deciding what is needed and costing it out for the proposal. The trickier aspect is executing the purchase of equipment after the award is made. In fact, consider it a hazardous activity and you will be properly prepped. On grants of substantial size, such as the TAACCCT grants out of U.S. Department of Labor, the equipment line item offers tremendous capacity-building opportunities to the grantee and should be regarded with care and responsiveness. Two main problem areas emerge during this process: (1) vendor complaints and (2) conflicts between government circulars and grantee institutional policy.

The first results from the highly competitive nature of federal procurements. Vendors understand the process for the most part and realize when specs are well written. They get when the process is fairly managed with no appearance of favoritism. They also know when these conditions haven't been met. When a procurement is poorly executed, the losing vendor has ample cause and sufficient motivation to make trouble for the grantee. For a vendor intent on voicing his or her displeasure, the loop is fairly uncomplicated: Call a legislator, presumably one not on board with federal spending in general or this program in particular, preferably one who represents either the vendor or the grantee's district; complain to the disaffected legislator about a lack of fairness and transparency in the process; convince the legislator to complain to the funding agency's

director; the director then calls the director of the Regional Office; the Regional Office director calls the FPO; the FPO calls the grantee authorizing signatory, generally the College president; the president then calls the project director in charge of the grant and the specific procurement. In *The Speed of Trust* (2008), Covey notes that as trust goes up, speed goes up and cost goes down. The reverse is also true. As trust is lost, speed goes down and cost goes up. The price of a procurement gone wrong is very high. Avoid it at all costs.

Let's look at the second point. Procurement is the most hazardous area related to equipment. While funder counsel to the grantee is to follow their own institutional procurement policies, occasionally institutional policy and OMB circulars don't agree. When they don't, this counsel turns out to be bad advice. For example, an institution may have a procurement policy granting a percentage favoritism for local vendors—in effect, a thin percentage advantage to vendors doing business within the College's taxing district. While this makes sense on many levels and certainly is within an institution's legal capacity, a federal auditor is likely to regard this policy as conflicting with the mandate that in procurements using government money every vendor should be treated equally without regard to where they do business or prior relationship to the College. Why is this important? Imagine doing an equipment procurement on a federal grant in which this institutional policy was exercised. Say the bill amounted to \$250,000, for example, and the contract has been executed and the equipment is on campus. Then imagine a federal monitor questioning the policy, and later issuing a finding for non-compliance. Prepare for the bad surprise of being told to pay that back—not with remaining grant dollars, or even a reduction in the award, but with General Fund dollars.

Safety directors and safety trainers are aware of a topic known as confined space, permit entry required—a hazardous space of potential dangerous atmospherics with only one way in and one way out. This is the operant image of a procurement gone wrong.

Complications in procurement represent the area of greatest vulnerability in grant management, mainly because the dollars involved are substantial and generally a grantee does not have the resources on hand to easily pay back a procurement gone awry. If they did, a grantee wouldn't bother going after a grant in the first place. Be cautious on equipment procurements. Pay attention from beginning to end.

5. Indirect. Google “quagmire” and “indirect” should pop up. The concept is simple enough: indirect allows the grantee to capture costs associated with program administration that are difficult to account for directly. Human resource functions such as writing position descriptions, posting positions, organizing interviews, hiring staff, and managing payroll; business office functions such as processing supply requisitions, paying invoices, and completing equipment procurement; and project management activities not related to program development are all examples of indirect. Most federal grant projects now require a federally approved indirect cost rate, generally ranging from 8-15. Near the bottom of the indirect approval documentation is a term referenced as Base, which defines the specific line items to which the indirect rate may be applied. If the approved indirect cost rate may be applied to salary, wages, and specific fringes line items but not to non-personnel expenditures, for example, obviously this distinction makes a difference in regards to the total amount of indirect that may be captured by a grantee. An additional complexity of DOL grants is a 10 percent cap on administrative expenditures. In other words, no more than ten percent of the award may be allocated to

activities deemed administrative, requiring the grantee to parse the distinction between administrative activities and program development, then track the hours allocated to each activity in order to maintain control over the ratio. Parsing the distinction between direct and indirect, administration and program development, and reporting the information accurately on the 9130 quarterly financial forms is necessary grant management work conducted way down in the weeds. The payoff for doing it right is substantial dollars tracking to the College General Fund via the Indirect line item.

6. Supplies. Supplies should come later in the budget drafting process. On federal grants, the distinction between a supply and equipment is a non-consumable resource costing less than \$5000 per item. A fairly straightforward concept, this distinction becomes blurry when a system comprised of multiple items, such as a video production studio, contains numerous components each costing less than \$5000 per item but the package as a whole exceeds that threshold. Consult your FPO if this issue arises.

7. Travel. Travel is straightforward. That said, on large federal grants in which program development is a primary deliverable, don't underestimate the amount of time and resources required to fully implement a new program. Starting a program from scratch is tricky, time-consuming, and costly business. Visiting sites where a comparable program is already up and running costs money, but pays huge dividends in deciding how to structure the program at your institution, particularly in regards to what equipment to buy, or perhaps more pertinently, what equipment not to buy. Seeing how it's done elsewhere helps considerably. Another consideration is building in adequate resources for the lead instructor of a new program to travel to conferences and symposiums in order to

make crucial connections with researchers, thought leaders, training coordinators, and employers. Don't be shy about building in plenty of dollars for travel.

8. Contractual. Contractual should be a fairly benign operation. The primary application of the contractual line item is the flexibility it offers for the project to bring in content experts for narrow, high-priced training purposes. Some programs require the same procurement procedures for contractors as apply to equipment, others don't. Before moving ahead, find out which is the case for the program you run. Generally, the business office likes contractual arrangements because they de-obligate the institution from paying fringes and contributing to the state employee pension fund. However, funding agencies periodically require grantees to ensure that contractors are responsible for meeting their tax obligations on revenue derived from their contractual arrangement, a tough mandate for the College to manage. For a more in-depth analysis, consider reviewing the IRS guide for distinguishing a contractor from an employee.

9. Other. Other is an overflow category designed to accommodate expenditures that don't fit in other line items. Budget purists don't regard Other highly, believing that it is poor form to allocate charges in such an unspecific fashion, but budget development and accounting purity don't always necessarily reside at the same address, nor do they need to. The Other line item is a good spot to allocate charges for marketing, web site development, small-scale charges that don't involve personnel, equipment, or contractors. In short, keep the Other line item small and inconspicuous but use it judiciously to get things done and keep things moving.

Developing the Narrative

Listen to your inner voice. The writing starts here. Many tools are available for beginning to flesh out the narrative, some quite complicated and hard to implement. Consider the tried and true SWOT analysis to bring the storylines to life. A SWOT analysis or similar tool can be useful as an environmental scanning mechanism, helping to reduce the range of possibilities from infinity to a manageable focus. Choosing a programmatic direction can be a tough call, however, because that generally means some promising possibilities won't make the cut. There is no hard and fast rule for this mental editing process. For better or worse, the grant writer's intuition for what will fly with the funder often plays a determining role at this juncture. Look for hints in the SGA boilerplate that link sinew to intuition. For example:

- Is there language conferring a geographic distinction, such as rural or underserved?
- Are there industry sectors, such as high-growth/high-demand, or green energy and sustainability, favored in the SGA that fit nicely with your proposal?
- Are there parts of previous proposals, either funded or unfunded, that fit the parameters defined by the SGA?
- Does the SGA reward a track record of grantee success with the funding agency?
- Is the language of the SGA penetrable to the extent that it can be boiled down to declarative statements of action?
- Do the funding proportions outlined in the solicitation roughly align with the capacity of the applicant?
- How long are the funding odds?
- What can be done to improve those odds?
- Can we win?

Ultimately the answer to that last question should be “yes,” or at least “why not us?”

The Technical Proposal

The narrative part of a grant proposal, often referenced in federal grants as the Technical Proposal, varies by funding agency, though enough similarities exist to make a walk-through of a specific program a useful exercise. For example, the 2011 DOL/ETA solicitation for the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College Career Training (TAACCCT) program announced the availability of \$500 million nationally for awards to eligible institutions ranging from \$2.5 million to \$5 million for individual applicants, and awards of \$2.5 million to \$20 million for a consortium of eligible institutions. Fifty-two pages of single-spaced boilerplate attended this SGA, covering a vast array of details including a 30-page limit for the Technical Proposal for individual applicants, but the Technical Proposal essentially began with the Evaluation Criteria, listed on page 22.

Table 2: TAACCCT Program Evaluation Criteria

CRITERION	POINTS
Statement of Need	30
Work Plan and Project Management	45
Measurement/Evaluation of Progress and Outcomes	25
TOTAL	100

Source: 2011 DOL/ETA solicitation for the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College Career Training (TAACCCT) program (p. 22).

Statement of Need

In a competitive grant environment in which the odds of winning the award are long, as was certainly the case with the Round 1 TAACCCT grants, it is useful to work backward from two fundamental premises. One, funders in the Need section are looking for more depth than an impassioned plea for assistance based on a litany of economic woes and labor force challenges. Secondly, every point counts. In the TAACCCT grants,

DOL asked first for applicants to document the Impact of Foreign Trade in Community(ies) to be Served (5 points), which could be done one of two ways: (1) an Affirmative Determination by the Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration; or (2) one or more TAA Certification determinations in at least one community to be served by the project, made on or after January 1, 2007. This became the first challenge, tracking down data to meet either of these two criteria. Next under Need the SGA asked applicants to identify the specific industries the grant intended to serve, specific occupations targeted for training, specific skills or abilities within those occupations that demonstrate a need for training, and project employment opportunities in the specific local area where grant-funded activities will take place. Additionally, specific employers needed to be identified with reference to their current and projected hiring needs with commitments to employ participants after exiting training (10 points). Finally, identification of the target population for training needed to be addressed, including references to skills gaps between participants entering training and the remediation required for trainees to successfully complete the proposed grant-funded activity as well as gaps in existing educational and career training programs (10 points). These requirements amounted to considerable ground to cover in 9 pages, challenging the grant writer to get to the point and align the narrative to every bullet point requested in the SGA. Here are some thoughts on dealing with those challenges.

One good rule of thumb is to set the scene regionally in the first paragraph, using a well-placed graphic such as a map blow-up to locate the region for reviewers, then use charts to boil down key data sets such as local, state, and U.S. unemployment rates, industry sector growth, job vacancies, significant employers, and other relevant

information as supporting evidence. The Need section needs to be written tightly and flow effectively from one major point to the next, and because it almost always comes first in the Technical Proposal, it sets the stage for the remainder of the proposal in the mind of the reviewer. In other words, if a reviewer loses his or her way in the Need section, it is likely the proposal will end up in the reject pile. There are at least eight ways to make Need stand out:

- Find good data and integrate it seamlessly into the narrative.
- If the funding agency maintains a data-generating network, make sure that agency's data is sourced early and accurately.
- Create a narrative featuring clear connectives between major points.
- Don't wander into minutia that distracts or confuses a reader.
- Keep points in proportion, not spending too much time on one requirement at the expense of another.
- Please the reader by presenting data that demonstrates effort and engagement in a visually interesting or compelling way as long as it supports and enhances the narrative.
- Polish the section so it shines with clarity and conviction.
- Don't whine.

Work Plan and Project Management

This section contained two integrated yet distinct elements. The Work Plan provided the funder's blueprint for what the applicant should attempt to build while Project Management focused on proving that the applicant could manage construction of the project and the funder's money. There were two required components to the Work Plan. Part 1 of the Work Plan (15 points) derived from U.S. Department of Education

involvement in the program and required applicants to support their proposed strategies by referencing existing research and to assess the degree to which those findings provided strong or moderate evidence validating the approach. This approach was new to projects administered by USDOL and it was unclear to what extent points were awarded or taken away based upon the skillful execution of this directive, yet clearly some reference to community college and workforce research needed to be incorporated into the proposal and the funders provided an annotated bibliography of pertinent research for applicants to review to help meet this criteria. Part 2 of the Work Plan (15 points) mandated that the applicant present coherent priorities, strategies, and deliverables that demonstrated the complete understanding of all responsibilities and costs required to implement each phase of the project within the timeframe of the grant, including feasible and reasonable timeframes for accomplishing all procurement and other necessary grant start-up strategies immediately following the anticipated grant start date, and explain how the costs in the proposed project work plan aligned with the proposed budget, specifically the budget narrative, and justified as adequate, cost-effective, and reasonable for the resources requested. Applicants were required to present this work plan in a comprehensive table formatted to the following categories: Priorities, Strategies, Implementers, Costs, Time, and Deliverables. This section presented considerable challenges due to manner in which the funder wanted the information presented, in a complicated table rather than narrative format. A couple observations to consider here:

- Comply with the funder's request in regards to all formatting requirements.
- Seek expert help as needed to make the graphics look professional.
- Carve out sufficient space to clearly describe in bullets or narrative the project deliverables and what makes them worthy of funding.

- Frame the deliverables so the reviewer has a chance to absorb them before encountering the same information broken out in a complex graph.
- Estimate high in equipment and personnel.
- Estimate low when committing to trainee metrics; a ratio of \$7500-\$9000 of grant request per trainee served is not unreasonable in federal training grants.
- Leave room to maneuver between and across the metrics should the grant be funded.
- Start early.

In Project Management, the applicant needed to fully describe its fiscal, administrative, and management capacity, starting with a staffing plan. The relationship between key staff and other stakeholders, including required partners, oversight, and governance, needed to be fleshed out and configured in an understandable manner via an organizational chart. The fiscal side was equally important as the funder wanted to see evidence that the applicant had structures in place to effectively administer the grant. Business office experience managing federal grants was referenced, as was a concise but detailed explanation of the process controls in place on the financial side. Applicant systems related to participant data and performance management was also emphasized in this section, including a description of the applicants' process for tracking performance outcomes. Applicant experience with comparable projects was an additional area of focus with the funder looking for specific examples of the applicant's track record managing state or federal grants, its track record in managing complicated partnerships, and its capacity for engagement with all required project partners. Commitment to project evaluation was also mandated of the applicant in order to receive the full scoring available in this sub-component (10 points). A section on sustainability (5 points) was

included in which applicants were strongly encouraged to ensure that effective innovations developed under the program were sustained after the grant period ends. To earn these points, applicants had to formulate plans for securing funding or commitments for future funding or develop low-cost strategies for integrating effective practices funded under the grant into their general operations.

As in the Need section, addressing every bullet point in Work Plan and Project Management involved careful articulation because there were far more bullet points referenced in the SGA than could be thoroughly covered in 15 pages. Considerable synthesis was required to make it fit, which meant working and reworking the section numerous times during the writing phase, an editing process driven also by an intuition for points of emphasis a reviewer would want to see and their capacity to extract credibility and project management experience from the text. Following the SGA in exacting detail is always good advice, and be prepared to write and rewrite many drafts before this section emerges in its most complete version. Here is a checklist of additional observations to consider:

- Look for repeat business with a familiar agency as funding opportunities arise.
- Reference past success with the same agency as an ironclad indicator of track record and organizational capacity, but don't overplay the hand to such a degree that a reviewer might be motivated to advocate for the federal investment to be allocated elsewhere.
- Be factual and mindful of tone.
- Consider using charts and graphs to clarify process intentions involving governance, fiscal system, and data tracking in particular. Graphics also serve to break up the monotony of excessive text, a feature widely appreciated by reviewers.
- Replicate structures that worked well during previous grants.

- Build in a fulltime project director and at least one fulltime support staff to stand the best chance of winning the award; large federal funding agencies want applicants to be realistic in their staffing assessments.
- Make sure all required partners are included in the proposal and referenced.
- Don't leave points on the table by failing to address scoring elements in the grant; even if the reference is brief or oblique, figure out a place to squeeze it in.
- Write like a journalism major with construction management experience.
- Think like a reviewer.

Measurement of Progress and Outcomes

As in the Work Plan and Project Management, Measurement of Progress and Outcomes joined two related but distinct sections, each with their own scoring criteria. In Measurement of Progress, the funder expected grantees to set performance targets and collect data on participant characteristics, progress measures, and performance outcomes in order to continuously monitor and improve program performance (10 points).

Applicants had to demonstrate they had systems and processes in place to capture data related to short-term progress measures and longer-term outcome measures, or a strong plan to develop and implement such systems or bridge gaps in existing systems, and were scored based on the following criteria: (1) the strength of the plan to continuously evaluate and improve program performance, which may include a description of prior experience in making decisions to improve specific programs based on evidence produced by research, rigorous evaluations, and/or program outcome data; (2) the evidence presented that the applicant has data systems and processes available to establish project baselines and monitor progress, or a strong plan to develop and

implement such systems or bridge gaps in existing systems, including a timeline for bridging the gap; and (3) the extent to which the two measures identified for each strategy clearly measure progress toward successful implementation of each strategy, and align to one or more of the project priorities.

Essentially, USDOL was asking applicants to lay out a plan for capturing required data upon trainee entry, a system for maintaining and reporting it, and a linkage between progress and deliverables that aligned with the program priorities. Here are some observations to consider:

- Find out what data needs to be obtained on trainees upon entry.
- Devise forms to capture that data.
- Learn about DOL Common Measures.
- Don't get lost in the nounish abstractions layered throughout most federal SGAs.
- Keep all plans simple, straightforward, and attainable.
- Build in feedback loops to meet the requirement for a continuous improvement model.
- Focus on developing a plan that works for your project.
- Use verbs strategically that reference back to the SGA and link scoring criteria to the applicant plan.
- Boil it down for the reviewer.

Outcomes reframed the funder's commitment to the two primary forms of outcomes measurements used by the USDOL (common measures) and the U.S. Department of Education (comparison cohort). The applicant had to describe how it would track and report longer-term outcome measures for program participants toward

their identified goals, as well as for a comparison cohort of participants in another program not funded by the TAACCCT. For both program participants and the comparison cohort, successful applicants would be required to report data for the following seven outcome measures on an annual basis (or every fourth quarterly report): entered employment rate, employment retention rate, average earnings, attainment of credits toward degree(s), attainment of industry-recognized certificates (less than one year), attainment of industry-recognized certificates (more than one year), and graduation number and rate for degree programs (15 points). Scoring was based on the quality of the applicant's plan to set up these outcomes gathering systems and to execute them on a timely basis.

Interestingly, submerged within the SGA boilerplate were two requirements that gave pause to watchful observers: (1) a mandate to obtain long-term employment and wage data on trainees; and (2) a provision to provide baseline data and projections for outcome measures. Accessing wage data is notoriously difficult due primarily to privacy concerns and often requires an applicant to submit a written request to the State Unemployment Agency (UA) system, an overture that generally fails. The other alternative is to ask trainees to provide it upon entering training and to pester them via follow-up survey after training is complete. This alternate approach works marginally well, depending on the degree of persistence by the applicant, but often is the only recourse to grantees who find themselves blocked and thwarted by USDOL's own workforce system from extracting the data the funder requires. Regarding baseline data, the directive was murky in three primary ways:

1. While the program was given a TAA prefix, nowhere was it mandated in the SGA that applicants had to restrict services only to TAA-eligible participants.

Because most TAA certifications were awarded prior to 2007, at least in some regions of the country, the pool of TAA-eligible participants was often quite small. Confining the delivery of services to only TAA-eligible trainees would make program outcomes nearly impossible to attain.

2. Baseline parameters for the comparison cohort were speculative and ill defined.
3. The stipulation was unclear on whether military and incumbent workers were allowable recipients of grant-funded service, or whether non-credit training was an appropriate grant-service activity.

In short, the TAACCCT grant program represented an historic opportunity for community colleges to build capacity and create innovative solutions expanding their ability to deliver education and career training programs that can be completed in two years or less. The review team read more than 500 applications during the first round of funding in 2011, and awarded less than 50 grants nationwide. Grant writers working in such a competitive funding environment are fortunate when the path they travelled leads to success. Here is a short checklist of considerations to summarize this section:

- Obtain the SGA at the earliest opportunity.
- Read it front to back at least three times before going any further.
- Take notes.
- Break the job down to its component parts.
- Assign timelines to the completion of the various component parts.
- Build in lag time.
- Work several component parts concurrently, not one at a time.
- Learn to cope with ambiguity and uncertainty.
- Loop in stakeholders.
- Work hard.

- Do the best you can.
- Don't start writing too early.
- Stay healthy during the entire process.
- Under promise and over deliver.
- Write well.
- Proofread relentlessly.
- Get the proposal done on time.
- Submit it early.
- Don't wait around for word to come through; get busy on the next most important thing.
- Celebrate success.

