Grant Writing 101

By Collaborative Partners Initiative for Enterprise, Fall 2025

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Training session agenda:

1. Introductions
2. Group discussion opportunity
3. Storytelling framework for grant writing
    a. Answering key RFP questions
4. Tips for navigating the grant world
5. Q&A
6. Post-survey

Meet your presenter!

Arianna Garofalo
Senior Grant and RFP Writer

Arianna has over 10 years of experience working in educational environments, including college-level teaching. She is a certified Digital Professor experienced in creating and delivering digital learning content.

She has coached clients, virtually and in person, in crafting winning grant proposals and other applications for 3+ years, including multiple first-time grant awardees.

Arianna holds a master's degree in Literary and Cultural Studies and a Grant Writing Certificate.

Group discussion opportunity:

What are some challenges you've faced when writing grant proposals?

Storytelling Framework

Grant writing is like storytelling: both contain a setting, characters, and conflict or challenge within a plot that leads to a resolution.

Enterprise/ PSTAA 2026 RFP Overview

Funding is available to support the construction of new childcare facilities or the expansion of existing childcare facilities. Applicants may apply for predevelopment funding, renovation funds for existing facilities, or construction funding for new facilities. All projects must be located within King County.

Golden Rules for Telling an Effective Grant Story

1. Don't assume a funder knows anything about you, your area, or your services

1. Use plain language: no need to be fancy or wordy.

1. Be specific: never speak in generalities

1. Incorporate data and statistics

Golden Rules: Don't Assume and Be Specific

- Provide definitions of key terms and concepts *as soon as you introduce them*
- Spell out acronyms *the first time you use them*
- Avoid using buzzwords or cliches (i.e. groundbreaking, uniquely qualified, life-saving, exciting, innovative, pioneering, etc.)
- **** Show, don't tell ****
- Avoid using ambiguous words (i.e. too much, not enough, etc.)
- Be cautious about using AI to generate generic content

Examples of generalities (What not to write!)

Established in 1990, IRIS is a life-saving [MEANING?], community-based organization serving those in need [WHO?]. IRIS breaks the cycle of poverty [HOW?], providing new, regenerative opportunities to members of the community's most underserved neighborhoods [WHERE?]. Since its founding, IRIS has served over 7,000 individuals [WHO?]. IRIS Afterschool Sports provide sports engagement programming [WHAT?] to underserved youth, reducing harmful activities [WHAT?], and providing a positive outlet [WHAT?] to children. The Afterschool Sports program acts as a catalyst for change [MEANING?], improving graduation rates and school attendance [HOW?]. Funding is requested to support IAS's scholarship program [HOW?/ WHAT?].

Stronger, more specific example

IRIS is a 501(c)3 that was established in 1990 to serve socially and economically disadvantaged youth ages 10-18 in the South Seattle neighborhoods of Tukwila, Renton, and Highline. We have served 7,000 youth whose families live at or below the poverty line. 90% of youth we serve are East African immigrants. ***[WHO/WHERE]*** *Our Afterschool Sports program offers FREE soccer, culturally representative mentorship, and tutoring in math, writing, and science. Staff and tutors are fluent in English, Arabic, and Somali, the languages most commonly spoken by our service population.* ***[WHAT]*** *75% of participating youth stay out or get out of gang activity; 85% have a decrease in the number of missed school days; and 90% graduate from high school.* ***[HOW]*** *We request $25,000 for our Scholarship Program, which provides $1,000 scholarships to youth who have participated in IRIS programming and are going on to college.* ***[THE ASK]***

Group activity

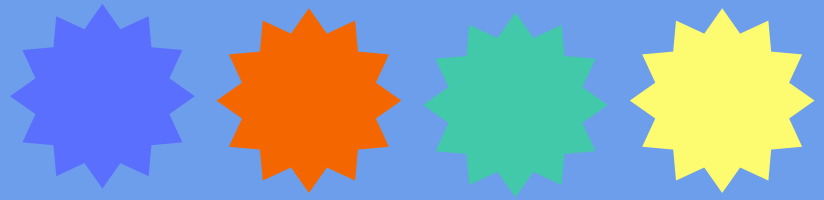
How could this sentence follow the golden rules for storytelling?

Our early learning center supports families in our community.

Setting: Organizational Description and Community Impact, Question 5

Describe the community partnerships the applicant, and early learning provider, if different, has formed through collaboration, coordination, and community networking with other organizations to strengthen your early learning program. How long has the applicant worked with community partners and organizations?

a. If you do not have any existing community partnerships, what is your plan to cultivate them and how do you want to work with community partners?



Characters: Organizational Description and Community Impact, Question 2

The following questions help us understand who you serve or intend to serve in your community:

a. What are the demographics of your child care facility's service area?
b. What community assessments have you done to understand your community's childcare needs?
c. How will access to cultural food be provided?
d. How will services for families who are unhoused or may be experiencing homelessness be coordinated?
e. Describe how your organization connects families/households to transportation to and from your early learning center. Please indicate whether your childcare facility will be accessible via mass transit, transportation provided by the operating facility or other.
f. How will language barriers or services to dual language learners be provided?
g. Please describe how specialized supports for children with complex needs and special needs will be provided.
h. Will non-traditional hours (early morning, overnight, evening or weekend care) for families be available?