Pre-submission Considerations

As noted in the previous section, the best proposals combine an excellent power to weight ratio. The power comes from a good idea that aligns well with most of the criteria documented in the SGA. A fit of this nature gives a grant writer good ground from which to build a competitive proposal. The weight is how well the good idea is fleshed out, packaged, and presented. A few common issues occur during this design period that merit consideration.

Connecting to the Funder

Legitimate pre-submission questions to the funder's representative are good. By all means, attend all scheduled webinars explaining the pertinent SGA details and make sure your registration for these events is on record. Webinars are a great way to get up to speed on funder language, desired outcomes, political nuances, and impending

intricacies. Listen for the subtext in these official communiqués. Don't get bent out of shape by funder mandates that appear too difficult or complex to attain at this stage in the process. Let some other Webinar attendee make that losing argument. Sit forward and listen, think it over, and sort out the process as a whole as it is described by the funder, from the funder's perspective. As applies to most everything in life, self-interest is a primary motivating factor. The funder's desire to share information via webinar is to assist you in the grant-writing process, true, but it is more about their need to accomplish an organized information-sharing event as part of the public record in rolling out a professional, highly-visible, well-funded grant program. Whining from the field about personal back stories, current or past workforce challenges, or institutional or state budget shortfalls does not advance the funder's self-interests, and funders don't want to hear it. They won't tell you that during a webinar, but it's true. This perspective is important to understand, way more important at this point in the process than a confessional approach to sharing minute details related to the struggle to fit your great idea into the parameters of their funding opportunity. Stay professional and don't go down that road. They don't want to hear it, even if they say they do. Count on the webinar hosts to repeat the content already in the SGA. Webinar attendees playing to the crowd at this point in the process are focusing on the wrong thing. Keep your voice down and your thoughts to yourself. Don't bleed the details of your proposal by talking too much before the writing phase.

Between the webinar event and the application deadline, it doesn't hurt to let the funder know you are out there, competent and reasonable, by asking a limited number of good questions. Beyond establishing that you are capable enough to ask good questions, pestering the point-of-contact listed in the SGA is bad form and dubious strategy.

Generally, these operatives do not review proposals and aren't decision-makers when it comes to evaluating your grant proposal. They are well schooled in the practical art of not saying much to help guide the proposal. They won't convey the secret code to funding for desperate grant seekers. You should not call them constantly seeking their advice, encouragement, and/or consolation. Pinning them down with lawyer-like cross-examination does not impress them with your shrewd and penetrating insight or turn them in your favor. They are not your Mom, your friend, or your confidant. They want to be regarded as professionals, and you should endeavor to treat them that way. Above all, don't get into he-said, she-said disputes with the office workers fielding calls and questions on a large, federal SGA. Don't wait for their blessing on your approach. Because ultimately you're on your own, no matter what guidance they may give you. Work ahead. Don't wait for help. Your best bet always is writing a good proposal.

Connecting with Other Grant Applicants

For many of the same reasons referenced in the previous section, it is not generally advisable to spend time talking shop with grant writers or colleagues from other colleges pursuing the same grant. Picking up useful intelligence, such as which sector(s) the competition plans on working with, is tempting. Sometimes knowing what the competition is up to might persuade a grant writer to alter his or her own approach, though it shouldn't. There are at least four main downsides to this approach, however:

1. Knowing what the competition is doing generally does not pay dividends in the most important currency—the quality of your proposal.
2. Sometimes the competition doesn't tell you the truth.

3. Too much dialogue with competing grant writers on a hard project leads inevitably to commiseration, which undermines a grant writer's focus on the task at hand.
4. Collaborating with the competition doesn't pay off.

Consortium grants are the obvious exception to these observations. Large grants involving multiple institutions united around a single sector or common training theme require extensive collaboration from the beginning, particularly for the lead institutions.

For the leads, there are numerous grant writing challenges:

- Aggregating employer demand, training capacity, deliverables, and budgets across multiple institutions.
- Establishing and maintaining a communications structure across multiple institutions that works.
- Speaking with one voice to the funder.
- Pulling all the required pieces together on time.
- Dealing with turnover among key contact people across multiple institutions and employers.

However, with the U.S. DOL/ETA consortium grants ranging up to \$20 million per award, a little extra collaborative effort by the grant writer is not out of line.

Writing Style

Beginning grant writers often grapple with this issue. For a grant writer nearing the end of a marathon session working for weeks against long odds, speculating on the influence of writing style as a potential determining factor may induce a sort of paranoia bordering on psychosis. How important is writing style? An FPO with experience reading and evaluating grant proposals said once that in his experience readers like to see three

things: (1) concise narrative with plenty of white space and bullet points; (2) highlights rendered in easy-to-understand charts and graphs; (3) and numbers in neat columns that add up both ways and make sense. This is probably good advice. Grant writing is not a literary exercise, though sometimes it pays better. Regarding style, here is a checklist for consideration:

- Don't bore the reader.
- Don't confuse the reader.
- Don't distract the reader.
- Don't filibuster or bait and switch.
- Don't make grammatical or usage errors.
- Give the reader something memorable to grab onto in the first three paragraphs.
- Stories work well if they are concise, clear, and make an unequivocal point that supports the central premise of the larger proposal.
- Address all the bullet points referenced in the evaluation section of the SGA.
- Don't spend too much time on minor points.
- Avoid fluff, hyperbole, mushy causality, dense academic prose, and complicated sentence structure.
- In grant writing, the marriage of substance and style is relatively unequal, with substance the more influential factor.
- Don't let style get in the way.
- Formatting is important.
- Tell the story with confidence.
- Picture a bright reader on the other end, and endeavor to engage that person.

Imagine a reader plowing through dozens of proposals. Then work backward from this question: What's going to make this proposal stand out from the rest of the stack?

The answers, in order, are these: (a) a good idea, (b) solid partners with heft and real needs, (c) a good track record, (d) a careful, balanced proposal that sticks like a barnacle to the SGA, (e) solid numbers based on good financial information, (f) innovative appeal, (g) workforce system support, (h) institutional commitment, (i) a delivery model that's challenging but attainable, and (j) good writing. All the grant writer needs to do is pull all these pieces together by the deadline, submit the proposal, then wait for news.

Surviving Rejection and Other Calamities

Sometimes the news is bad. On large federal grants, a success rate of 20 percent is customary, which means that 80 percent of applicants will be forced to deal with the downside of rejection. Famous American architect Frank Geary (2010) talked on a TED episode about the insecurity of hard work, how you don't know while you're doing it if it's going to work out, and the pleasure in adding a piece beyond competence and professionalism he called the "then what" factor, which is the vision, edge, and inspiration an artist brings to their craft that sets them apart from other craftsmen working in the same medium. Grant writing may not rise to the level of an art form, yet the tenacity and insight required to do it well borrows upon those same traits. The "then what" component, call it pride or balance or determination or confidence, a grant writer must access following receipt of a rejection letter. Recovering from the news that 8-12 weeks of focused work has gone down the drain is not easy. A degree of randomness accompanies all grant funding decisions, and it takes resiliency to bounce back. Here are some recommendations for getting past rejection:

- Do share the news with all stakeholders, thank them for their support, and pledge to pursue additional opportunities as they arise.
- Do get the reviewers' comments and read them without prejudice.
- Do what it takes to get over the disappointment.
- Don't call the funder and impugn their competence or integrity.
- Don't give up.

CHAPTER 6: PROJECT START-UP

Introduction

On large federal grants, project startup begins with a call from your U.S. Congressman's office, informing you of a pending award. American novelist Jane Smiley (2005) once described the feeling as akin to a person given the owner's blessing to go into an upscale clothing store and told to pick out any suit free of charge, but then finding out nothing on the rack fits just right. There is truth in this assessment, though the grant manager doesn't experience the second part of the observation until later in the project. Taking the call from a congressional staffer regarding the positive outcome of a grant proposal is both satisfying and daunting. There's nothing like it in the grant-writing world. The call is what you've been working toward, often for weeks with no assurance that the writing, organization, and the vision behind it will be rewarded, and sometimes with the threat of unemployment looming. It takes guts to keep going. After the final push of turning in the proposal you hear nothing for weeks, and then one day the call comes out of the blue. Depending on the size of the award, it's like finding a multi-million dollar gift under the Christmas tree. The glow from this achievement often creates a sense of optimism and opportunity that can permeate an institution and inspire the community it serves. The successful grant writer needs to soak up this golden moment and let it marinate a while. After all, it may never happen again. But there are two risks in dwelling too long in the afterglow phase. One, the human tendency to over promise and

under deliver can set in during the award announcement phase, similar to drinking of too much caffeinated sugary drink. Also known as drinking the Kool-Aid, overhyping what may happen should be avoided at all costs because it undermines the sustained effort required to bring many deliverables in a complicated project to fruition. This is comparable to a writer talking too much about the details of their current project before it's been written, thereby bleeding the power from the narrative. A better way to go long-term is to lay the groundwork to under promise and over deliver. Don't talk too much about what's going to happen until it's largely done and in place. The second risk of waiting too long is deferring momentum, which ultimately will be the fuel that drives the project forward. As any beginning physics student can tell you, momentum is a function of mass and force. Inertia is its counterbalancing force and is the enemy of work. The most effective way to establish momentum and mitigate inertia is to focus on opportunities for early wins. Some folks call this low fruit, an apt analogy though it's not always true that the easiest or most inviting fruit is low on the tree. Regardless, early wins are important. The smart project manager takes maybe a day or two to savor the award, promotes it as appropriate, and then gets busy. Often the early days of an award offer the best opportunities to work under the radar and get things moving. Below is a startup checklist:

1. Negotiating with the Funder
2. Dealing with the Media and Other External Stakeholders
3. Dealing with Internal Stakeholders
4. Revisiting the Timelines
5. Defining the Project Director
6. Pulling a Team Together

7. Bridging the Credit vs. Non-Credit Divide
8. Leveraging Technology
9. Looking Ahead

1. Negotiating with the Funder

As the grantee sorts out formative questions, the funder will begin moving ahead negotiating the terms of the award, generally contained in a document known as the Statement of Work (SOW). In the acronym-rich world of grants management and contracts, the SOW represents the contract between the funder and the grantee and so is a very important process document. The Statement of Work consists of three main components: (1) budget, (2) deliverables, and (3) metrics. Let's look at each of these components from the standpoint of the Statement of Work.

Budget. Agencies vary in regards to budget negotiations, and programs within individual agencies vary as well. Sometimes the funder will ask the grantee to adjust particular line items, moving dollars from one area in the grant to another, for example, or ask for explanation on how fringes are calculated, or even readjustment on the SF424a so that columns that may be obscurely understood by the grantee but are clear and required by the funder read accurately and balance across line items. Budget negotiations can involve any line item. The grantee needs to listen, react to the funder, and be responsive in making changes. Award negotiation is not the time to get militant or engage in philosophical debate about the government's role in our lives. Clarify the changes required and get them done. Realize that seldom is the award amount diminished during budget negotiations. Rather, what the feds want is an accurate read on the numbers that will form the basis of mutual understanding for the duration of the project. In rare cases

they will accept the budget as submitted without modification. This outcome is the gold standard for grant work and should be the goal as the budget is first conceived during the writing phase. In short, as referenced earlier, a professional grant writer should approach creating the budget from the perspective of accurately matching the dollars requested to key program deliverables rather than approaching the budget as a grab-bag to pad with fluff. Grant readers generally start their evaluation process by looking at the budget. If the budget seems reasonable, that impression has a tendency to carry through to the rest of the narrative. If it doesn't seem well thought out, either on the high side or the low side, the proposal suffers and is scored accordingly. It is worth noting that asking for too little is not a rewarded activity in competitive grant proposal work. Being overly frugal does not translate into a good score. It is as poorly reviewed as asking for too much, both approaches reflective of proposals that will not successfully derive optimal return on the federal investment. Common sense aside, if you want to get funded, think like a reader. Budget negotiations often stem from institutional policies that don't align with the funders' mandates. On federal grants, those mandates are outlined in OMB Circulars, a complicated set of directives that grant managers need to force themselves to read and absorb. Here are six common sense management directives to heed:

1. Outside of the personnel line item, movement of dollars between line items up to 20 percent of the line item can be moved either way without a modification request.
2. Movement of dollars into and out of personnel from non-personnel line items requires a modification request and approval.
3. Equipment is defined as any item or unit costing more than \$5000. Equipment purchases require a bidding process involving a minimum of three bidders. Supplies are defined as purchases less than \$5000 per item and do not require a bid process.

4. Fulltime project management charged to the grant means that the director should not be engaged in general fund activities funded by the grant.
5. Indirect is tricky, it varies in its allowable application by agency, and should be the focus of discussion supported by a paper trail before mistakes are made by the grantee.
6. Modification requests don't guarantee approval. Moving ahead and seeking permission retroactively is not good practice. Grant managers have been known to play naughty and claim that it's easier to ask forgiveness than seek permission, but they generally end up doing both. So why bother? Do it right in the first place.

Deliverables. Deliverables represent the substance of what the grantee commits to doing in the grant proposal. To win funding in a competitive environment, the deliverables must align closely with the program requirements of the funder. The vision of the grant writer evolves from speculation to reality at this point, and a poorly conceived proposal full of deliverables that cannot be accomplished will start to blow back on the grantee. It's a simple premise, but sound proposals are built on sound deliverables. Competitive workforce training grants from U.S. Department of Labor, for example, might contain the following components:

- A reasonable but ambitious target number of trainees served for the dollars requested
- A reasonable array of curricular tracks ranging from attainable to a stretch
- Innovation
- Scaling capacity
- An appealing industrial sector or sectors

During the negotiation phase, deliverables are generally lifted from the proposal in whole and deposited in the statement of work. The funder either likes the deliverables

or they don't. If they do, assuming the rest of the proposal holds water, the funder announces a pending award. If they don't, the grantee is shot down and never gets to the negotiation phase.

Metrics. Metrics differ by agency. On Department of Labor projects, common measures are generally used: trainees served, trainees entering employment, trainees entering employment related to training, trainees retained employment one quarter after training, trainees retained employment one year after training, etc. It can be a challenge to monitor all these metrics and report on them accurately, but that is not the concern during startup negotiation. Occasionally agencies will reform or reconfigure the metrics during negotiation, creating a higher level of measurement and accountability than was referenced in the SGA. From the standpoint of a grantee it can feel like a bait and switch, though from a perspective of the funder it probably is framed as nothing more than a mechanism to ensure effective stewardship of public dollars. Regardless, a project manager encountering this during negotiations needs to pay attention. The options to a grantee are limited. During startup negotiations the pending award status gives the funder most of the leverage. However, both grantee and funder generally aspire to establish a positive working relationship from the start, and ironing out details such as these, if handled with a degree of finesse by the project director, falls into the category of finding common ground and learning to speak a common language. It can pay dividends long-term to work through a tough issue with a funder. Funders pay attention to the grantees out in the field they can work with. They pay attention to grantees they can't work with, too.

Bottom line, don't make the mistake of assuming the grant submission that triggered the pending award takes precedence over the Statement of Work. It doesn't. The proposal forms the basis of the negotiation between the funder and the pending grantee, culminating in the SOW, which is the contract outlining the terms and conditions of the award. Only when the SOW is completed and signed by both parties, the funder and the grantee, can the project start and grant-funded expenditures begin to flow.

2. Dealing with the Media

News of a large federal award carries much reward and some risk for the grantee. Generally, the federal funding agency prefers breaking the news of the award via a press release to the local media. The first risk for the grantee is getting ahead of the curve on this process, and preempting the agency press release. That doesn't go over well and is almost an unforgivable offense. If you're fortunate enough to be funded, wait for the press release before going public. Let the agency play through. There will be plenty of time afterward to harvest PR for the College. The award press release flows through the congressional office and often is written in the sort of stilted bureaucratic vernacular that makes understanding what happened a challenge to the average reader. On a large award, however, reference to the dollars alone will grab the attention of the general public and once this news gets out, be prepared to answer questions about the project by local media. While this is a good thing, going public presents a layer of risk that devolves into four main concerns:

1. In trying to describe a complicated project with many component parts and partners, the media person half-captures the essence and fails to place the correct proportion on the various elements of the project.

2. A reference to the award amount can convey a mistaken impression to the community that any financial challenges the College had been facing are now history.
3. Project partners and their commitment to the project, financial or otherwise, may come under the spotlight in a sudden, unrehearsed manner. As in most aspects of life, partners don't like surprises.
4. Critics of federal investment, taxes, and government in general will be presented a gaping opportunity to hold forth and criticize the award. If the voice belongs to an influential community member with a personal animus or skepticism toward the College, the project director will be facing an uphill challenge from the start.

Sometimes the less said at the time of the award the better. It pays dividends for the project director to boil down the deliverables to a digestible narrative, and be prepared to stick to that storyline. From a PR standpoint, it is better to promote deliverables after they are in place than to talk them up too much in the beginning and then possibly fail to deliver. Grant narrative and media presentation don't align well together. A mistake the project director should avoid is thinking he or she can render that integration seamless on the front end of the project and make others as enthusiastic about the project as he or she was when the vision was first hatched.

3. Dealing with Internal Stakeholders

Internal stakeholders here refer to employees of the College who will be in some way affected by the project. If the grant writer has done his or her work in exemplary fashion, these internal stakeholders know who they are and how they will be affected if and when the grant is funded. In the real world of grant chasing, however, this is often not standard operating procedure, if only because from the grant writer's perspective getting everyone stirred up and asking speculative process questions with no solid

answers to offer doesn't help get the grant written. Outreach to various internal areas affected by a grant proposal is often done when news of the award spreads across campus. It's then that the grant writer, if he or she is now the project manager, needs to get in gear and follow this checklist:

- Will recruitment involve faculty? If so, who and how so.
- Will recruitment involve admissions staff? If so, who and how much.
- Will recruitment involve marketing to produce brochures, promotional videos, etc? If so, when and to what extent?
- Will registration involve student services, registrar's office, financial aid, etc? If so, who, when, and to what extent.
- Will curriculum development and delivery involve IT, web site, or online coordination? If so, how, when and to what extent?
- Will coursework and delivery involve facilities to rearrange rooms or labs? If so, who needs to be brought on board?
- Will staffing affect faculty and support staff contractual bargaining units? If so, how and who needs to be looped in.
- Will staffing involve HR and the posting process? What is the time lag between posting, interviews, candidate selection, and hiring?
- How will contractual arrangements be arranged? Who is authorized at the College to sign contracts?
- How soon does the business office need to be looped in? What role will the business office play in final negotiations of the Statement of Work?
- How often and under what conditions does the President or CEO need to be looped in?

One caveat here. Consortium projects involving multiple partners over many states and awards as high as \$20 million per project involve much more complicated internal stakeholder arrangements. Standalone grants are much easier to manage in this

regard. The retroactive backfilling that can be done on a single campus among colleagues is far harder to orchestrate over 8-10 community colleges of varying sizes and cultures. Directors of consortium projects probably should not count on resolving these internal issues after the funding award.

4. Dealing with External Stakeholders

External stakeholders such as employers, labor organizations, trade associations, and the workforce system are written into grant for specific purposes. Pulling a proposal together involving a range of partners often feels like gossamer prior to submission. The grant writer is responsible for the vision and implicitly for the implementation of the vision, which he or she conveys to the external partners while soliciting their support, but it is known by all stakeholders that until money starts changing hands, nobody is really on the hook for anything. When the award is announced, however, what's written into the project comes to life. Support that involved only a signature on a sheet of paper now represents real commitments that you, the project director, will need to orchestrate. Landing the award is always good news, especially to employers, provided that the project director is straight on the following considerations:

- Are employers committed to cash match?
- Are employers committed to sending a specific number of employees?
- Are employers obligated to pay trainee wages during training?
- Are employers responsible for providing training space, equipment, recruitment support, or marketing?
- Are employers obligated to hire trainees at the conclusion of training?

Some employers don't mind providing these services to the grant. Most don't, but some do. But all employers resent the grant writer that commits them to obligations they didn't know about then informs them about their commitments after the award is made. This is bad form. It erodes trust, which takes a long time to build and can be squandered overnight by not being straightforward with external partners. Employers in particular won't forget this sort of treatment. Avoid it at all costs.

In order to get the word out to all external stakeholders, figure out a mechanism to spread the news to all at the same time. Most competitive grant proposals require the grantee to itemize their approach to external communication in the proposal. If this is the case, the astute grantee should just follow the communications plan laid out in their proposal. Project advisory teams that meet quarterly are well-regarded structures by most grant readers. A project website with all key deliverables, timetables, and commitments accessible to the funder, employers, other external stakeholders, and trainees works well in this regard. But when the award is made public, nothing underscores the event like a handwritten note by the director to the point of contact for each external stakeholder. Memos or email don't quite make it. Write a note.

5. Revisiting the Timelines

From general to specific, below is a checklist of questions the project manager needs to consider during the early startup phase:

- Which deliverables can be rolled out quickly?
- Which deliverables will take longer?
- Fully implemented, what is likely to be the long-term benefit?
- What is the best that can happen with this project?

- What is the worst that can happen?
- Where are trouble spots and entanglements likely to occur?
- How will the funding opportunity integrate with existing non-grant college processes?
- What level of awareness and comfort exists between the College and the funding entity?
- What needs to be done to further enhance the level of awareness and comfort between the College and the funder?
- What needs to be done to gather the data the project will need to report to maintain compliance with reporting mandates?
- What paperwork needs to be collected and how will that be managed?
- What is the internal process for managing grant restricted funds and the process of sharing financial data with all key stakeholders?

The project manager needs to remember to revisit the timelines outlined in the Statement of Work, and share them with internal stakeholders. It doesn't hurt to post them storyboard-style so that everyone has a sense for project milestones and the time available to attain them. A project website performs this function quite nicely as well. On consortium projects with multiple partners, maintaining this operational structure is essential. Consortium or standalone projects are alike in that time is the limiting factor, not resources. Letting days slip away is like leaving money on the table.

6. Staffing Key Positions

Good hiring practices are integral to optimal management of large federal grants. It is important that grantees follow the same policies and procedures in their grant activities that govern the rest of the institution. Federal agencies will be particularly interested that ADA, EEO, and non-discrimination mandates are followed, not only in

regards to trainees and their access to supportive services but for staff and new hires as well. In fact, federal auditors often start in this area to assess whether an institution's attention to compliance in these areas is sufficient and documented. An organized presentation of these policies by an institution is a good way to kick off a monitoring visit. Conversely, trouble here may lead to trouble elsewhere. Three pieces of HR guidance are presented here for consideration:

1. Make sure that policies and procedures related to federal mandates are posted and accessible on official College documents and websites.
2. Consider compiling a hard copy or electronic handbook of key federal guidelines to give to new hires working for a federally funded grant.
3. Make sure trainees entering training funded by the grant sign off on ADA, EEO, and non-discrimination paperwork during the intake process. Maintain these forms with each student's file.

Perhaps no activity is more correlated to project success than hiring the right staff on a timely basis. The first hire should be the project director, followed by office management, tech support, part-time instructors, and fulltime faculty. Here is a checklist of considerations:

Project Director. At some institutions, particularly smaller community colleges with limited resources, the grant writer by default becomes the project manager on grant proposals that are funded. At many larger institutions, this is not so as the two functions—grant seeking and project management—are separate jobs involving skill sets that do not necessarily nest well together. There are at least three obvious benefits to the grant writer transitioning to project management as the proposal is funded:

Continuity. The grant writer will understand the proposal at a deep level. He or she will know the employer partners and other external stakeholders written into the

grant. He or she may know the federal support structure from previous funded projects or submissions, relationships that can prove very useful all along the way from award to closeout. The grant writer also is likely to be well known to internal stakeholders, helping to facilitate the integration of a complicated project into ongoing college functions, often an overlooked factor not to be discounted.

Timing. Related to continuity but slightly different in scope and scale, timing refers to the internal clock the grant writer brings to the project. Having nursed the proposal from concept through the organization and writing stages to completion and submission before the deadline, a grant writer develops keen understanding of the timeline of the project, a capacity that can prove very useful post-award when a large award without leadership can feel as adrift as a schooner floating free in a harbor—plainly there for all to see from shore but rudderless and without momentum nonetheless. An inner feel for the marriage between timeline and deliverables is essential to management of the project—a sense of ownership and urgency, in other words.

Federal guidelines. A successful grant writer on a large federal project will have likely internalized during the writing process many of the compliance issues related to the program and its funding stream. Compliance affects every area of the project: trainee eligibility, program income, credit vs. non-credit delivery, outreach, workforce system involvement, employer match, academic credentials, budget, modification requests, etc. The list is long and dense with entanglements. The cost of getting it wrong can be high, however. Paying back substantial amounts of money is a very real threat on large federal grants. A good grant writer knows this and sorts through the many scenarios in which compliance problems during the implementation stage may arise, building firewalls into

the proposal as necessary to mitigate these potential problem areas and insulate the project from major findings. Bringing this depth of understanding to the endeavor is one of the primary benefits an experienced grant writer provides. It's carpentry on an intuitive scale.

However, let's assume that the grant writer does not become the project director, which is often the case. The project director may or may not be familiar with the nuances of the solicitation, the mandatory program guidelines, or the rationale for how the proposal was constructed. He or she also may not be familiar with managing federal grant projects. The partnership commitments documented within the proposal may appear loose, arbitrary, or challenging to accomplish. The budget may not make sense. Stepping into the project director's shoes and making the best of a grant written by somebody else can become an extremely daunting task. For the new project director, the following checklist of opportunities and challenges applies:

- Read the SGA. Read the proposal. Read the Statement of Work. Then re-read.
- Get a feel for project timelines. Write them down if necessary.
- Connect with the Federal Project Officer. Look for opportunities to establish a trust relationship. Don't be negative about any aspect of the award or the challenges ahead. Don't point the finger at the grant writer to the FPO, even if it may seem warranted.

The FPO does not want to be embarrassed by a project that goes off the rails or be caught in the middle of the ensuing wreckage. The FPO will be highly attuned to an approach that sounds like preemptive excuse making, and will not respond positively to the first whiff of a "he-said, she-said" quagmire. Keep communications real and keep it

can-do. Commit to asking for help when you need it and follow through at a professional level.

- Meet the external partners, particularly the employers. Listen and learn. Share what you know. Don't make promises beyond what's written in the grant. Commit to follow through. Then do so.
- Meet the internal stakeholders. Seek to understand their issues. Resolve to avoid needless friction between the grant and internal college processes.
- Find a great detail-oriented person to manage office paperwork, supply requisitions, trainee intake, timesheets, and cross-project communication. Treat that person like gold. They will make your work possible.
- Use technology smartly including web-conferencing, online course development, and the creation of a project website documenting program deliverables, timelines, and milestones.
- Find the best tech support you can. Inspire them about the project and the neat innovative opportunities it offers to stretch their skills and bring change to the College.
- Find the best content experts you can to develop curriculum and teach. Look for passion, work ethic, expertise, and folks motivated by a challenge.
- Look for motivated faculty who love to teach and want to reinvent the wheel.
- As your job is to bring the proposal to life, beware of voices who tell you "we've tried that before and it didn't work." Don't waste time and energy on negativity.
- Be mindful of sorting through all pertinent details related to the project, but don't linger too long in the weeds. Delegate so that you can find the space to work ahead. Working ahead needs to be your sweet spot.
- Get out early, mindful that staff will start to transition during the latter stages of the grant. On Department of Labor training grants, eighty percent is considered adequate performance on baseline deliverables. Get to eighty percent as soon as you can.
- Find some early wins. Establish momentum and credibility. Get the word out. Stay positive. Keep the team motivated. Create a sense of shared journey in a special project. Share credit as it arrives. Keep an eye on the big picture. Don't get ahead of the rest of the institution. Align to College goals. Link with good practices and positive people. Look for transformative opportunities. Work below the radar. Present when ready.

- Meet all project deadlines, especially required quarterly reports.
- Maintain focus.

7. Pulling a Team Together

Pulling people into a grant-writing project, especially if their heart is not in it, is generally a tough starting point that often does not improve even if the proposal is funded. Grants can be viewed warily by faculty, sometimes for good reason, which tend to coalesce into three categories of objection: (1) grants by their nature are disruptive, there's nothing wrong with the status quo, and we don't want to be bothered; (2) the bubble of enrollment stimulated by grant activity will burst after grant funding goes away, thereby creating enrollment challenges and problems for us post-grant that aren't our fault but which we'll ultimately be held responsible for; and (3) grants tend to leverage control away from faculty toward the project director, taking the program in a direction faculty feels is often misguided by an administrator without content credibility or industry contacts. All of these at times are valid points. On the other hand, they also can be excuses by entrenched faculty who are protected/victimized by a system that does not reward innovation, risk-taking, or effort any more than it punishes mediocrity.

The new grant manager encountering this situation is somewhat behind the eight ball, but may improve his or her position using the following strategies: (1) listen to their objections, be open to their view of where the grant proposal ought to go, and attempt to accommodate their views where possible; (2) look for opportunities to purchase equipment that the affected faculty want but can't afford without external funding; and (3) involve influential outsiders, such as advisory team members, to intervene on your

behalf. If all of these feel coercive and slightly unsavory, it's because they are. If the institution's position is that the opportunity presented by pursuit of the grant outweighs internal objection, you'll likely be tasked with moving ahead regardless of objection and submit the best proposal you can. If so, count on no cooperation from the affected faculty and in some cases sustained resistance of the long-term, passive kind. Dealing with this reaction post-award is no fun.

Ultimately the funder doesn't care about internal obstacles. If they fund your proposal, they're going to mandate that you do what you said you'd do in your statement of work. If you don't, you as the project director and the College will be vulnerable to findings that could include paying back money—the third rail of grants management. The best a grant writer can do, faced with these challenges, is to think ahead during the writing stage and spread the deliverables across multiple content areas involving staff that are motivated by the opportunity external funding presents, and who will work with you to bring the vision to life. The worst position to be in—short of not getting funded—is to be locked into a single deliverable with a group who won't cooperate. Then you're truly in a trapped position and seldom do good grants come from that place.

That old saying—success has many fathers but failure is an orphan—relates to grant writing too. Cracking the funder's code in order to write a successful proposal is only part of the equation. Equally important is figuring out what the institution can manage in terms of change to its programs and processes, where funding is most likely to benefit the College and the community in the short, intermediate, and long term, and how a successful project might leverage future opportunity that brings good things to life—the vision thing. The best way to win the hearts and minds of internal staff is to succeed, and

to bring things to fruition that they see are good for all parties. Some folks you never win over. It sounds harsh, but it's best to not waste time on them. Build coalitions of the willing and able. Most folks like to be part of something positive, and so it's the job of the project director to bring something positive to life.

8. Bridging the Credit vs. Non-Credit Divide

In 2007 Alpena Community College won a national award from the United States Department of Labor, Employment, and Training Administration for excellence in workforce education, the highest award available in the non-credit world at the community college level. Most of the key characteristics and limitations of non-credit work at community colleges have been identified and described accurately by researchers. What many articles miss, however, is the often frantic, patchwork, underfunded, poorly-recognized, creative, fun, fast, rewarding, human, interesting, and ultimately marginalized aspect of most non-credit endeavors. Working in the non-credit side is like being in love with a crazy person—fast-paced, out of control, all kinds of drama, memorable, and, over time, pretty exhausting. In the end, sometimes all you're left with is wondering what just happened.

To do it well you're constantly chasing money to fund the activity, which means you're writing grants, dealing with government funding agencies, employers, the workforce system, cash payers, and regulatory people (government auditors) watching over you. The ongoing need for financial accountability is much higher on the non-credit side than most people realize. And with that, the stakes are high for the college if you mess up.

Except in the larger shops, there's seldom much standardization of curriculum or even process. You react to the request, make the necessary arrangements, set it up, try to hit the mark instructionally, manage the paperwork, do the billing, and move on to the next job. The lack of data to drive decision-making is endemic. Follow-through on trainee employment outcomes is seldom done or budgeted for. Word of mouth is the coin of the realm. If you don't deliver or do it poorly, word gets around and the program sputters and eventually dies. It's very action-oriented. You can't spend much time talking about what you're going to do or making long-range strategic plans.

In short, if the activity is a money loser for the college, non-credit is first on the chopping block. That reality makes it a tough area for most people to work in, long-term. The reactive yet entrepreneurial nature of non-credit work is both its primary strength and its greatest limitation. On the other hand, there's a connection to constituencies on the non-credit side that folks on the credit side don't widely experience—and which is very important to the college in order to stay connected to the community. Non-credit constituencies mean trainees from every background and educational experience; employers doing neat and important things; adjunct instructors who are passionate and accomplished; full-time instructors wanting to plug in and see how their curriculum on the credit side applies in a real-world workplace setting; funding agencies on the state and federal level with dollars to invest in new pedagogical notions; triage retraining on the ground—all of it arrives at the doorstep of the non-credit side.

The leader of non-credit activities should be the conduit for all these inputs to flow into the college, informing its collective DNA and growing its knowledge capacity. He or she should also think responsibly about the quality of training that is provided on

the non-credit side and its connection to the overall reputation of the college as a credible teaching and learning institution in the community. Shoddy work gets around, sticking like Velcro to everybody. The most common charge leveled against non-credit activity from the credit side is that it's not academically robust—the notion that we train animals but educate human beings.

It doesn't have to be this way. Too often credit and non-credit behave as if they are on opposing teams. In its lowest form, each side can regard what they don't know about the other as information not worth knowing. This represents a toxic state of affairs and must be dealt with for the betterment of the institution as a whole. The best way forward is to recruit the best credit side instructors to do non-credit workforce instruction in their area of expertise. It's slow going, but spreads the word in the most authentic way that there's real substance in non-credit workforce instruction. This engagement process is arguably one of the most effective ways to keep a community college grounded and focused on its mission. It's an important piece of the puzzle.

9. Leveraging Technology

Most observers agree that technology has been and will continue to be a displacement force in higher education. Many large federal grants present a great opportunity to think big in terms of technology and build in funding to bring the vision to life using external dollars. In fact, grantees that don't feature innovation in their proposals using technology often find their proposal on the reject pile. Technology moves at the speed of change, so proclamations regarding its usage quickly become outdated. However, several broad areas of technology now appear to be so embedded in our culture and the educational ecosystem that focusing on these during startup has merit.

Video and Streaming Technology. Video and streaming technology is an area of innovation and opportunity for workplace training providers. A number of questions related to rollout of video services will appear during startup. Below is a brief checklist:

- How will video be captured?
- Does it involve hiring staff or can the service be contracted?
- Does the College or the grant have the resources to procure video equipment?
- What video production and associated hardware and software is required?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of lecture capture vs. embedding instructional content within a course shell in a Blackboard environment?
- Does the College have streaming server capacity and sufficient technical support to provide video streaming services on demand to students or should that be outsourced?
- To what extent are instructors prepared or willing to employ video in coursework?
- Can video be effectively used to simulate occupational coursework and lab components?
- Where will video production equipment be stored and secured?
- What forms of backup on data and hard drives will be required?

Skype/Adobe Connect/Interactive Conferencing. With the advent of Skype and comparable low-cost providers, interactive video-conferencing has become the norm at many institutions of higher education. The tool offers great opportunities to bring students and instructors together in a virtual environment with the added convenience of not requiring participants to congregate in a single setting. Current research on interactive conferencing tools infers great promise in the establishment of learning communities. Some questions for the project director to consider during startup:

- Do all stakeholders have access to the software?
- Is there a consistency across platforms that allow users to interact seamlessly?
- Is training required?
- Are there bandwidth considerations at remote locations?
- How can instructors and trainees use the technology to enhance instruction and create a more interactive learning environment?
- What does the research say about learning communities and non-traditional learners, such as the unemployed, underemployed, or displaced workers of a certain age not generally perceived to embrace technology?

Website Technology. Websites are so ubiquitous today that it's hard to recall a time not that long ago when a webpage represented breakthrough technology. Websites provide a perfect framework for posting all manner of useful project-related information at virtually no charge. Thus, creating a project website should be a front burner startup activity for the motivated project director. Here is a checklist to consider:

- Who develops the page?
- Who controls the site?
- Who is responsible for updates to the site?
- What content should be most prominent on the site?
- Is the site organized by deliverable or some other project feature?
- Is streaming video part of the site?
- Does the institution or a public domain such as YouTube host the videos?
- Are the project website and the institutional webpage well integrated?
- Is a consistent and professional look maintained across the site?
- Are web services offered to traditional students at the institution going to be provided to trainees under the grant?

- If so, how will the delivery of those services be managed?

Online Coursework. According to Jeff Selingo (2013), online delivery in its many forms and modalities is perhaps the most disruptive technology affecting education today. Providers such as the Western Governor's Association and the University of Southern New Hampshire are changing the landscape of Higher Ed in fundamental ways. Large federal workforce grants that find their way to the top of the funding heap likely contain some measure of online innovation. The wise project director should begin during startup to sort through the details associated with implementing online delivery in content areas in which it currently doesn't exist, generally the upfront requirement for getting grant funding to support online innovation. Here is a checklist for consideration:

- Who is on board and who is opposed?
- How do you manage both approaches?
- Where do you find appropriate content experts?
- Who provides online content management support?
- Are accreditation issues involved?
- Are there internal quality control factors to consider, such as a curriculum committee approval process?
- What are the timelines working backward from anticipated delivery?
- Any supplementary supplies or software required?
- How is trainee recruitment for online curriculum going to be managed?
- How do you handle lab courses in a virtual environment?
- What academic credentials do you intend to offer?
- How will those complement or undermine existing credentials?
- To what extent can new partnerships factor into the mix?

- How motivated are you to be a change agent?

Startup is the time to address these questions. Bringing skeptics and non-believers on board is tiring, frustrating and almost always incremental work. It moves ahead one person at a time. That's why it's good to get started early. Time is not your ally on a grant-funded project.

Social Media and Marketing. ACC's marketing technician, tasked with managing the College website and Facebook presence, shared these insights regarding social media and its growing role in higher education. Regarding Facebook, she emphasized seven main points:

1. The appeal of Facebook is its community-based, two-way conversational function in which news, commentary, questions, information requests, video and updates are all available for free in a friendly, informal, network of users.
2. The interactive nature of the site creates an opportunity for the institution to inform users of current events at the college, a good thing, but also creates the challenging expectation among users that a question or criticism demands an immediate response by the institution or its representative, which may also be a good thing but not always.
3. There is an important distinction between public relations, in which Facebook excels as a medium, and marketing or promotion, in which it is largely ineffective due to users' aversion to the taint of advertising on the site and its violation of an ethos of two-way informal communication among users and the institution.
4. Facebook and the college website are two different applications of outreach, and while complementary, they should not be commingled in terms of their applications and audience.
5. A primary challenge of Facebook for a community college is that someone needs to be monitoring it almost fulltime so that the college does not appear unresponsive to users.
6. Facebook fits into a generational shift in which users prefer to communicate electronically in some cases more than face to face or via phone. Lost in this paradigm shift are traditional interpersonal communication staples such as

reading body language, assessing non-verbal cues, and communicating tone. She did point out, however, that being sensitive (but not oversensitive) to written electronic communication is a mandatory people skill in this new environment.

7. She does not see any of this going away anytime in the future (Silver, 2013).

Looking Ahead

The line between startup and project management is not well defined, and in some ways is not an especially important distinction. Activities cut back and forth across the borderline like bridge traffic over international waters. Many SGAs require the grant writer to delineate activities that happen during the first quarter, defined as startup, distinct from activities that happen later in the project as if both happen in a vacuum. They don't. Federal auditors generally don't focus their monitoring attention on whether deliverables were accomplished during the startup phase of the grant or after the first quarter. However, there are three initiatives that the astute project manager needs to get moving during startup:

- Procuring equipment
- Beginning curriculum development
- Trainee recruitment

Regarding equipment, if the procurement process languishes too long a federal monitor will begin to question how essential the equipment is to the project, and the risk increases that the national office will not approve the final request when it appears in Washington. As for initiating curriculum development, if training delivery is a key

deliverable, getting the process moving through its initial phases should be the focus of the project director. Trainee recruitment also benefits from an early start due to the multi-phase process of training delivery. On each of these activities, like so many others on large federal grants, there is a varying degree of lag time between getting the activities moving and when they begin to take shape. The astute project manager needs to be mindful of these uneven gestation cycles as the project emerges out of the startup phase and begins to mature.

CHAPTER 7: PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Introduction

Project management is often defined in terms of operational functions, as the steady attainment of a sequence of details leading to timely accomplishment of multiple outcomes, which include:

- Supervising project personnel
- Developing a working relationship with the funding agency
- Working with project partners and developing new partnerships
- Overseeing procurements and vendor activity
- Being accountable for the progress of the project
- Managing the project budget
- Preparing reports
- Creating sustainability
- Ensuring that funder requirements are followed
- Filing required paperwork

The checklist above indeed represents key activities of a Project Director managing a large federal grant, and the timely execution of the items on the list is no small feat. However, while the checklist provides a framework of guidance and structure, it does not address some of the underlying leadership challenges a project director will

face during a typical grant cycle, and so a broader list is proposed. Consider these traits as a launching point for discussions on essential characteristics of good project managers.