Q2 Highlight: Service Area Demographics

Example: Our city is made up of 60% Hispanic, 25% African American, and 15% other ethnicities, with many families being first-generation immigrants. 28% of residents over age 5 speak a language other than English at home. Nearly 40% of these residents report they do not speak English very well or at all.

Other demographic factors you might note include average income levels, rates of homelessness, average age distribution, cultural backgrounds, etc.

Source for King County data
Washington Census data

Q2 Highlight: What community assessments have you done to understand your community's childcare needs?

Surveys/ questionnaires: Have you conducted surveys or questionnaires with parents, caregivers, and community members to gather their input on childcare needs and preferences?

Informal/ unsolicited: Have you talked to many people in your neighborhood who have a hard time finding childcare? Has a parent given unsolicited comments or feedback?

Data Analysis: Have you analyzed demographic data from sources like the Census Bureau or https://childcaredeserts.org/ to understand the population characteristics, such as the number of young children, income levels, and employment rates?

Q2 Advice: Remember the Golden Rules for Grant Storytelling!

Access to cultural food: What demographics do you serve that require culturally specific food? How will you provide this?

Services for unhoused families: Describe any partnerships you have in place to serve these families. Provide anecdotes if you have served these populations in the past.

Transportation: Explain nearby public transportation options or other ways families can access your facility.

Language barriers: What languages are spoken by the children, families, and staff? Describe how you accommodate language differences, such as bilingual staff, translation services, or culturally sensitive communication strategies.

Specialized supports: Describe how you have taken care of any children with special or complex needs. Explain accommodations you have made. Use anonymized anecdotes.

Characters: Organizational Description and Community Impact, Questions 3 & 4

Describe the early learning provider's expertise and experience in providing culturally responsive and trauma-informed care and curriculum to socially and economically disadvantaged populations.

How will services for tribal members be coordinated? If you do not yet have services for tribal members, please describe how you intend to serve tribal members.

Use statistics and data to backup your points

- Data: Factual information used as a basis for reasoning, discussion, or calculation
- Include both internal organizational and external data
- Use a mix of quantitative (numbers) and qualitative (stories) data
- External data sources
  - Census
  - King County Public Health Dashboard
  - PIT count

Plot: Project Description, Question 1

Scope of Work: Please describe in detail your proposed project. What will the PSTAA funds be paying for? (example: acquisition, predevelopment, renovation, or construction). ***Please do not assume that anyone reading this application knows anything about you, your area, or the development/construction of the project as proposed. Please include any and all details, and steps, associated with your project.***

Golden Rule #1: Don't Assume

Golden Rule #2: Use plain Language

Golden Rule #3: Be Specific

Question Break

Any questions so far?

Tips for navigating the grant world

Be prepared to manage a grant

When you win a grant, there are almost always “reporting requirements,” which are good to be aware of at the outset.

Any funder will want you, at minimum, to track how you used their money.

Come up with a system that works for you to make this process easier. A good system should:

- Keep your receipts and invoices organized
- Keep track of your expenses both to the grant and separate
- Keep any necessary files and documents for reporting and retention

Don't give up!

In a survey of ~4,000 grant professionals, 90% of organizations that submitted three to five grant applications won at least one; 98% of organizations that submitted six to eleven grants won at least one; and 99-100% of organizations that submitted more than eleven grants won at least one. In other words, the more grants you apply for, the higher your chances of success. [Source]

- If you get rejected from a grant once, you can reapply
- Processes may change from year to year
- Don't take it personally
- Make sure to update your application every year and include the most up-to-date statistics and information about your work
- Know your mission, vision, and intention and make sure the grants you apply for are in alignment

Participant question

Have you ever attended a proposal debriefing?

Where can I look for other grants to apply for?

- DCYF
  - Grant opportunities may include Early Achievers Needs Based grant, Child Care Complex Needs Fund, and Early Childhood Equity Grant
- King County Best Starts for Kids
- Candid Philanthropy News Digest
  - This is completely free! You can sign up for alerts.
- Grant Watch
  - This is one of the most affordable paid grant databases
- Foundation Directory Online
  - This is a paid database. It contains many small family foundations that may not have a web presence.
- US Small Business Administration
  - Offers support for small businesses, sometimes including grants

Thanks for viewing our presentation!

Any questions?

Resource Links

Sample grant proposals from Candid

Sample grant proposals from DCYF WA

Sample grant proposals from Instrumentl (Scroll down to “The Ultimate List of Grant Proposal Examples”)

Seattle Public Libraries grant search and writing resources

Words and phrases to avoid for stronger grant writing

The Unfunded List (Free review of rejected grants with feedback from volunteers)

The Amber Grant for Women in Business

Comcast Rise Small Business Grant

Verizon Small Business Grant (Must complete two free courses to apply)

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// Passionate about improving lives and communities through our work