Communicating Leadership and Shared Vision

There are probably as many different leadership styles as there are leaders. Gifted leaders often seem to redefine the model based on the marriage of circumstances, timing, and fit of the position, and the unique package of skills, experiences, and personal attributes they bring to the job. In *Shared Vision: Transformational Leadership in American Community Colleges* Baker, Roueche, and Rose (1989) note that strong leaders tend to be self-actualizing people who set high goals and become known for achieving them. They exude confidence that they can make things happen. Knowledge of self is a key component of effective leadership, as well as having the vision and the capacity to articulate that vision to others. In so doing, the dynamic is changed from passive to active, exciting others into seeing the vision and seeing themselves involved in it which ultimately leads to a shared commitment to making it happen. A compelling vision is the catalyst for engaging others in doing meaningful work. Shared vision is based on shared values, such as hope for what the future might hold, and represents powerful links to pulling a team together to do good work.

Vision in its most mundane form is when good leaders provide direction, based on their capacity and access to informed decision-making, similar to the bottom layer on Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs. People need and expect this from their leaders. But followers require leaders to do more than keep the lights on and the doors open, as challenging as that may be these days. Followers hope that leaders have thought through a way forward for the college and all the stakeholders it represents. According to

Maslow, we all aspire for the point at the tip of the hierarchy. The problem for the transformational leader is there's not a lot of footing up there. It can be hard to stay balanced. Nonetheless, people hunger for leaders with vision. The vision doesn't need to be tangible, such as buildings or facilities, but it needs to register with internal and external stakeholders while communicating a sure-footed understanding of the community's deepest aspirations. In *Beyond Vision: The Transforming Leader*, Pielstick (1996) argues that shared vision is first developed through dialogue. To keep the dream alive, it must be repeatedly articulated in many forms to instill shared meaning and purpose. While two-way communication facilitates the process of elevating the moral purpose of the shared vision, inspiring and unifying both followers and leaders, listening is the most important component of communication for transformational leaders and project managers alike. Traditionally, leaders have been valued for their communication and decision making skills. Project managers must reinforce these important skills by making a deep commitment to listening intently to others. To identify and clarify the will of a group, listen to what is being said (and not said), and place it in context of the present, the future, and past institutional history. Drucker (1990) found the willingness, ability, and self-discipline to listen as the first competence of an effective leader.

Demonstrating Character

A good leader must possess integrity, ethics, and character. Good leaders need to communicate at a very high level, both on their feet in front of an audience and in electronic and written forms of communication. Project leaders need to write well, or least effectively. Connecting with people through the written word has a cumulative

payoff, because of the intimate relationship between writers and readers. It creates a foundation of trust that comes from one mind revealing itself to another, and over time a sort of political capital accumulates which can be drawn on in times of duress, like a savings account. As one community college president astutely observed: “Never underestimate the power of a handwritten note.” Communication is also the linkage to the hearts and minds of the many stakeholders of the modern community college—students, trustees, faculty, administrators, staff, alumni, donors, legislators, the media, business and industry supporters, arbiters of accountability at all levels, and the many taxpayers out in the community hoping that the community college leadership operates efficiently and with exemplary character.

In *Relational Leadership* (2000), Wright defined leadership in the following ways:

- Leadership is about influence and service
- Leadership is about vision and hope
- Leadership is about character and trust
- Leadership is about relationships and power
- Leadership is about dependency and accountability.

Robert Greenleaf, originator of the term, servant leadership, also connected leadership to character:

The servant-leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The best test is: do those served grow as persons: do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And,

what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, not be further deprived? (Greenleaf, 2002, p. 27).

Transparency and the willingness to share information freely is also widely perceived to be a demonstration of leadership and character as well. In *Character-Centered Leadership*, Micah Amukabole (2012) observes that leadership coupled with character creates an environment of openness that avoids ambiguity and champions clear communication. Such a leader prefers using plain language in communication to demystify technical and professional jargon that tends to obscure the truth. Character is what people see, not what the leader says about him or herself.

Building Relationships

The capacity to build enduring relationships is a critically important leadership function. Researchers attribute the ability to a variety of sources: gregarious good will, personal branding, advanced people skills, insight into human nature, a willingness to listen, and even necessity. However the trait is derived, the impact is beneficial and in some circumstances can become transcendent. For example, in *Team of Rivals* (2005), historian Doris Kerns Goodwin describes the way newly elected president Abraham Lincoln shaped a cabinet from the ranks of his bitterest political rivals. Analyzing Lincoln's leadership style and his deep understanding of human behavior and motivation, Goodwin recognizes Lincoln's political genius by examining his relationships with three men he selected for his cabinet, all of whom were opponents for the Republican nomination in 1860: William H. Seward, Salmon P. Chase, and Edward Bates. All three men originally disdained Lincoln for his backwoods upbringing and lack of experience,

yet Lincoln not only convinced them to join his administration, he ultimately gained their admiration and respect as well. The manner in which Lincoln turned rivals into allies and dealt with many challenges to his leadership is a testament to Lincoln's deep understanding of the power of building relationships, Goodwin argues. Had he not possessed the wisdom and confidence to select and work with the best people, he could not have led the nation through the Civil War. In many ways, consider Lincoln as the model for a harried project manager.

Achieving Results

In interviews with more than 140 CEOs and business leaders, Barsh, Mogelof, and Webb (2010) distilled a set of five capabilities that, in combination, generate high levels of professional achievement and life satisfaction: (1) finding meaning in work, (2) converting emotions such as fear or stress into opportunity, (3) leveraging connections and the community, (4) acting in the face of risk, and (5) sustaining the energy that is the life force of change. The researchers called this set of capabilities "centered leadership" and found that they apply to leaders across the board facing demanding circumstances. A subsequent McKinsey survey (2010) of global executives found that leaders who had mastered even one of these skills were twice as likely as those who have mastered none to feel that they can lead through change (Barsh, Mogelof, and Webb, 2010). Leaders who had mastered all five capabilities were more than 20 times as likely to say they are satisfied with their performance as leaders and their lives in general. Mooney (2013) in the Chronicle of Higher Education found that leadership and work-life balances make great colleges, based on survey results from more than 45,000 employees at 300 institutions of higher education, 73 of them two-year of community colleges. Bass and

Avolio (1994) in *Improving Organizational Effectiveness through Transformational Leadership* described a process of achieving lasting results using the following transformational leadership principles:

- Stimulate interest among colleagues to view their work from new perspectives.
- Generate awareness of the mission or vision of the team or organization.
- Develop colleagues and followers to higher levels of ability and potential.
- Motivate colleagues to look beyond their own interests toward those that will benefit the group.

To summarize, project managers interested in achieving long-term results should seek to maintain balance between life and work while nurturing a connectedness between managing themselves and developing colleagues to their fullest potential.

Maintaining Focus

Deeply rooted in the intuitive mind, foresight allows a project manager to understand lessons from the past, the realities of the present, and the likely consequence of a decision in the future. *In the Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Covey (1989) describes this skill as Habit 2: Beginning with the End in Mind. Covey writes that Habit 2 is based on imagination, the ability to envision in your mind what you cannot at present see with your eyes. It is based on the principle that all things are created twice. There is a mental (first) creation, and a physical (second) creation. The physical creation follows the mental, just as a building follows a blueprint. Beginning with the End in Mind means to begin each day, task, or project with a clear vision of your desired direction and destination.

A good leader also must have energy. He or she must be able to get up in the morning and go to work for long hours, to focus, and be resilient when things don't go well. A good project director can't be sick much, or chronically functioning at less than their best. The leader's work ethic sets the tone, for better or worse. When the leader's energy level is low, the project suffers in a number of direct and indirect ways. It would appear the aspiring project director needs the stamina of a distance runner, the strength of a logger, the brilliance of a particle physicist, and the people skills of a senior UN diplomat. In truth, maybe only three of those skills are required.

Confronting Bad News

Nobody wants to be the bearer of bad news, particularly a project manager tasked with the responsibility of managing a large federal grant. In *How Great Leaders Deliver Bad News* (2013), Forbes contributor Erika Anderson describes the following six-step process:

1. **Speak up:** Don't push it under the carpet. When something has gone awry, immediately come up with a plan for communicating it, even though it will be uncomfortable, embarrassing, awkward, even painful.
2. **Be accurate:** Don't spin. If you try to make a bad thing sound like a not-so-bad thing, it will backfire. You'll have to explain your explanation, and your credibility will continue to plummet. Say as much as you can (sometimes confidentiality issues create constraints—but you can say that, too), and be as accurate and objective as possible. Simple, clear, true, balanced.
3. **Take responsibility:** Don't play the blame game. When a leader doesn't try to squirm out from under and instead takes full responsibility for whatever he or she has done, or—and this is important—*for whatever the company has done*, it sends a powerful signal of confidence, honor and courage.

4. Listen: Don't try to talk people out of being upset. Once you've let a big cat out of a big bag, you need to let people say what they think and feel about it. Some leaders get it right up to this point—they quickly say what's true, and take responsibility for it—and then they blow it by trying to stifle people's natural reactions. If you share bad news and then aren't willing to take in the response, it feels as though you're throwing something nasty on their desks and walking away.
5. Say what you'll do next: This is the pivot point where life beyond the bad news begins. Great leaders are especially good at this. The natural corollary of taking responsibility for the bad news is to say how you're going to turn it around—and people expect and want that from their leaders.
6. Do what you say—and repeat as needed: Bad news is seldom a “one and done” scenario. According to Anderson, a leader confronting bad news will likely have to cycle through these steps more than once, and to multiple audiences.

Learning to Admit: “I don't know”

Freakonomics authors Stephen Dubner and Steven Levitt (2012) offer an interesting observation on the aversion of managers to admit that they don't know the answer to a question related to their span of expertise. Levitt says:

What I've found in business is that almost no one will ever admit to not knowing the answer to a question. So even if they absolutely have no idea what the answer is, if it's within their realm of expertise, faking is just an important part. I really have come to believe teaching MBAs that one of the most important things you learn as an MBA is how to pretend you know the answer to any question even though you have absolutely no idea what you're talking about. And I've found it's really one of the most destructive factors in business—is that everyone masquerades like they know the answer and no one will ever admit they don't know the answer, and it makes it almost impossible to learn (p. 1).

The most salient point in Levitt's analysis is that last one: it makes it almost impossible to learn. One of the most significant institutional benefits grants provide is the opportunity to learn. While understanding institutional history is highly recommended, two comments a project manager should seek to sidestep or overcome are these: (1) "it won't work here, we tried that before" and (2) "why reinvent the wheel?" Regarding the first, almost nothing that happens in the future is new. Innovation is almost always something that has been tried but failed in the past. Regarding the second, the premise may not be about reinventing the shape of the wheel, but rather seeing new applications for its unique functionality. Look at airport travel, for example. Consider rolling a heavy piece of luggage across a busy airport terminal compared to the days before wheels were attached to the base of the bags. Which is easier? And how many travelers now use bags with handles and wheels, compared to those who still carry their luggage? This is the model for educators to note. Grants allow for disruptive technology to be developed and implemented on a manageable scale. Though it often may become a sort under-the-radar activity, savvy project directors should take full advantage of this opportunity.

Managing Ambiguity and Paradox

Management researchers maintain that successful project management is a combination of approximately 20 percent hard skills and 80 percent soft skills (Morreale, 2009). The hard skills relate to the actual processes, procedures, tools, and techniques that comprise planning, organizing, monitoring, and controlling, while the soft skills relate to the project manager's attitudes and behaviors. Within this soft skills spectrum, a set of leadership paradoxes must be effectively managed:

- Project managers must have confidence that they can deliver results, while at the same time must possess the humility to give most of the credit for successful delivery to their team.
- The project manager must be not only a manager but must also exhibit the skills of a leader. The leader establishes the direction in which the project should go while at the same time the manager identifies the steps that must be taken by the team members to go in that direction.
- The manager must be able to handle the ambiguity that is inherent in a project and be able to live with it but at the same time search for perfection.
- The manager must be able to handle the complexity of the project, while at the same time be always searching for simplicity and making things clear.
- The manager must be able to have the helicopter view and understand the big picture and see how his/her project fits into the overall scheme of things. In addition, he/she must be able to get into the details, see the small picture when required, and then be able to step back up to see big picture view. Kanter (2011) calls this self-management capacity “Zoom in, zoom out.”
- The manager must be impatient and expect things to be done with a sense of urgency while at the same time understand that in some cases he/she must be patient in establishing the relationships that are required to run a successful project.

Understanding Team Development

Understanding how teams evolve is critical to sound project management. While there are many theories regarding why teams take off or fail to launch, the original four-step model first articulated by Tuckman (1965) still effectively tracks the stages of team development:

- Stage 1: Forming
- Stage 2: Storming
- Stage 3: Norming
- Stage 4: Performing

A fifth stage, adjourning, was later added by Tuckman and others to describe the phase of completing the task and breaking up the team. Tuckman’s model is still a useful guide for project managers facing the complexities of building a team, for it is a given that implementing a large grant will require development of a working team operating a high level for the project to succeed.

Adding Value

Stephen Covey, in his book *First Things First* (Covey, Merrill & Merrill, 1994), highlights four quadrants where one can spend their time: (1) Quadrant of Necessity, (2) Quadrant of Quality & Personal Leadership, (3) Quadrant of Deception, and (4) Quadrant of Waste.

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	I <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Crises > Pressing problems > Firefighting > Major scrap and rework > Deadline-driven projects 	II <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Prevention > <i>Production capability</i> activities > Relationship building > Recognizing new opportunities > Planning > Re-creation
Not Important	III <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Interruptions > Some calls > Some mail > Some reports > Some meetings > Proximate pressing matters > Popular activities > Some scrap & rework 	IV <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Trivia > Busywork > Some mail > Some phone calls > Time-wasters > Pleasant activities

Figure 3: First Things First
 Source: Covey, Merrill & Merrill, 1994

Covey notes that people who accomplish very little are probably spending a majority of their waking hours in the Quadrant of Deception and the Quadrant of Waste.

Project managers should aspire to organize themselves and their team so they work productively in Quadrant 2, also referenced in the text as the intersection of the Important and Not Urgent sectors of the grid. How does a project manager arrange reality so the team spends its most productive hours in the quadrant with the highest reward?

According to Covey, he or she should focus on the following value-added activities:

- Preparation
- Prevention
- Values clarification
- Planning
- Relationship building
- True re-creation
- Empowerment

Avoiding Avoidance

Due to the writing-intensive nature of grant-funded project management work, a real risk arises over time when a director becomes too glued to the tablet or computer generating memos and reports for the range of stakeholders involved in the project. It is important that the manager stay connected to day-to-day details as they arise and to do that most effectively a manager needs to get out of the office on a regular basis. There are a number of practical, commonsense ways to accomplish this sustained engagement model. One of the most useful is known as MBWA, or Management By Wandering Around. First recognized as a defining feature of the corporate culture at Hewlett-Packard in the 1970s and popularized by Peters and Waterman (1982) a decade later, the premise

is deceptively simple: MBWA refers to a style of business management in which managers wander through the workplace in an unstructured manner checking with employees about the status of ongoing work. Impromptu movement within a workplace, rather than a plan where employees expect a visit from managers at more systematic, pre-approved or scheduled times, benefits a manager by providing access to a random sampling of events or employee discussions and is more likely to facilitate improvements to the morale, sense of purpose, and productivity of the organization (Mears, 2009). Here are some guidelines from MBWA research:

- Make MBWA part of your routine
- Dropping in on employees' workspaces for an informal chat is most effective if you don't do it on any fixed schedule.
- Don't bring an entourage
- MBWA works best as a continual stream of one-on-one conversations with individual employees.
- Visit everybody
- Try to spend roughly the same amount of time—not necessarily all in the same day or even the same week, but over the long run—with each person who reports to you.
- Ask for suggestions, and recognize good ideas.
- Ask each member of the team for his or her thoughts about how to improve the collective process. If someone's idea leads to a positive result, make it known whose suggestion it was and show you're ready to give credit where it's due.
- Follow up with answers.
- If you can't answer an employee's question off the top of your head, don't forget to get back with an answer later. Besides being common courtesy, follow up builds trust.
- Don't criticize.

Ultimately, management by wandering around provides valuable insight into how a manager's work affects colleagues down the line. It also limits the tendency to hide out in the office and practice avoidance, a very common yet damaging management practice.

Continuous Improvement

Known as the father of the total quality management movement, W. Edwards Deming redefined the role of management on quality and systems thinking. Deming believed that poor management accounted for approximately 85 percent of quality problems, primarily due to an inability to fully grasp four basic concepts, which he called a Profound System of Knowledge:

1. Appreciation of a system: understanding the overall process.
2. Knowledge of variation: understanding the range and causes of variation in quality, and use of statistical sampling in measurements.
3. Theory of knowledge: understanding the limits of what can be known.
4. Knowledge of psychology: understanding human nature.

Deming linked these core principles as foundational to his famous *14 Points for Management* (Deming, 1986), which described the transformative view that quality and operations are all about systems, not individual performance, and that the role of management is to design a system so that the empowered worker can perform well. In *The Essential Deming* (Orsini, 2012) usefully aggregates many of Deming's most famous dictums under the following subheadings:

- How poor management infects an entire organization

- The critical importance of management on producing quality products and services
- Improving management in any company
- The effective management of people--the manager's single most important task
- How to educate workers into critical thinkers
- Ways to preserve statistical integrity while dealing with real-world problems

Deming is perhaps best known for the "Plan-Do-Check-Act" checklist, a process improvement model that transfers effectively to project management in general and grant management specifically. Plan-Do-Check-Act builds quality into the front end of a process rather than inspecting for quality at the output end, thereby mitigating the necessity of correcting flaws as post-production standard operating procedure. Deming's advocacy of systems thinking still works today and merits focused consideration by project managers.

Building Trust

In *The Speed of Trust* (Covey & Merrill, 2006), the author describes the process of building credibility based upon four core principles: (1) integrity, (2) intent, (3) capabilities, and (4) results. Integrity and intent are described as character cores; capabilities and results are competency cores. All four cores are necessary for credibility. Trust is comparable to a savings account in which the following behaviors represent net investments:

1. Talk Straight
2. Demonstrate Respect

3. Create Transparency
4. Right Wrongs
5. Show Loyalty
6. Deliver Results
7. Get Better
8. Confront Reality
9. Clarify Expectations
10. Practice Accountability
11. Listen First
12. Keep Commitments
13. Extend Trust

Because of the limited life cycle of federal grants, project managers have a limited amount of time to establish trust. Yet in many ways, there is no more value-added activity for a project manager to engage in than seeking to establish and build trust. Covey notes the high cost of low organizational trust in the form of excessive redundancy, bloated bureaucracy, employee turnover, churn, and in extreme cases, fraud. Similarly, the benefits of creating what he calls “a trust dividend” are increased value, accelerated growth, enhanced innovation, improved collaboration, stronger partnering, better execution, and heightened loyalty. Clearly these dividends not only apply to external stakeholders but to internal team members as well. Trust is the defining currency of project management activity. Like a savings account it builds slowly over time with many incremental deposits, yet can be squandered overnight by one bad or hurried

decision. A good project director is very mindful of the influences operating on the trust dividend. A good leader is as well.

CHAPTER 8: LEVERAGING OPPORTUNITY DURING THE FUNDING CYCLE

Introduction

As noted in the previous chapter, pursuing a large federal workplace grant is not a dreamy enterprise. A technician's aptitude is required, similar in some ways to carpentry or basic electrical wiring, in order to organize and manage the many connections and process flow considerations that will be required by the SGA. However, one could argue that after the award and startup considerations are connected and the structure is roughed in, a more pertinent analogy for leveraging opportunity is agrarian—perhaps crop farming, raising livestock, or maybe growing landscape trees. The checklists below flesh out this notion further:

Planting the Tree

Step one is getting started. This sounds self-evident, and it is, but nonetheless remains perhaps the most difficult step in the process. What does it mean to get started?

Consider the following three-step process:

1. Planting a tree requires digging a hole. Hole digging is hard work. It's hard on the back, working bent over, and it can be hazardous to the nails and the knuckles as the necessity of prying loose obstacles presents itself. Depending on the site, the soil may be compacted or riddled with underground debris, such as large stones or backfill from some past construction project. The point being, the person planting the tree doesn't know what he or she will encounter before they begin digging. Yet if you want to plant a tree on that spot, you must dig. And you sort out the issues as they arise. The willingness to dig is fundamental, both to planting a tree and getting started on leveraging opportunity.

2. The savvy tree farmer looks around at the trees species that grow naturally in the climate zone in which he or she is working. Attempting to grow warm weather trees in harsh northern climates, for example, is not likely to lead to long-term sustainable growth. Trying to grow quality trees on poorly drained or poor soil is also not conducive to a stand that will root well and thrive in all seasons. In other words, the project director seeking to leverage opportunity needs to understand the climate in which he or she is working, the organic assets at their disposal, and be able to recognize the difference between productive possibilities and long shots that don't fit the region and are doomed to wither at the first sign of distress.
3. Healthy landscape trees often fall victim to low-slung, bark-scraping varmints such as rabbits, raccoon, porcupine, possum, or even beaver that left unchecked will eventually girdle the tree and kill it. Almost as damaging are the leaf-browsers, mainly white-tailed deer, which equate lush hardwood landscape trees as their private buffet and can easily leap tall fences in a single bound to partake of the treats at the salad bar. Just as a tree farmer must not turn a blind eye to these nuisances hoping they'll eventually tire and go away of their own accord, the project director concerned with seizing opportunity must not overlook or ignore neighboring residents in the food chain that will be motivated to chip away at his or her progress. Recognizing the threat and the root cause motivating it is the management imperative here. Don't be late to work in this regard. And don't arrive without tools.

Changing the Culture

Institutional culture is like topsoil—all of its history, current capacity, and future possibilities lodge within a thin nest of organic matter anchored along the surface. As astute tree farmers know, topsoil is not only a precious commodity, it's fragile as well, easily undermined by natural forces exacerbated by poor management practices ranging from bad luck to indifference and neglect to the most damaging of all: erosion. Like topsoil, institutional culture is formed by the accumulation of countless productive encounters, large and small, and is nourished by a complex root system representing tradition, excellence, appropriate care, governance and nurturing, and student learning focus. As with topsoil, when roots holding institutional culture in place die, the operation

becomes unmoored and exposed to the vagaries of nature. The primary agent in the demise of institutional culture is the erosion of trust. Topsoil, like trust, can be rebuilt. But it's not an easy task, nor a quick process. Here are ten guidelines for a project manager to consider when approaching the topic of culture change:

1. Align project goals with the College mission and strategic goals.

Don't go off the farm and freelance.

2. Build off College and community assets.

Be smart about working with partners of the College. Don't alienate long-term trusted partners for any reason; when you find new partners, treat them like long-term trusted partners. The Golden Rule applies.

3. Understand that the project represents the College at large.

Unprofessional or substandard work will attach itself to the project and the College with the tenacity of mold. Don't let the project become an easy target for critics by being indifferent to the quality of the product, timely delivery, and process details in which the internal processes of the College and the project intersect.

4. Culture change properly done is a slow and integrative process, not destructive like ripping off a scab.

An astute project manager should model the change he or she seeks to implement.

5. Align with College faculty recognized for teaching quality, change leadership, content expertise, energy, and vision.

Hire them as part-time instructors if possible. Involving key faculty in a workplace project cross-pollinates the process. Establishing internal credibility ought to be the goal, and nothing accomplishes the objective more quickly and effectively than word of mouth by respected faculty.

6. Build alliances with community leaders.

Local economic development officials are fruitful contacts. Connecting the dots can be a shared exercise.

7. Share success stories with College leadership, local media, regional decision-makers, and state and federal elected officials.

Don't be afraid to get the word out. Shy and reserved does a disservice to all stakeholders.

8. Look forward, not back in anger.

Explore opportunities to change the culture by finding angles of confluence between project deliverables and areas of untapped institutional potential.

9. Be generous but goal-directed.

Share project resources and expertise with institutional staff interested in change. Culture change is incremental work. It grows one productive encounter at a time.

10. Be positive and persistent

Nothing succeeds like success.

Cultivating Talent

Funders never award large grants to institutions that want to maintain the status quo. Grants go to community colleges that commit to new programs involving innovative approaches and hard to serve populations. Development and delivery of technology-based learning is often mandatory, leading to stackable credentials in high-demand, underserved occupations. In short, most winning proposals work backwards from jobs to content delivery to technology platforms to curriculum development to trainee recruitment. The whole process is a stretch. It should be hard to do. In grant work it pays dividends, as Covey famously notes, to begin with the end in mind. An often-overlooked piece of the Big Picture is failing to fully appreciate the opportunity a large federal grant offers to bring new talent to the project, and to introduce those new skills to the institution at large. The mandate to innovate embedded in nearly all large federal workplace grants means that institutions will need to stretch to attain the vision of the funder matched to the regional demographic and workforce challenges outlined in the

Need section of the proposal. Far from being an onerous obligation, meeting or exceeding the innovation challenge is a most productive opportunity for the grantee. The wise project manager should seek to locate and engage the brightest minds to grapple with the most difficult, ambitious project assignments, realizing that the opportunity to innovate is catnip to bright, highly motivated people. The beauty of smart new hires working hard is that they find a way, often following a path nobody has seen before, to arrive at complex solutions unencumbered by institutional history or the confines of internal process entanglements. In order to keep hope alive, it's the job of the shrewd project manager to not only find good people but keep them motivated by letting them work, and then run interference as they inevitably collide with the internal procedural barriers erected to standardize institutional work flow that never predicted the disruptive force of a large federal grant. Disruptive is tolerable for most institutions. Disruption? Not so much. It's the job of the project manager to keep the innovative process streamlined and moving, to know how much churn is productive and when to pull back and refocus the group on getting the immediate and intermediate milestones done. Disruption is what happens when the process stops dead in the water and everyone is bailing. Here is a checklist of considerations to help avoid that unhappy condition:

- Seek the best talent you can afford to hire.
- Don't take shortcuts and hire less qualified candidates because they are friends, or friends of friends. Hiring the right person is serious business.
- Previous community college experience is not mandatory
- Sometimes outsiders bring fresh insight. True innovators do not always migrate easily or consistently up through the ranks.
- Beware of consultants and thought leaders telling you what to do.

- A grantee should never veer from the vision that animated a winning proposal. Believe in the proposal, especially if you wrote it. Stay strong in your belief.
- To sort out technology innovation, find a trusted ally who understands that world.
- Understand technology and its purpose in sufficient depth to avoid getting rattled by the self-assured, the savvy, and the verbose.
- Be wary also of vendors and fads.
- Vendors are paid to sell you things. Respond accordingly. Fads often are what vendors are selling.
- While technology changes and becomes obsolete almost overnight, bright people and innovative processes don't.
- Trust in people. Budget for technology upgrades.
- Motivated instructors know best how to improve their courses and make technology work.
- Be diligent and smart about supporting motivated instructors. Inspired instruction leads to inspired learning. Inspiration on all levels is the fuel you're seeking.
- Share best practices.
- Innovators thrive on recognition and feedback.
- Share credit.
- See above.
- Create a culture of applied daring.
- When work is fun, people achieve. When it's not, they leave. Able people vote with their feet.
- Seek opportunities to promote grant-funded talent into General Fund positions as the grant matures.

Loyalty to staff is good karma, though not always best for the grant. Strike a balance. Treating people right creates its own momentum and its own reward.

Eying the Horizon

Just as the best time to pursue a new job is when you're currently employed, the best time to lay the groundwork to chase a new grant is when you're currently managing a grant project. Laying the groundwork involves an array of considerations. Foremost among them is a good idea. For example, as referenced earlier, ACC was the recipient of a \$2.835 million Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College Career Training (TAACCCT) from the United States Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration in 2011. The proposal focused on sustainability and green jobs for NE Michigan, incorporating five curricular tracks: (1) biofuels, (2) alternative energy production, (3) green construction, (4) marine technology, and (5) online concrete certificates. Each of these tracks evolved and rolled out at its own pace, as if almost independent of the pressure applied by the project manager—a common trait in large, complicated projects with multiple deliverables—and as each rolled out, new opportunities appeared that were not evident when the initial proposal was funded. This transition landscape is the absolute sweet spot of project management, and arrival at this launch point should be the vision of every grant writer and project manager engaged in rolling out federal investments in training local training projects. At ACC, for example, an employer with a market share in aerospace and wind turbine production expressed a need for the development of composites training for current workforce and new hires. Composites training fit into the existing grant due to its application in the green energy market, but it also allowed entry into the aerospace sector, which correlated with an intense regional and statewide economic development effort to attract a FAA Center of Excellence designation and drone manufacturing, research, and testing. As the College

developed the composites course and then delivered it, the College established entry-level credibility in the sector and so became more influential and increasingly linked to the drone recruitment economic development initiative, as well as providing a leadership role in the burgeoning aerospace sector across NE Michigan. Within a six-month span the following opportunities arose, none of which were known when the initial TAACCCT grant was written:

- A composites training course involving new partners in a new sector.
- Central involvement in a critical regional economic development initiative.
- Development of unmanned autonomous technology capacity and expertise.
- Outreach to national community leaders in drone manufacturing, telemetry, robotics, sensor avoidance systems, and associate high-end technologies.

The last bullet point formed the basis of the College's next TAACCCT submission. Encouraged by the DOL TAACCCT national office, the project director began exploring where existing capacity in the key content areas existed, and how ACC might partner to bring that capacity to a remote NE Michigan location. A critical piece of this work involved looking ahead and not being discouraged by poor visibility and lack of clarity at the outset. Often the best leads occur later in the funding cycle and are driven by events outside of the grantee's control, or derive from insights gained during rollout of an existing project. As in the case of drone manufacturing for NE Michigan, project leadership must possess the vision to see the future, the hunger to chase down opportunity, and a feel for how things fit together. Here are several checklist items to consider:

- Funders prefer to work with organizations that have a track record of success.

- Knowledge acquired during successful management of a large federal grant puts the applicant in an advantaged position when working with the same agency and subsequent funding streams.
- Finding the right fit in a new grant program in a new agency is a very difficult, time-consuming process.
- Partnership opportunities in the private and public sectors often are more likely to derive from involvement in a high-profile, competitively funded program.
- Partnership opportunities with other grantees may be revealed during the funding cycle that would not have been a consideration in a non-funded environment.

When eyeing the horizon there are at least three storm clouds to consider, however. One, unwinding the personnel and training delivery structure assembled with grant funding can be daunting and needs to be thought through at length by the project director, particularly if a pending proposal using the same structure has been submitted. Two, the timing of award decisions by the funder seldom correlates conveniently with institutional budgeting cycles. Three, putting all your eggs in the federal funding basket may leave the project and the institution with nothing if the answer is no from the funder's national office. A wise project manager works ahead on what comes next. Leveraging a current grant offers great opportunities to shape the future, either through developing partnerships that help sustain the project after the funding cycle ends or by providing a platform to pursue another round of funding to further develop the initial premise. Consider the months in the middle of the funding cycle as prime time for this planting season. As all living creatures can attest, nothing happens unless a seed is planted.

Data and Analytics

The community college success agenda has placed a renewed emphasis on accountability. Graduation, completion, and retention rates, transfer success, cost of attendance, and federal initiatives such as Gainful Employment and Pell grant restrictions all focus on community colleges doing more with the resources they have. Underlying these mandates is the notion that community colleges must do a better job of measuring key outcomes and communicating them to stakeholders. While commendable on many levels, this increased emphasis on institutional research and data mining poses challenges for many smaller, resource-starved community colleges grappling with revenue shortfalls due to state disinvestment in public higher education, stagnant local property values, and dwindling enrollment. Critics of this trend argue that increasing the amount of mandatory federal and state-level data reporting results in stressed College IR staffs reverting to a survival compliance mode—submitting the required cycle of reports to meet the deadlines to avoid reprisal while foregoing the opportunity to drill down and contribute to informed management decisions based what the data reveal. There is some truth to this argument and some hyperbole. A well trained Institutional Researcher with ample support and effective executive direction can transcend the compliance-reporting model. Sometimes that IR staffer works his or her way into the institution via a federal grant. There are other effective ways that a grant project may contribute to an institution-wide culture of inquiry. Below is an analytics checklist for reader consideration:

- Metrics required by many funders, such as entered employment and wage data, would be useful performance information for institutions to gather on its non-grant students, and fits nicely with the Voluntary Framework of Accountability movement.

- Accessing wage and salary data from the state unemployment system is notoriously difficult. Once approval is obtained by grantee staff, accessing the UI system for broader institutional use on all its graduates would make sense, especially in regards to occupational programs.
- Project evaluation often mandates folding project data into a process improvement loop. Many institutions would benefit from adopting this model on a larger scale.
- Demographic data used to create a competitive proposal is transferable for use by the grantee institution for marketing, community engagement, and accreditation self-study purposes.
- Trainee, employer, and instructor feedback required by many funders would inform change and improvement if adopted on a larger scale by grantee institutions.
- Software analytics used for evaluation purposes of online courses by grant staff could be scaled for comparative data-driven decision-making of non-grant online courses at grantee institutions.
- The accreditation change status approval required for the delivery of online certificates and associate degree programs offers growth opportunities for both grant-funded and institutional data gathering.
- A culture of evidence supported by data can be modeled by a grant-funded project, especially if the data points acquired form a sensible structure that can be communicated effectively to a receptive cross-section of internal and external stakeholders.
- Seek opportunities to integrate IR staff into grant-funded training for employers that might enhance institutional understanding of high-end reporting software such as SQL Server.
- Grant-funded data gathering offers the chance to de-mystify the IR process due its narrow focus and smaller scale.
- The project director responsible for the data gathering function of a large federal grant project ought to seek the opportunity to present on this function to non-grant staff.
- One way forward is to schedule a monthly brown bag seminar open to all staff on the fundamentals of statistics, data analytics, quantitative and qualitative analysis, SPSS, and practical applications for the non-doctoral level professional.

Most community college leaders want to be data-informed decision-makers. Dr. Byron McClenney, former president of the Denver Community College district and notable advocate for the influential Achieving the Dream initiative, defined this aspiration in a recent interview as the importance of data as foundational to establishing a culture of evidence and inquiry (2014). Use the grant to make the data case.

Integrating Best Practices

This step often gets lost in the shuffle. Yet it's a highly important piece that deserves more consideration. Why doesn't this due process concept rise to the conscious level more insistently? There are two primary reasons, both familiar to busy project directors. One, the squeaky wheel gets the grease. Problems requiring lubricant come first, consuming the first measure of administrative focus until the squeaking stops. As project managers well know, problems of a chronic nature may result in blowback that reaches the funder, a destination that administrators want to avoid, so a focus on problem solving is both persistent and urgent. Seeing problems or at least potential problems everywhere flattens perspective, unfortunately. In a two-dimensional world, a sense of proportion and scale are lost. The second reason, counter-intuitively, derives from the opposite source. The better a project is humming along, the more gets done. The more gets done, the more good things get jammed in, and the less each individual piece stands out distinctly from the rest. When things are going well, it's hard to distinguish the contours of one good outcome from another. They begin to look all the same. Most large grant awards mitigate this tendency by requiring quarterly reports that ask for reports on best practices or promising success stories. Reporting to the feds doesn't replace the need

to bring best practices to the surface, however. Here is process checklist and associated examples for practitioner consideration:

- Look for best practices distinguished by the following characteristics: unique trainee population, unique timing, unique location, innovative delivery, productive integration of multiple partners, rapid curriculum development, high placement of trainees, media attention.

ACC recently combined these factors in a gas energy boot camp for unemployed military veterans resulting in entry-level employment in the gas energy sector.

- Distill the best practice elements into a concise narrative that can be shared and digested with media, legislators, and external stakeholders unfamiliar with the project.

Sometimes this is done most effectively by media. A downstate journalist covering the technology beat statewide heard about ACC's unique Marine Tech AAS degree program, funded by the TAACCCT grant. After coming up to visit and touring the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary, a NOAA-funded shipwreck museum located in Alpena and a partner of ACC in the Marine Tech degree, the journalist wrote a piece that appeared in downstate markets referencing the surprising amount of technology being implemented in NE Michigan, a storyline that drew additional state and federal visitors to Alpena.

- Capture key events on video, build a library of video testimonials, news stories, written media accounts, and maintain all student feedback.

A storehouse of student feedback on a popular green building seminar series helped document industry demand for expanded coursework accessible to a wider market, leading to the development of a new online certificate in Green Building and Sustainability, the first all online credential offered by the College.

- Meet with key stakeholders to advance unique projects beyond the conception stage.

A pair of online concrete certificates, one focused on wet cast applications and the other on concrete masonry with core courses common to both, languished in the development stage until project staff connected with the state network of K-12 career and technical educators, a group very much interested in scaling learning opportunities to thousands of occupational students statewide.

- Meet with internal stakeholders to align project interests to institutional mission, goals, strategic plan, and values.

Procuring equipment that supports grant deliverables and institutional goals is perhaps the most tangible way this alignment can be accomplished. Successfully timing a grant award with an institution's capital expansion project is fortuitous, but not impossible.

In *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership*, Bolman and Deal (2008) advocate for multi-frame thinking, which is the capacity to think flexibly and see organizations from multiple angles. They argue that because organizations are “complex, surprising, deceptive, and ambiguous” (p. 31), they are difficult to comprehend and manage, and that our preconceived notions of institutional culture become blind spots determining what we see, what we do, and ultimately what is accomplished. Using multiple frames allows leaders to see and understand more, the authors argue, while the capacity to see possibilities and create new opportunities helps leaders discover alternatives when options appear severely limited. They conclude that leaders fail when they take too narrow a view. This dictum applies to grant managers as well.

Transforming the Landscape

Managing change in response to crisis or opportunity is recognized in the literature to be challenging work requiring leadership with an understanding of change management theory and practice. It is well known that most people don't like change, though change happens around us every day whether we embrace it or not. In *Leading Change* (1996), Harvard Business School professor John Kotter outlined an 8-step framework that is widely acknowledged to be an influential change model. The eight steps include these:

1. Establishing a sense of urgency
2. Forming a powerful guiding coalition

3. Creating a vision
4. Communicating the vision
5. Empowering others to act on the vision
6. Planning for and creating short-term wins
7. Consolidating improvements and producing still more change
8. Institutionalizing new approaches

Sirkin, Keenan, and Jackson (2005) contend that most change initiatives fail due in large part to an overemphasis on soft factors, such as communication and relationships, and insufficient focus on hard factors, such as success metrics that can be measured and communicated widely and quickly. In *The Hard Side of Change Management*, an October 2005 article in the *Harvard Business Review*, the three researchers framed these hard factors using an acronym called DICE: Duration, Integrity, Commitment, and Effort. *Duration* represents persistence with frequent review of project milestones being a surprisingly important success factor. *Integrity* is the team's capacity to complete the initiative on time, with alignment between the change required and the team members' skills and abilities the critical success factor. *Commitment* to change—displayed by executive leadership and the employees affected by change—is a third success factor. In other words, if commitment is missing among either constituency, the change initiative is likely to fail. *Effort* beyond the normal workload that the change initiative demands of leadership and workers is a final critical factor. In *Why Transformation Efforts Fail*, Kotter (2007) refined his work on the 8-step model, noting that change management failure often derives from moving too quickly through the eight steps, skipping some of the steps altogether, or lingering too long on a particular step, especially the first step.

Overall, according to Kotter, 70 percent of all change initiatives fail, primarily because leadership does not take a holistic approach to see change through to a successful conclusion.

In spite of this sobering assessment, we know intuitively that change is possible and that it indeed occurs. As partnerships expand, a landscape of opportunity for partners that did not exist prior to grant funding begins to coalesce and take shape. This is the growth potential of large federal grants leveraged by the power of a good idea.

CHAPTER 9: EVALUATION

Introduction

Wall (2004) defines evaluation as a purposeful, systematic, and careful collection and analysis of information used for the purpose of documenting the effectiveness and impact of programs, establishing accountability, and identifying areas needing change and improvement. External evaluation is mandatory in most federal grant programs, though agencies differ in how they implement the mandate. NSF/ATE requires grant applicants to build in an external evaluator for each project, often at a rate of 8-10 percent of the total budget request. Other agencies, such as USDOL/ETA, have contracted with a single provider to evaluate multiple projects in its TAACCCT program. Regardless of the evaluation mechanism, federal grantees need to understand evaluation and evaluators because they will be partners throughout the funding cycle. The purpose of evaluation is to measure how the grantee is doing in meeting the deliverables in the statement of work.

As Vogt (2006) accurately points out, program evaluation and program management often clash. Ideally both should share the same goals, namely how to make the project the best it can be, yet on the ground project directors often find an evaluator's work hitting a little too close to home, especially if the reports contain findings that are critical of management performance. In fact, evaluators are not paid to be friends to project stakeholders. Their job is to render an objective assessment, not be cheerleaders

for the project. Project directors would be well served to understand as a first premise that professional evaluators are wise to being wooed and don't like it.

While there may be nearly as many evaluation models as there are evaluators, three broad templates are referenced here.

The Kirkpatrick Model

When evaluating workforce-training programs, the four-step model advocated by Kirkpatrick (1994) is used by many external evaluators. The first level documents satisfaction on the part of all stakeholders—workers, supervisors, training director, project director, company management, union, and instructors. Usually this is measured with a brief questionnaire by the provider or company. Structured interviews to get an objective look at satisfaction as well as suggestions for improvement are often employed as well. The second Kirkpatrick level is mastery of the training content. The provider needs to demonstrate that the workers have learned the content that has been taught. Pre and post content-specific test scores work well here, sometimes coupled with normed basic skills assessments such as the TABE (Tests of Adult Basic Education) or Work Keys, an ACT product. The third level is transfer to the workplace. Evaluators here look for carryover of instruction into the daily jobs and worker performance. Measurement is often based upon supervisor and worker interviews and questionnaires. The fourth level is impact on the organization—bottom-line results. This is the hardest data for the evaluator to get, generally requiring cooperation from the employer. If the employer has a metric they tend to track, outside evaluators often will attempt to correlate training impact to this company metric in order to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the training program.

Kirkpatrick's four levels are designed as a sequence of ways to evaluate training programs. Many practitioners believe that as you proceed through each of the levels, the evaluation becomes more difficult and requires more time. In practice then, it is common for trainees to get stuck in Levels 1 and 2 and never proceed to Levels 3 and 4, where the most useful data exist. Today, Kirkpatrick-certified facilitators stress "starting with the end in mind," essentially beginning with Level 4 and moving backwards in order to better establish the desired outcome before ever planning the training program. When done strategically, reaching these levels does not have to be any more expensive or time consuming, but will still help to ensure on-the-job performance of learned behaviors and skills. The four levels of Kirkpatrick's evaluation model are broken out as follows:

1. Reaction - what participants thought and felt about the training, occasionally known as participant satisfaction or "smile sheets."
2. Learning - the resulting increase in knowledge and/or skills, and change in attitudes. This evaluation occurs during the training in the form of either a knowledge demonstration or test.
3. Behavior - transfer of knowledge, skills, and/or attitudes from classroom to the job. This evaluation occurs 3–6 months post training while the trainee is performing the job. Evaluation usually occurs through observation.
4. Results - the final results that occurred because of attendance and participation in a training program.

CIPP (Context, Input, Process, Product) Evaluation Model

The CIPP evaluation model first devised by Stufflebeam in 1966 is a framework guiding evaluations of programs, projects, personnel, products, institutions, and evaluation systems (Stufflebeam, 2003). Its core concepts are context, input, process, and product evaluation, with the intention of not to *prove*, but rather *improve*, the program

itself (Stufflebeam, 2003). An evaluation following the CIPP model may include a context, input, process, or product evaluation, or a combination of these elements.



Figure 4: The CIPP (Context, Input, Process, Product) Evaluation Model
Source: Stufflebeam (2003)

The context evaluation stage of the CIPP Model creates the big picture of where both the program and evaluation fit. This stage assists in decision-making related to planning and also identifies the political climate that could influence the success of the program (Mertens & Wilson, 2012). To achieve this, the evaluator compiles and assesses background information, and interviews program leaders and key stakeholders. Data collection can use multiple formats, including both formative and summative measures, such as environmental analysis of existing documents, program profiling, case study interviews, and stakeholder interviews (Mertens, & Wilson, 2012).

To complement context evaluation, input evaluation is completed. The purpose of this stage is to benchmark the program's strategy, merit, and work plan against existing research and to choose an appropriate strategy to implement.

The third stage, process evaluation, investigates the quality of the program's implementation. In this stage, program activities are monitored, documented, and assessed by the evaluator with feedback provided regarding the extent to which planned activities are carried out. Guidance to staff on modifications to the program plan is provided at this stage by the evaluator (Stufflebeam, 2003).

The final component to CIPP, product evaluation, assesses the positive and negative effects the program had on its target audience (Mertens & Wilson, 2012). Both short-term and long-term outcomes are evaluated as the perspectives of stakeholders and relevant experts are analyzed. A combination of methodological approaches correlated to project goals assures that all outcomes are noted. Stufflebeam (2007) notes that the four parts of CIPP evaluation respectively ask:

- What needs to be done? (Context)
- How should it be done? (Input)
- Is it being done? (Process)
- Did it succeed? (Product)

In this checklist, the "Did it succeed?" or product evaluation part is divided into impact, effectiveness, sustainability, and transportability evaluations. Respectively, these four product evaluation subparts ask: Were the right beneficiaries reached? Were their needs met? Were the gains for the beneficiaries sustained? Did the processes that produced the gains prove transportable and adaptable for effective use in other settings?

A strength of the CIPP approach is the way in which formative and summative data is bound together in a comprehensive model with a theoretical base yet remains adaptable to the defining features of the project being evaluated. A less noticeable yet sometimes equally valuable element of the approach is its capacity for unearthing unintended consequences and factoring them into the evaluation model. The Evaluation Center at Western Michigan University, where Dr. Stufflebeam is a Distinguished Professor in the School of Education, is notable for its expertise on evaluation in general and CIPP in particular.

The Wall Model

This evaluation model creates a framework for organizing the evaluation process into nine discrete, sequential activities (Wall, 2004). A fundamental premise shared by nearly all evaluation models is that evaluation is not a one-time event and should be a continuous activity that becomes an integral and integrated part of program activities, and the Wall Model is no exception in this regard. The payoff for stakeholders is that well designed, thoughtful, and carefully executed evaluations can provide important information to document the program results while pointing the team toward areas where improvements may be needed. Robust evaluation is also a valuable resource for informing internal and external stakeholders about your program. The nine steps in the Wall model include:

1. Define the Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation
2. Specify the Evaluation Questions – What Do You Want to Know?
3. Specify the Evaluation Design
4. Create the Data Collection Action Plan

5. Collect Data
6. Analyze data
7. Document Findings
8. Disseminate Findings
9. Feedback to Program Improvement

Defining data and the process for gathering it is a strength of this model, which is significant because data is the focal point of most evaluation models. The two most common forms of evaluation are formative and summative. Formative evaluation looks at process or implementation and summative evaluation looks at outcomes. Typical formative evaluative questions might include:

- Is the program being implemented as it was designed?
- Do the students or clients understand the program's concepts?
- What are the misconceptions about the program?
- Is the program being implemented on schedule?
- Is there sufficient time to implement all aspects of the program?
- What aspects of the program do not seem to be working as intended?
- Do program implementer's need additional training on the program?
- Are there any negative outcomes surfacing?

Typical summative evaluation questions would likely include these questions:

- What did the program accomplish?
- Did the program reach its goals and objectives?
- What impact did the program have on its recipients?

- What were the outcomes?
- Who benefited from the program?
- How much was the benefit?
- Was the benefit greater with this program as compared with another program?
- Did all types of students or clients benefit from the program?
- What were the positive outcomes?
- What were the negative outcomes?
- What should be improved/changed in the program?
- Does the benefit of the program warrant the cost?

Formative and summative evaluation is fairly standard evaluative practice. While the responses to these questions may not be easily quantified, the process for extracting the information required to answer them relies primarily on evaluator interviews with stakeholders, focus groups, observations, and desk reviews of project documents. A qualitative case study model is most commonly used to answer the macro-level questions related to project implementation and effectiveness. However, within many larger projects, particularly highly visible federal awards, opportunities exist for project staff to conduct more quantitative analysis of outcomes, and it is often the case that evaluators will locate these opportunities and guide and motivate this data gathering process. Much can be learned from this micro-level examination, particularly if the team is willing to explore the concept and do the collective work required to derive data that has transferability to a larger sample. The leadership displayed by a project director is critical to this evolution of effort. For example, on a workplace training grant stakeholders,

particularly funders, want to know if the training was effective, which often may be broken down into at least four pertinent sub-questions:

1. What did the trainees learn?
2. How are they able to demonstrate their acquisition of knowledge?
3. To what extent can they apply what they learned in class in the workplace?
4. What was the Return on Investment (ROI) on this investment in training?

These are all complicated questions to answer definitively, which make finding their answers all the more compelling for stakeholders engaged in a grant-funded endeavor. Regarding bullet point one, administering a post-test yields some information, yet is not as complete as when coupled with a pre-test benchmarking prior knowledge. Normed instruments validated over large samples provide an even greater degree of clarity, though often do not correlate well with what trainees are in class to learn. Adult learning theory posits that workers do best when engaged with material that has a contextual connection to their workplace, offering some application than can be transferred quickly, and involves group learning and facilitation rather than straight lecture-recitation format. A normed instrument supports none of these practices. Regarding bullet point two, forming a comparison cohort involving a control group that does not receive benefit of the training is a possible solution, though very tricky to implement. Challenges include rendering the comparison cohort similar enough to the group receiving the treatment that the contrast between the representative groups has validity. Bullet point three presents obstacles in controlling all the variables that affect the workplace application so that just the classroom concept is assessed, and conducting this test in a way that treats all trainees equally. The last bullet point has similar research

design challenges, but on a much larger scale. Attempting to quantify the value of a discrete range of skills upgrades on a limited number of trainees on an employer's bottom line, when Return On Investment is comprised of so many other variables, is daunting research design execution. Parsing out these design questions so that quantitative data may be derived and analyzed represents an interesting challenge to a project team. In the best-case scenario the evaluator, project staff, project director, employer, and funder all engage in the hard work of trying to tease out what works, how well, why, and to what effect. Bottom line, in the realm of evaluation, it is the job of the project director to figure out how to make the best-case scenario happen for all stakeholders.

An Evaluation Checklist

Regardless of which evaluation model the external evaluator employs, the process of evaluation often looks fundamentally different from the perspective of a project manager leading a team working in an environment of ongoing evaluation. Antagonism may set in over time between evaluators and staff, which a smart project director should make every attempt to defuse. Evaluation on federal grants is going to happen because the funder needs assurances that the grantee is being accountable with public resources. As with accreditation of community colleges, practitioners understand in theory the need for periodic engagement in the process of outside review, yet still may sometimes regard the exercise in practice as a potentially hazardous activity requiring considerable focus of institutional resources in order to avoid the consequences of a negative result. Evaluation of federal grant projects is comparable to accreditation in this regard, just with a narrower scope and slightly less defined criteria. Just as accreditation site visit teams are populated with experienced practitioners who know what to look for in terms of evidence and

institutional culture, project evaluators are bright and do not respond favorably to bait-and-switch choreography or attempts to manage their access. Evaluators are free to probe. Because that is the nature of their business, smart project directors do not alienate. Instead, they prepare for them by listening well, engaging their insights, and running exemplary projects that meet the funder's objectives, thereby allowing the evaluator to occupy a position of valued consultant reviewing a worthy project in a continuous improvement cycle rather than an enforcement agent or whistleblower. It always is in the best interests of the project director to comply with both the theory and practice of evaluation. Below is a checklist of principles for project management consideration:

- Be upfront with the evaluator from the beginning.
- Do not attempt to limit evaluator access to any aspect part of the project.
- Work with the evaluator on documenting outcomes.
- Do not respond to critical feedback as if it were a personal attack.
- Share challenges with the evaluator as they arise.
- Do not hide bad news.
- Think broadly about data gathering that aligns with project goals.
- Do not downgrade the evaluator to other project stakeholders.
- Be professional.
- Stay engaged with the process.

Dealing with evaluation and evaluators is one of the hardest aspects of grants management. Rigorous program evaluation is not for the squeamish. However, assuming that everyone stays professional and can avoid taking things personally, the built-in

adversarial nature of the relationship can turn out to be a learning experience for all involved.

CHAPTER 10: PREPARING FOR AN AUDIT

Introduction

Depending on the size of a grant award, an audit by the funding agency sometime during the funding cycle should be expected and planned for by the project manager and his/her team. Also known as a monitoring visit, a comprehensive program audit can be a highly nerve-wracking experience. It stands to reason, as observers tend to note, that if you are doing what you should be doing following the statement of work and generally accepted principles of project and financial management there should be no problems. In fact, that's about 90 percent accurate. A thought process for preparing for that 90 percent is outlined in the section below. However, it is the other 10 percent, which former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld once famously referenced as the unknown unknowns—the things you don't know you don't know—that grant managers, particularly managers of large federal grants, should be especially concerned about. Unknown unknowns often reside in the shaded area between an OMB Circular that's not widely known as applicable to the governance of the project finances and the institutional policies and procedures of the grantee. Based on their previous experiences, grant monitors come with a package of skills and insights that are not well known to project staff, yet absolutely affect the direction in which the monitoring goes, particularly in the early stages of the visit. For example, a monitor with extensive experience in the world of Equal Employment Opportunity will tend to focus on the level of compliance grantees

muster in areas related to EEO—signage, forms that trainees sign prior to entry into training, college policies, etc. A monitor with experience in finance and auditing may explore procurement at a very deep level. It is the unpredictability of the depth and direction of focus that should give project managers their greatest degree of sleepless nights prior to a monitoring visit due to the potential damage of discovering a breach in compliance, especially in the financial area, when the monitor is on site. The level of financial exposure this presents to the College should not be underestimated, especially by the Project Manager, the CFO, and the College president.

Recently the College was visited by a monitor from the United States Department of Education, Employment, and Training Administration, on its TAACCCT grant. Eight hours into his examination of the Business Office financials, the DOL monitor, a bright, friendly, knowledgeable young man, emerged to ask the TAACCCT project manager if he was aware of the College policy referencing the 3 percent preference for local vendors.

Under the 5000 series set of ACC Business Services policies, a procedure numbered 5609 outlined the approved process for Bids, Quotations, Processing, and Approval. Under Evaluation, point 5, subheading A., the approved procedure reads: “All matters being equal, the lowest bid will be accepted with the following qualifications: Local vendors will be given a 3 percent advantage.” The purpose of the 3 percent preference is to reward vendors doing business in the local tax district, which is Alpena County, who support the College with their millage dollars. In other words, according to 5609 a local vendor bidding on an RFP generated by the College could be

awarded the contract, all other specifications being met equally, with a bid up to 3 percent higher than a vendor outside Alpena County.

The stipulation has been on the books at ACC for many years without incident, including two comprehensive monitoring visits by DOL field staff on previous federal workplace grants. The project director said he was familiar with the policy. The monitor asked him to explain the premise behind the policy. After his explanation, the project manager, sensing trouble, asked if there was a problem. The monitor replied that from the DOL's perspective, in regards to TAACCCT grant expenditures the College is spending government money; any preference extended for any reason constituted favoritism and would represent a disallowed cost. In the world of DOL discretionary grants, as both the project manager and the monitor knew, disallowed costs generally must be paid back in full—a finding that would cost the College about \$300,000, or about a third of its general fund reserve.

So in the span of about 15 seconds, the project manager felt the ground give way and the outlines of a giant financial sinkhole emerge. Astute project managers should work backward from this sinking feeling as they prepare for an audit, as it is both motivating and instructive. When the monitor asked if any of the TAACCCT procurements to date had been influenced by this clause, the project director was able to truthfully say no. You should probably consider amending your policy then, the monitor suggested. Add a bullet point regarding federal grant projects being exempt from this policy. At the closing meeting the monitor again shared this concern with the project manager and the ACC President. Both assured the monitor that a revised policy noting the exemption of federal grant funds from the College policy regarding the 3 percent

local preference would be before the Board at its next meeting in August. In this case, fortunately, the necessary policy change was identified in time to render corrective action before hundreds of thousands of dollars of grant-funded procurements had to be paid back due to a technicality. This is just one of many ways the Rumsfeld rule should guide the preparation of project managers. Don't ever be complacent about the monitoring event.

For the remaining 90 percent, the unknowns we do know about, here is a working checklist to prepare for a site-monitoring visit. As in all matters of grant project management, many of these steps need to operate concurrently:

- Organize the Narrative.
- Prepare the Business Office.
- Review the Statement of Work.
- Develop an Agenda for the Visit.
- Align Documentation.
- Begin Early.
- Build upon Established Trust.
- Pay Attention to Timelines.
- Work Steadily.
- Don't Panic.

Organize the Narrative

In large complicated projects with multiple timelines and deliverables, it is incumbent upon the grant manager to be able to explain the current status of each

deliverable in a credible narrative that can be absorbed by the monitor. In order to do this well, always assume that the monitor is bright, prepared, experienced, knows what they're looking for, and is immune to hyperbole. Don't try to mislead or outsmart the monitor. Do think of ways to present summary project information built upon a sort of skeletal framework in which the priorities of the funding agency are recognizable as the spine and key achievements are plainly visible without making the monitor have to parse language or sort out elaborate explanation. If five curricular tracks are detailed in the grant Statement of Work, make sure these five narratives are accessible to the monitor in a format that makes sense. A project website is an excellent tool for walking a monitor through key events, project milestones, and deliverables. If video is available highlighting certain aspects of the project, such as trainee testimonials, these also work well.

Prepare the Business Office

With the possible exception of the project director, no entity is more exposed during a monitoring visit than the business office, specifically the Controller. What makes the Controller's position particularly vulnerable is the degree to which he or she must rely on the project director to make sound grant management decisions throughout the process leading up to the monitoring visit. If the project director screws up, the Controller ultimately gets rolled up in the debris. This is a tough position for a colleague and the project director must not only acknowledge his or her shared responsibility in this regard, but internalize the critical importance of preventing financial trouble stemming from project mismanagement or negligence from landing on the doorstep of the College via the Controller. It's a big responsibility, not one that is immediately apparent during the formative stages of writing a grant. Regardless, protecting the College and the

Controller from damage is a fundamental obligation of the grant professional. To mitigate the possibility of trouble for the business office during a monitoring visit, the following preparation checklist is proposed:

- On behalf of the business office, obtain a checklist from the monitor as early as possible that itemizes the financial documents the auditor will like to review on site.
- Collaborate with the Controller on the checklist.
- Talk through any potential issues that might crop up, such as program income; indirect cost rate; and college policies that intersect with grant-funded activities, procurements, contracts, etc.
- Review quarterly financial reports and any issues that have arisen during the funding cycle.
- Be available to the Controller before the monitoring visit for consultation and arranging schedules.
- Bring the monitor to the business office and take the responsibility of preparing a secure and comfortable workspace for the monitor near the business office. Phone and Internet access should be provided in this workspace.
- If issues arise during the visit, share them with the Controller so he or she is not caught totally off-guard.
- Don't leave anyone hanging during the visit. Don't disappear.

Review the Statement of Work

The Statement of Work is the contract between the grantee and the funding agency. It is a key document that provides a blueprint for deliverables that the grantee will be required to carry out. Often the Statement of Work defines the threshold to which the grantee must execute the deliverable. Most monitors will begin their review with the Statement of Work, not from the original grant proposal submitted by the grantee.

Variations from the Statement of Work require a process of approval called a modification, or a “grant mod” in the shorthand of the trade. Grant mods are also a frequent source of monitoring review. Regarding grant modifications, monitors are looking for two things: (1) that mods were submitted in a timely way and the activity contained within the mod was delivered after the date formal approval was authorized by the funding agency, and (2) that the project director did not use grant funds to deliver activity outside the Statement of Work. More than any other document, the Statement of Work forms the paper trail of grant activity. Project managers veer from the roadmap outlined there at their peril. Reviewing this document periodically is good practice for project directors, particularly so during the time leading up to a monitoring visit.

Develop an Agenda for the Visit

Who develops the agenda for a monitoring visit is a subtle litmus test of trust. As such it is significant, more than it might seem on the surface. Clearly the monitor sets the agenda. They can do whatever they want, go where they want, and poke and probe as they see fit. That’s their job. On the other hand, if they generate a broad outline of areas of inquiry and leave it to the project manager to fill in the necessary details, this is a good sign. They trust the project manager with this key gate-keeping function. From the standpoint of the project manager, fleshing out the agenda so all elements requested by the monitoring staff are in place offers an opportunity for the project manager to establish a level of competence before the monitoring visit even begins. Establishing the agenda is a key opportunity the project director should never turn down. Moreover, it provides a further opportunity for back and forth communication with the monitor, which is almost always a good thing prior to the visit.

Align Documentation

Broadly defined, this means tidy up and get the paperwork in order. Make sure trainee files are clean and organized, procurement documents are clear and make sense, payroll is airtight, and contracts follow the College policies and procedures. The importance of clean paperwork depends on who is doing the assessment, but no monitor will dispute that a disorganized set of program documents testifies to overall loose project management. Nothing activates a monitor more quickly than shoddy documentation. The process of aligning documentation assumes a good to excellent level of document control and refers to presenting documents so that they individually support key deliverables and collectively provide a foundation for the Statement of Work. For those familiar with the ISO and QS world, aligning documentation in preparation for a monitoring visit is very comparable to preparing for a document control quality audit. In each case, the auditor wants to know that you understand your internal process, the documents support that you do what you say you do, and you can prove it when a monitor asks to pull a random sample for his or her review. Aligning documentation is important. Without equivocation it may be said that document control executed at a high level from the time the grant is written through closeout is a grant management best practice.

Begin Early

Most of us learn early, as early as when we started grade school, that getting an early start is good practice. Beginning early to prepare for a monitoring visit is comparable to systematically reviewing the material for a final exam early in the process, not waiting until the last minute to cram. This all makes sense intuitively, even to procrastinators. But the real reason to begin early is that it gives the project director and

the staff an opportunity to get their arms around the process, to think through what may be required, and perhaps most importantly, to have the opportunity to present an organized front to an auditor. Grant monitors don't often visit a grantee more than once during a project, so the first impression is critical. Monitors look for signs of competence, energy, professionalism, engagement, awareness, respect, and integrity.

As positive traits are supported and corroborated by other partners in the project, a good first impression lends itself to an open mind on any number of points encountered during the review. The project manager should expect to spend virtually all their time with the monitor during the monitoring visit, but be prepared and willing to turn the monitor loose with anyone connected with the project so that the monitor can hear multiple unabated project voices. Monitors go where they want to go and don't like being steered or manipulated. They expect a certain amount of spin, but respond best to a candid summary of where things stand. If they sense they're not getting the straight shot from the manager, they'll be more determined to seek input from other stakeholders. If the monitor begins to doubt the veracity of key project messengers, the project manager should prepare for trouble. But by then it's too late, which is why it's important to begin early.

Build Upon Established Trust

The most effective early move a project manager can make is to establish trust with the project officer monitoring the grant. Look for ways this can be accomplished.

Here is just a handful for consideration:

- Be patient during the award stage, being mindful of the funder's desire, especially on federal projects, to manage the award notification publicity through regional legislators.

- Be professional during the award negotiation, forwarding material, budget revisions, and additions to the Statement of Work, quickly and thoroughly without fuss.
- Seek clarity in all communications with the federal project officers, avoiding at all costs misunderstandings that devolve into highly unproductive he said/she said personal conflicts that lead to damaging defensiveness on both sides.
- Don't do anything that embarrasses the project officer or makes him or her look unprofessional to his or her colleagues or supervisors.
- Get going as soon as you're able, but don't work outside the approval structure.

Establishing a level of professional trust with the project officer pays immediate and long-term dividends. As noted many times by researchers on the topic of trust, it is obtained incrementally by many productive and mutually satisfactory engagements but can be squandered quickly and irrevocably by taking shortcuts, not being mindful of the interests of the wider range of stakeholders, or by getting angry. In grant management, especially in the formative stages of establishing trust with federal project officers, a project manager who gets mad loses. Avoid the temptation to hit send on angry emails to the project officer. Don't do it. The most tangible benefit of trust is the ability to move quickly and decisively, both important concepts in grants management. Longer term, a reservoir of trust established between project manager and federal project officer bears considerable fruit during a monitoring visit. Many gray areas exist in the management of large, complicated, politically visible federal projects. Trust allows the monitor to see these gray areas as positive behaviors rather than compliance issues requiring corrective action or punishment.

Pay Attention to Timelines

Just as grant management is timeline-driven work, so is preparing for an audit.

The following preparation checklist is proposed:

1. Review all documents and quarterly reports submitted to the funding agency.
2. Review all financials, focusing specifically on equipment procurements, payroll, personnel, and contractual line items.
3. Review Statement of Work and assess current status of grant deliverables with the SOW.
4. Prepare College president, CFO, controller, faculty, staff, and other key internal stakeholders.
5. Prepare external stakeholders including employers, trainees, trade associations, and workforce system as applicable.
6. Ensure required program documents—trainee files, course authorizations, supplies requisitions, payroll timesheets, etc.—are complete, organized, and available.
7. Revise or update project website as required.
8. Update project summary information—financials, total trainees served, trainees entering employment, trainees entering employment related to training, etc.—and make sure the numbers provided are solid. Don't inflate to make the project look better.
9. Visit employers personally 1-2 weeks before the monitoring visit in order to provide some parameters on the likely items of interest to the monitor.
10. Proceed thoughtfully and thoroughly, providing sufficient lead time to all stakeholders. Don't wait until the last minute, thereby rendering the monitoring visit a crisis management exercise for everyone involved.

Work Steadily

This sounds like common sense, and it is; yet it's surprising to what extent an impending audit or monitoring visit elicits either paralyzing indecision or obsessive

misguided detail tracking on the part of a project director. In large projects with literally thousands of data points representing financial and programmatic decisions laid out for scrutiny by an auditor, the process is daunting to the project director. And it should be, especially on projects in which millions of taxpayer dollars are invested. The project director needs to stay focused during the period leading up to a monitoring visit, and working steadily is one of the most effective ways of maintaining productive focus. Gathering feedback from other grantees in the same funding stream that have already undergone monitoring visits can provide useful intelligence to prepare for a visit.

Knowing what monitors are looking for at other places can be helpful. But there are limitations to that approach. One is it distracts you from telling your own story, which is essential to a successful outcome. Two, you can't be sure that your monitor will bring the same range of concerns of monitors examining other projects. Three, there's a natural tendency among project managers discussing a topic as fraught with stress as monitoring visits to begin sharing war stories and audit team worst practices, the misery attracts company mindset. This is akin to soliciting pity and should be avoided as an unproductive practice. Bottom line, the project manager needs to manage the stress of an impending monitoring visit by exercising sufficient discipline to focus on the right things. Maintaining business as usual grant operations is the best course. Timing a procurement around a site visit, for example, may be an effective practice because it allows the monitor to see firsthand how the grant manager gets this key piece of work done.

Don't Panic

This concept mainly applies to when the monitor is on site. Consider it likely that a federal monitor or team of monitors on site for several days will find some aspect of

project management that falls short of perfection. From the perspective of a project director, this should not be taken personally. Listen carefully to the auditor and pay attention to verbal cues. Being combative with the monitor is almost always a bad idea. Play it straight, answer the questions, and don't make small problems bigger than they are by engaging in verbal swordplay with the monitor. By all means engage in discussions related to the overall scope of the issue at hand, mindful that process issues can almost always be easily corrected but findings related to money often cannot. Process issues are almost always better topics of audit focus than money. If the process issue is small, let it air out. Give the monitor space to help resolve the issue.

Generally speaking it's okay to let the monitor know that you're aware of the importance of the rules, especially those related to procurements and expenditures, but that you're not a legal scholar on every intricate nuance of OMB Circulars. However, under no circumstances should a project manager imply or convey the perception that OMB rules are so excessively bureaucratic that they cannot possibly be followed, and so should be ignored. With an auditor on site and a potential finding on the table, there can be a temptation on the part of project manager under this kind of pressure to throw up their hands and metaphorically (or literally) curse the complexity of the rules governing compliance. This is the definition of panic. Don't do it unless you're prepared to fight on bad ground, expose the institution to harsh punitive sanctions, and ultimately lose.

CHAPTER 11: SUSTAINABILITY

Introduction

Sustainability is a point-bearing section in many federal workforce development grant proposals. On a 100-point scale, sustainability may be worth 5-10 points, sometimes more. From that standpoint alone, it is a section the astute grant writer should give merit and attention. Sustainability from the funder's perspective refers to the plan the grantee develops and implements to keep the project going after grant dollars go away. Robust sustainability plans contain at least five components: (1) employer support, preferably in the form of cash; (2) grantee commitment, also with cash the preferred currency; (3) a fully functioning advisory committee; (4) marketing support from somebody's general fund; and (5) sincere commitment from all stakeholders.

Unfortunately, despite the best-laid sustainability plans, most federal workforce development projects expire after grant resources run out. Once the last external dollar is tapped by the grantee and closeout is accomplished so there is no hanging chad between funder and grantee, sustainability goes by the wayside. This is highly unfortunate. It's too easy to say that it doesn't need to happen, because grantees generally pursue grants precisely because they lack the unallocated resources to fund an activity with general fund dollars, so it stands to reason that when federal funds stop flowing an institution reverts to the same practice that predated the successful grant pursuit initially. In other words, the grant is comparable to found money—once it's gone, the activity (and staff)

are likely gone, too. It can be a hard truth for grant writers and grant staff to deal with, but with no further leverage on the grantee available to the funder, there's nothing stopping the grantee from moving ahead and leaving the sustainability plan on the shelf. Experienced grant writers who have gone through this cycle understand the rhythm, feel, and institutional language of an empty sustainability plan. In fact, they're likely the authors of the plan, knowing that they're likely describing a process that's mostly veneer glued to an empty commitment. The fact is, if the grant is compelling enough to pursue, it likely is a highly competitive evaluation process. Failing to develop a good sustainability plan might very well represent the one or two-point difference between getting the proposal funded and doling out excuses after an unsuccessful submission. And there's nothing worse than spending weeks on a proposal and not getting funded. So good sustainability plans are written which often go unimplemented.

Understanding the Landscape

Consider sustainability from another standpoint, however, and it becomes a much richer endeavor, one certainly more in keeping with the intent of the criteria. Consider sustainability more like rock climbing—moving carefully but with a sense of urgency from one toehold to the next, leveraging opportunity written into the grant to access new opportunity that was not part of the proposal. This is what the grant manager needs to be doing, non-stop, from the start. This instinct to leverage opportunity in the pursuit of new opportunity is the most substantial, value-added activity a workforce development professional can be engaged in while managing a large federal project. It should not be regarded as a box to be checked at closeout but rather an intensely focused activity begun early with components of vision, detail, engagement, innovation and opportunistic

activity. In large federal grants, as noted earlier, the primary limiting factor is time, not dollars. The Buddhists talk about intense engagement with a task that is like working with your hair on fire. This captures the idea.

Connecting the Dots

There is no substitute for legwork. Sustainability is a labor intensive activity built on passion, vision, and personal contacts. Think of the Pulitzer-Prize winning *Flint Journal* photo of the holes worn in the bottom of Sen. Adlai Stevenson's shoes during the 1952 presidential campaign (Labor Day, 1952). Even in this Internet age of social networks and electronic communication, it takes this level of outreach, focus, and commitment to personal networking to connect the dots and make change happen on the ground. A project director must be willing to get out of the office and escape the false tyranny of deadlines and compliance paperwork in order to bring the full potential of the project to life. Email doesn't do it. Here is a checklist guideline for action.

Connect with local, regional, and state economic development staff. Thought leaders are found in nearly every occupation and station in life. Also known as idea guys, or big picture thinkers, they are found in higher education, government, and public and private sector economic development staffs. Sometimes their capacity for unconventional thinking creates a dissonance with convention that's hard for them to overcome, and sometimes that's a good thing when the result is fresh thought that disrupts the ecosystem. The astute sustainability practitioner needs to connect early and often with the local economic development staff. The focus of these discussions should be shared awareness of these factors:

- New businesses, industries, or industry sectors being recruited into the area

- The status of economic development strategies such as Tax Increment Financing, Brownfield redevelopment, tax-incentivized Smart Zones, and abatements.
- State or federal initiatives flowing through the Economic Development agency.
- Projects both can work on together for the mutual benefit of the region.

Local economic developers should be on the front end of the business recruitment curve, if they are doing their job well. They should be meeting and greeting key business contacts before the education and training provider does. Assuming this is so, the education provider concerned with sustainability ought to feed the local economic development recruiter a boiled down outline of their education and training capacity as a common sense marketing tool to inform site locators about the community college. Highlights should include credit and non-credit offerings, the process used in developing new coursework or curriculum in partnership with employers, the capacity of the college to respond programmatically to new sectors, the college's track record in obtaining grant funds to support program development, and contact information and biographical information of key workforce development personnel. Sustainability has a marketing component. Practitioners engaged in this activity should not let themselves get so immersed in the daily details of their work that they neglect sharing success stories geared toward a wider audience unfamiliar with the neighborhood scale. Video testimonials professionally rendered are very effective in this regard. Make YouTube your friend. Seek opportunities to tell your story.

Seek opportunities in new directions with existing partners. Workforce development activities with existing partners occasionally lead to new opportunities

neither party could have predicted when a grant proposal was written. Three examples from recent experience are referenced here:

1. Gas Energy Bootcamp

ACC has operated a premier utility tech lineworker's certificate program for more than 20 years. The first of its kind at a community college in Michigan, it has been the model for subsequent programs training men and women to climb utility poles and work at heights in close proximity to high voltage electrical transmission lines. The two largest energy companies in Michigan, Consumers Energy and DTE, have partnered with the college and the Utility Tech program faculty on projects over the intervening two decades, occasionally hiring program graduates or more often admitting them into their apprentice training programs after obtaining entry level experience at regional cooperatives or municipalities.

In 2012, DTE and Consumers was seeking to launch a gas energy bootcamp for unemployed military veterans in an attempt to prepare these veterans for entry-level employment in the energy sector. Representatives from both companies approached the college to become involved with this project. The College accepted and quickly a partnership of the employers, the Michigan National Guard and Reserve, the Michigan Works! Workforce system, ACC, and joined forces to recruit, screen, house, feed, train, and prepare veterans from around the state for this pilot project. The first planning session began in late July 2012. Training began the first week of October with 20 veterans from across outstate Michigan housed on the Camp Grayling National Guard training facility for eight weeks of intensive residential training on gas industry fundamentals. The cohort model employed had considerable beneficial effect.

By December the group was ready for graduation and by spring all but a handful were hired, beginning new careers in the energy industry. The model received national attention, most notably from a White House commission on veterans retraining chaired by Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden, but also from leaders in the VA systems and USDOL as well. The main takeaway from this pilot, beyond the pleasure of assisting struggling vets to get good jobs, was the binding value a unique project has in creating lasting partnerships that transcend region or sectors or even workforce development conventions: the employers' foundations both contributed to a College capital campaign to create the Electrical Power Technology Center; the Michigan National Guard and Reserve began discussions with the college on training related to cyber-security and drone manufacturing; the workforce system and the College partnered on promoting green seminars and composites training; and USDOL nominated the training program as a national "best practice" for workforce training.

2. Alpena Biorefinery

The Alpena Biorefinery is a national prototype cellulosic (wood) ethanol production sited behind a large hardboard manufacturing plant along the Lake Huron shoreline in Alpena. Funded in part by ARRA stimulus dollars, the U.S. Department of Energy, a State of Michigan Center of Environmental Excellence award and private investors, the business model of the Alpena Biorefinery is to take effluent from the hardboard manufacturing process, distill and extract the sugars, and make biofuels from a wood waste product.

Alpena Community College's TAACCCT Sustainability and Green Jobs grant contained startup training for the facility, as well as a plan to scale training provided locally to other cellulosic ethanol biofuels plant startups as they come online. Compared to corn-based ethanol, which consumes slightly more BTUs in production than is yielded in fuel while also negatively affecting commodity prices due to the removal of significant amounts of corn from the agricultural food supply, ethanol derived from wood waste products represents the sweet spot of the biofuels sector. From this standpoint, the Alpena Biorefinery is as much an investment in proof of concept as it is a commodity source of alternative biofuel.

In this prototype phase, the product is not a few hundred thousand gallons of 200-proof "hooch," but rather a \$20-\$30 million production facility replicable worldwide in which the engineering, process, startup, and training functions have been tested, refined, and resolved. As startup training progressed and new trainees were added to the workforce, discussions regarding scaling up the training package began to distill around a certificate program in process engineering, a unique credential for the College and one with broad marketing potential.

3. Marine Technology AAS Degree

The Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary is one of 13 federally designated marine sanctuaries by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and the only freshwater sanctuary in the network. Located in Alpena on the shores of the Thunder Bay River in a retrofitted paper mill, the Sanctuary is a magnet for researchers and underwater archeologists exploring the shipwrecks of Thunder Bay in Lake Huron. As a community asset, TBNMS is unparalleled, particularly in its embrace of technology such as Remotely Operative Vehicles (ROVs), which allows exploration of dive sites using underwater submersibles outfitted with cameras and sonar.

Alpena Community College and the TBNMS have collaborated extensively since 2006 when both worked together to bring the Internet2, a high speed broadband fiber optic network devoted to research and telepresence, to the community in preparation for a visit by famous undersea explorer Dr. Robert Ballard, discoverer of Titanic. In 2011, after the College was able to procure

TAACCCT funding, a Marine Tech AAS degree focused on operation, maintenance and troubleshooting of ROVs was developed. Additionally, the grant provided funding for an observation-class ROV, simulation hardware and software, and multi-beam sonar for student use.

The only program of its kind on the Great Lakes and one of only a handful in North America, ACC's Marine Tech program prepares its graduates for technician-level employment as ROV operators, primarily in ocean work in oil and gas applications around the world. According to Oceaneering Inc., the leading employer of ROV technicians worldwide and a member of the project advisory team, entry-level technicians begin at \$55,000 per year with an opportunity to double or triple that income as experience is obtained.

In June 2014, Alpena hosted the Marine Advanced Technology Education (MATE) international ROV competition at the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary. Fifty-nine teams from around the world came to Alpena for the competition with teams from Russia, China, Indonesia, Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Scotland, and Canada taking honors. Students from ACC's pilot Marine Tech program competed as well with students and the community alike benefitting from the interaction with bright young STEM students from around the globe, united in their avid regard for electronics, robotics, engineering and applied problem-solving.

The competition was an historic event for Alpena and it originated from a vision fleshed out three years before which became ACC's Marine Technology program, its development funded by a TAACCCT grant. The day after the competition ended, Oceaneering, Inc. interviewed then hired all of ACC's Marine Tech graduates.

Build relationships with new employers. For community colleges serving districts parched for jobs, building relationships with new employers that lead to economic development opportunities for the region is the gold standard of workforce development success. The lure of new employers and new employment is strong in stressed economic communities, particularly those making the often-wrenching transition from manufacturing and extraction-based economies to knowledge-based futures. Facilitating this transition is the most important role a workforce professional can play. It is the sustainability function boiled down to its essence: Jobs, opportunity, building a culture

that's aspirational, adaptable, and open to change. New employers arrive for a range of reasons without the benefit or the burden of accumulated local history. It is the job of the workforce professional to plug in without shorting the circuit with a lot of extraneous background interference. Tune into their needs. Tie what they want to what you can do. Don't overpromise and under deliver. Look for an early success; then build on it. Word of mouth is your best friend or worst enemy. Make sure it works in your favor.

Pursue connections between existing and new partners. Grant-funded training developed for one partner often may fit with other employers in new sectors. A smart sustainability practitioner looks for these opportunities and follows up on them. Serving one need with an existing partner often resonates with another. This is the power of the delivery model—it creates credibility and momentum. The sustainability champion needs to leverage delivery opportunities with the finesse of a craftsman, seeking always to figure out a way forward using the resources at hand while thinking through the range of funding sources that successfully accessed would bring new resources to bear. This ongoing thought process is the art of sustainability and is the most challenging and fun part of the work.

Listen. Take notes. Respond. Follow Through. Deliver. Repeat. Sustainability requires both passion and professionalism. The six-step process referenced above is the professionalism part. Too often sustainability gets sidetracked in false turns that lead to not getting to step five, which is delivering something. Project directors, even experienced ones, need to beware of the following sustainability cul-de-sacs.

- Dwelling too long on the good news of what's already been done.
- Failing to launch on details that lead to the next iteration of work together.

- Making the next phase of a project so complicated that it can't or won't be done.
- Spending too much time on speculation and meetings with non-essential players.
- Avoiding decision-makers and employer partners.
- Not finding funding to keep things going.

The last two bullet points are related. For better or worse, successful pursuit of grant-funded training projects sometimes creates an expectation among some employer partners that continued success in the money chasing arena is a done deal—a matter of dotting I's and crossing T's and getting the forms filled out and submitted on time, essentially a bureaucratic exercise in gilding the lily. Of course, this seldom is the case. All the grant writer-project director can do is be straight with all stakeholders, which is the basis of sustainability. To the employer, sustainability may involve paying cash for valued services. To the internal college community, sustainability may mean investing General Fund dollars on staffing a certificate or associate's degree program. To the funding agency, sustainability may rely on further investing in promising programs or institutions involved in developing capacity or expertise in areas of particular interest to the funder. An energetic sustainability champ needs to be engaged across all three areas and a trusted ally to all constituencies.

Explore delivery modalities that expand the footprint. As noted earlier, researcher and thought leader Terry O'Banion (1997) references the success agenda as the next imperative for community colleges. One way this can be accomplished, he observes, is by scaling up best practices across institutions, taking discrete activities practiced locally and integrating them throughout the system. Online delivery, face-to-face hybrid courses,

accelerated degrees, and competency-based curricula are all instructional modalities that may contribute to the success agenda. For institutions with unique programs, grant funds are often a good source to explore ways to export the delivery of these programs to a wider audience. Occupational programs with a prominent hands-on lab component continue to be challenging to adapt to online or virtual delivery modalities. Approaches to this delivery quandary tend to align along three tracks: (1) send students a lab pack containing all the supplies and equipment to do a lab, require the students to video themselves doing the lab, then have students email the video back to the instructor for feedback and review; (2) require students to attend a compressed face-to-face session in which the hands-on lab component is rolled out in an accelerated fashion; and (3) simulate the lab through video accessed by the student, require the student to access the necessary materials on their own, have them do the lab, and then demonstrate competency. Sustainability advocates need to explore the best way to extend the footprint of their most promising programs, and to search for grant opportunities that allow them to research and fund best practices that can be brought to scale.

Think chess, not checkers. In an outdoor commons area across the street from Harvard Yard, a group of motivated savants, weather permitting, play chess on a set of concrete tables with the boards embedded. They play a speed game with timers and very little talk, focused on the action to the exclusion of the many interesting distractions ongoing all around them. The good players arrange their assets with decisive authority, coordinating an attack with an innate understanding of the spatial capacity of the pieces and how they work together. The best players understand this too, but add a defining feature: they see the board several moves ahead of their rivals. With a swift glance at the

rapidly unfolding action, they process the status quo and quickly move to set the future conditions that will overtake the present, working in a three-dimensional model that often obscures how quickly incremental details upon which the action is built are processed and reformulated to set the stage for the next series of moves. Inspired workforce development follows this model. Practitioners need to understand the big picture, the status quo, the unique capacity of the individual pieces, the many formulations of defense they will encounter, all counter-balanced by the sequence of moves leading to opportunity. Above all, practitioners must possess the intuition and feel the urgency to look several moves down the road as a matter of course. Consider inertia—a perpetual opponent of modest skill, considerable experience, and a nearly unlimited reservoir of implacable resolve—and the chess model makes sense.

Don't get bogged down in who gets credit. Workforce development practitioners seldom work in an environment of solo performers. Dr. Sandy Shugart, president of Valencia Community College in Orlando, Florida, recently published a book on leadership in which he compared the role of a community college leader to an orchestra conductor, attuned to the pace and rhythm of the ensemble with a clear and uncompromising ear. Sustainability in workforce development is similarly modulated. Good leadership is mandatory, but the leader must understand the big picture and how the pieces fit together. He or she must know at a deep level what motivates the group, and how to lead them from good to great. The leader must be able to feel the momentum of the group and be mindful of the various forms of acknowledgment that represent the currency of success in each of their worlds, and above all be generous in doling out credit. Credit, like trust, is a savings account built on multiple positive interactions.

Tapping it for short-term gain, or grabbing more than your share, undermines credibility and sells the group short of their best work. As the recent economic meltdown tells us, chase too much credit and the group goes broke.

The Vision Thing. A project director engaged in sustainability must resist the temptation to do a bait and switch on workforce and economic development stakeholders—that is, to sell a vision based on hype and potential and then repeat the cycle when the next big thing comes along, thus staying one step ahead of accountability without landing anything tangible. This is bad form and should be avoided on general principles. However, the sustainability champion must be willing and able to sell a legitimate vision of a future that connects with real assets on the ground—or in the case below, underwater. Look for examples to use as sample case statements useful for advancing a vision, as outlined below.

Going Wireless. Recently a team of educators from ACC visited their Canadian counterparts at the Marine Institute at Memorial University in St John’s, Newfoundland, to discuss a pilot partnership that is training the next wave of global explorers. Graduates of the Marine Institute Program guide remotely operated and autonomous unmanned vehicles to some of the most remote undersea settings on earth. They map the underside of the polar ice cap, maintain deep-water offshore oilrigs, and “fly” underwater trenching equipment that introduces electricity and fiber optic capacity to remote areas around the globe. ACC created its Marine Technology AAS program based upon the St. John’s model. As the two teams of educators stood on Signal Hill gazing out over the churning north Atlantic, the same site where in 1901 Italian inventor Guglielmo Marconi first

demonstrated wireless transatlantic transmission to the world, the leader of the Canadian team said: “It’s all about the dream. Then making it happen.”

CHAPTER 12: PROJECT CLOSEOUT

Introduction

Closing out a grant can be a thankless task. Assuming that the project went well, all the dollars spent, the deliverables delivered, equipment procured and now owned by the College, good press digested, and good will deposited in the community savings account—all these events now largely dwell in the past. Attention now turns to what comes next. This is often a harrowing time for grant-funded staff, including the project director, who must make their way in the uncertain world outside the slipstream of the general fund. Yet there is still an important piece of grant management work to be accomplished, known as project closeout. Closeout is the process by which the funding agency and the grantee agree that a sufficient level of deliverables in the Statement of Work have been met, the grant dollars have been expended properly, and the contract that existed between the two parties for the duration of the funding cycle now begins to unwind. On most federal grants this process must be completed within 90 days after the end of the grant. The process is complicated for a number of reasons. A short list is outlined below:

- Federal agencies often turn closeout over to finance staff in Washington who have had no connection with the grant program, the federal project officer, or grantee staff. Finance staff in the national office often take a different view than agency field officers regarding financial details or processes. For example, the federal project officer may have devoted virtually no attention to employer match during the entire project, yet during closeout the Point of Contact may require a detailed analysis of the contributions by partners during

the project supported by documents such as trainee records, meeting meetings, invoices, etc.

- Federal project officer turnover often occurs near the end of a discretionary program's life cycle, which can coincide with project closeout.
- When federal project officers leave or transfer, grantee project directors are left without a contact on the federal level that is remotely familiar with their project.
- Grantee staff also often turns over during closeout. Project directors leave for other positions, sometimes at other institutions. When that happens, closeout falls to support staff or lower-level administrators who have not held day-to-day responsibility for the grant to date.
- Closeout often involves technology and reporting templates that do not provide convenient or seamless service.
- Grant dollars have already been expended. Support for further funding agency-grantee engagement now must come from the grantee's General Fund.

Because of these challenges and others that tend to arise during transition periods, closeout represents the period of most vulnerability for the grantee. From that standpoint one could argue that closeout is perhaps the most important step in the process. Simply put, if grant closeout goes awry, the potential for crippling financial entanglements for the institution is front, center, and immediate. That said, if the common sense steps below are followed, a grantee can substantially mitigate the possibility of serious blowback.

- Establish a relationship with the Point of Contact for the closeout process.
- Don't miss deadlines.
- Loop in the College's business office.
- Write the Final Report.
- Stay engaged until the letter announcing successful closeout of the grant appears.

Establish a Relationship with the Point of Contact

Closeout is a highly idiosyncratic process. Agencies manage it many different ways. Agencies also differ in the level of engagement or aggressiveness they bring to the process. One generalization that does hold true, however, is the value of establishing a relationship with the Point of Contact managing the closeout process for the funding agency. In some cases, a relationship already might have been established. In others, the POC will be a stranger to the grantee project director and vice-versa. On federal grants, if the federal project officer can be accessed to facilitate relationship building between the grantee and the POC, the grantee should go for it. Take advantage of the opportunity by reaching out to both the federal project officer and the POC, keeping both looped in and informed. As noted earlier, a relationship of trust between the grantee and the federal project officer is like a savings account put aside for just such as rainy day purpose as project closeout. A trust relationship constructed over the duration of the grant should be leveraged by the grantee; it makes sense and is part of due diligence and good grant management. The relationship between the grantee and the POC does not have to be deep or deeply personal. Best-case scenario: it likely will last only for the duration of the closeout. A grantee should seek specific pieces of feedback from the POC, however, including these:

- Deadlines.
- Process.
- Content.
- Grant activity aligning specifically with desired program outcomes that can be promoted nationally as a best practice.

- Any toxic data point or activity from the funder's perspective, which we'll call the third rail.

As in much of grants management, deadlines are the connective tissue in the closeout process. Grantees are most noticeable to funders when they miss deadlines. There is no upside to this sort of attention. Funders don't like it. It creates suspicion on their part. They wonder what's going on out there. Federal project officers don't appreciate it because they are called out by the National Office and asked why their grantee is late; this puts them on the spot and embarrasses them. As deadlines are missed, consider each occasion a withdrawal from the trust account the grantee has been building over time with key funding agency players. The only exception to this trust disinvestment is if the grantee notifies the funder prior to the deadline that a tangible obstacle, such as wayward technology or a balky web portal, is preventing timely submission of the material by the deadline. Working through issues together with the funder is almost always a good thing. Ignoring them and hoping nobody notices is not smart.

Loop in the Business Office

As noted in the section on preparing for a monitoring visit, the business office has considerable responsibility during the closeout process. Accurate financial reporting on large grants involves consistent tracking of restricted fund expenditures, a system of account codes that is clear and well-understood, a set of policies outlining accepted institutional practices that align with the funder's allowable costs parameters, and an overall understanding of the grant project, the funder's imperatives, and the schedule for submission of financial reports. Copies of the grant agreement should be on file in the

Controller's office along with a copy of the institution's approved indirect cost agreement on federal projects. A copy of the approved grant budget should also be available to the Controller. On multiple-year grants, aligning the funder's fiscal year to the institution's fiscal year can occasionally be complicated. Most multi-year federal grants allow automatic carryover of funds across fiscal years within the award cycle, so the complications that do arise often reside more on the institutional side than the funder's. The following checklist provides a basic outline for Business Office closeout considerations:

1. Be able to explain and defend the drawdown process of funds from the funder.
2. Be able to explain and defend the indirect cost rate and how it was applied.
3. Be able to explain the difference between administration and program development as that distinction relates to the indirect cost pool.
4. Be able to explain and defend the accounting of any program income deriving to the institution due to the funder's investment.
5. Be able to explain and defend equipment procurements and contractual relationships.
6. Be able to explain and defend Fringes expenditures charged to the grant.
7. Be able to explain or defend match, particularly cash contributions from employers.
8. Be able to explain and defend the accounting process employed—accrual or cash.
9. Be able to explain and defend cumulative totals across line items.
10. Be able to access the web portal and forms required to submit closeout financial data.
11. Be able to pull the required data together and submit it before the deadline, generally 30-45 days after the grant end date.

Pulling these details together on a large federal grant is a considerable task for a Controller. The project director can provide valuable assistance by keeping the Controller in the loop on all communication between the project and the funder, particularly in regards to closeout timelines. The business office and the project manager need to work well together at all times, but it is particularly critical during closeout. The bottom line is twofold: (1) getting the institution all the money it is owed by the funder and not a dime more; and (2) proving to the funder that corruption, incompetence, or financial mismanagement are not factors of concern at the institution.

Write the Final Report

Keep the report accurate, succinct, positive, and forward-looking. The final report is not the time or the place to address grantee grievances. Think long term, big picture. What possible good can come from criticizing the funder over process details? Keep the report focused on project accomplishments. Highlight work that went well, the development of institutional capacity, employer and employee benefits derived from training, the pertinence of the curriculum developed, the equipment, supplies and staff development afforded by grant funding. Align these successes with funder priorities. Give the reader, whoever it may be, narrative structure that allows them to understand how your project fit within the funder's agenda. It is common at the end of a project for gloom to set in. For staff who have bought in heart and soul, this is comparable to the grieving process, a genuine emotion derived from sustained and inspired effort that should be understood, acknowledged, and championed, especially by the project director. It takes time to move on. Sometimes there's no place for project staff at their institution when a grant ends, which is a hard reckoning. No matter how the transition goes,

however, the project director should not bring these issues into the Final Report. The Final Report should be about the project. And it should celebrate the innovations and successes brought to life during that rare moment when local initiative converged with an external funding source that shared the same vision.

Stay Engaged Until the Letter Arrives

Nothing is official until the letter arrives from the funder documenting that closeout has been successfully consummated. While this letter might seem like a formality, the wise project manager keeps this final step on their radar. Sometimes the letter is slow to arrive due to the glacial pace of bureaucratic approvals. Sometimes the letter is slow to arrive because something happened along the way that will prevent the letter from ever reaching its destination. The concerned project manager must be able to discern that seam when patience stops being a virtue and becomes pathology. Paying attention to the calendar and intuition will help in this regard.

Personal Reflection: The Missing TAA Application

In 2000, for example, a mid-sized family-owned paper mill closed in our town. By making quality product and specialty orders with a coating application, the mill had managed to stave off the wave of plant closings of mills of comparable size across the upper Midwest during the previous decade. But a pair of unfortunate management decisions coupled with a bit of labor shortsightedness pushed the plant into bankruptcy. I was in the plant the day the news spread through the men that the mill was closing for good. In fact, I had begun my workforce development career at the College teaching literacy skills in the plant under a U.S. Department of Education workforce literacy grant.

Having been in the plant off and on for several years, the demographics of the workforce were well known to me: bright, resourceful men, good problem-solvers, and intuitive papermakers, many of whom migrated to the mill straight out of high school and worked their entire careers there, providing themselves with the pride of gainful employment and their families the benefits of a middle to upper middle-class lifestyle. Most had no formal schooling or college degrees. They knew that if the plant closed, the way of life they'd enjoyed for many years would vanish overnight. The community knew it, too.

As the news spread, the expressions on the workers' faces assumed a gray pallor. Many looked as if they'd been pole-axed, stunned. There was a huge sense of loss, as if a close friend had died, not unexpectedly exactly, but at least before his time and from preventable causes. Members of the local workforce system began to filter on site. The workers shifted around uneasily. They knew the workforce system by another name—unemployment—and the appearance of the local crisis team caused the men to cluster, whispering anxious asides. Meetings were scheduled to discuss the options for the workers, included something called a Trade Adjustment Assistance petition, TAA, or just Trade. Trade is the gold standard of worker retraining programs, the crisis team explained to the workers, who now were beginning to grapple with workforce system terminology and programs. If foreign competition can be proven to have played a significant factor in the plant closing in a petition submitted by company management to the U.S. Department of Labor, two years of retraining would be provided to each member of the workforce plus 18 months of supplementary unemployment benefits to assist with living expenses during retraining for a new career. The workers, mostly men, almost 200 of them, regarded it—some with dread, others as a lifeline, and a few as an opportunity to pursue

an entirely new direction, quite possibly their dream which had been deferred by good-paying work in the paper mill. The crisis team did a good job laying out the options for the men and a TAA petition was soon submitted in a timely fashion.

Then everyone commenced waiting. The men and their families were advised that there was no hard and fast timeline for the decision on the petition from the U.S.

Department of Labor. It could be two weeks, it could be two months—it all depended on the number of petitions from around the country they were reviewing. During that year, unfortunately, plant closings were plentiful and so were petitions. A number of the spouses began visiting the website daily, checking on the status of the petition. As the first few weeks passed with no change in status, they understandably began to become anxious and impatient. What could be done? Who could provide some information? Where could they go to find out what was going on? There were no answers forthcoming.

Trying to be helpful, it occurred to me almost on a whim one day to go back to the plant to check with the lone office worker still engaged there on a part-time basis cleaning out personnel files and shutting down the office. A large pile of mail was sitting on a desk in the former CEO's office. And there, in the pile, was an unopened letter from the U.S. Department of Labor. I opened it and recognized the original petition inside, with a note from DOL asking for a signature from a company rep on a line on the form that had been missed. The petition had been kicked back to the plant due to a technicality. We quickly obtained the required the signature and sent the petition back on its way. Not long afterward, DOL made the determination that the plant was closed due to foreign competition and the workers were awarded TAA status, a lifetime transferable two-year retraining benefit, the gold standard indeed. Many of those workers came to Alpena

Community College to pursue training for new careers. Slowly they began to recover and build new lives as the abstract term workforce development grew a spine and new local meaning.

More than a decade later, the coating plant has been retrofitted into a vibrant, high-tech maritime museum, part of the NOAA network called the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary. The community has moved on from that grim day on the shop floor. But without that paperwork, it would not have been possible. Don't forget to close the loop on all the closeout paperwork.

Personal Reflection: A Cautionary Closeout Tale

Working on a daily basis with federal funding, the agencies that allocate that funding for specific purposes, and the staff that monitor the performance of that federal investment, I'm familiar with the persistent and real threat of paying back substantial sums due to mismanagement or misinterpretation of the OMB circulars. In 2010, I was closing out a successful \$1.9 million Community-Based Job Training Grant from the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration. Unfortunately, four unexpected factors led to that closeout becoming a very stressful event. One, our federal project officer was deployed overseas during the last month of the funding cycle, resulting in a new FPO that was totally unfamiliar with the preceding 40 months of the project. Two, our Controller was retiring less than a week after the final reports were due, and his plate was full with retraining his replacement. Three, the Feds were piloting a new electronic closeout format that none of the grantees had seen or used before. And four, the closeout process dumped grantees into dealing with a separate DOL audit team

that had no connection with the CBJTG grant program but only worked from the Bible of OMB circulars—a distinctly Old Testament set of documents.

On our end we'd managed expenses to within .1 of one percent of the award—which in the peculiar world of grant management is a good thing. After submitting the closeout document, I received an urgent email from someone I'd never met before informing me that the report was flawed in an unspecific way and needed to be modified within five business days or the total amount of grant award expended, more than \$1.9 million, would be considered by DOL to be a disallowed cost and would need to be paid back. With a fund balance of less than half that amount, this of course could mean bankruptcy for the College if it weren't straightened out. I was dropping my oldest daughter off for her freshman year at college in Milwaukee when this message came through on my Blackberry. Eight hours from the office, I started working through the issue with our Controller, who definitely did not want to have to deal with this as he was finally about the head out the door for the last time. But he stepped up and we worked through it.

The issue was minor—how match was recorded on a reporting form with instructions so obscure that the DOL contact wasn't even sure of their proper interpretation. We revised the form with the information in its proper place, hit submit, and the closeout was accepted without further comment or incident.

Back the office the next day, I called the closeout officer and asked why he felt the need to impose such a dire threat on such a minor and confusing technicality. He laughed, and with a little touch of embarrassment said, “We do that so we can get people to pay attention to us. It worked with you, didn't it?”

CHAPTER 13: FINAL THOUGHTS

In *The State of Workforce Development Initiatives at America's Community Colleges*, nationally-recognized community college researcher George Lorenzo explored the topic of Workforce Development (WFD) from a number of perspectives and concluded that attainment of the traditional workforce mission at many community colleges is fairly uneven (2013). Lorenzo found that not every two-year institution is on a productive track that allows them to build and offer the much-needed courses and programs that the working population needs. The general impression in much of the literature about WFD confirms that while much progress has been made, there is still a great WFD need going unfulfilled (Lorenzo, 2013). *Reclaiming the American Dream: A Report from the 21st Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges* went further, pointing out that the “connection between education and training and employment demands reveals serious shortcomings” while bluntly concluding: “The American dream is at risk” (AACC, 2012).

Lorenzo noted that there are numerous community colleges doing innovative and productive work in workforce development, including Alpena Community College, though there is no “one-size-fits-all” strategy that guarantees success other than what’s characteristic of any smart endeavor in the business world. Among these characteristics, Lorenzo identified:

- Strong leadership at the highest levels that trickles down into the culture of every employee at an institution, bringing camaraderie and producing effective like-minded goals.
- People recognizing that they must work together and not in silos.
- Sound organizational and communication skills.
- Simple hard work and determination.

This short checklist reduces the full range of operational variables down to a handful of success factors, a most useful common denominator for the aspiring grant writer to consider, because cracking the code is simply about focus, motivation, leadership, and action. Ancient Chinese philosopher Sun Tzu framed the notion this way: “Opportunities multiply as they are seized” (Clavell and Tzu, 2013). Embracing this mentality should be every grant writer’s primary deliverable.

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