Winning Grants
A How-To-Do-It Manual for Librarians®
Third Edition

Stephanie K. Gerding
Foreword by Patricia “Patty” Wong

available at alastore.ala.org
STEPHANIE K. GERDING (she/her), MLIS, is a sought-out library grant expert with success as a writer, a reviewer, a funder, an evaluation and needs assessment methodologist, and a project manager. Her career includes roles with state libraries, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and library schools, as well as university, corporate, and public libraries; additionally, she consults with such organizations as ALA, COSLA, PLA, TechSoup, and Infopeople. She is the author of five books, including Winning Grants and The Accidental Technology Trainer. She manages the Library Grants blog and has authored more than forty articles on library grants and fundraising. Stephanie finds grant work exciting and challenging and loves helping others learn to succeed.
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOREWORD</td>
<td>xiii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PREFACE</td>
<td>xv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>xxi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>xxiii</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Part I: The Grant Process Cycle

1. **Understanding the Grant Process** 3  
   Overview of the Grant Process Cycle 3  
   Key Commitments for Winning Grants 6  
   Tips for Grant Success 8

2. **Plan for Success** 11  
   Getting Started: Leadership, Grant Team, and Partners 11  
   Assessing Community Needs and Priorities 15  
   Needs Statements 19  
   Strategic Plans: Grant Time-Saver and Key to Success 22

3. **Design Winning Grant Projects** 27  
   Project Definitions 28  
   The Project Planning Process 28  
   Outcome-Based Evaluation and Logic Models 36  
   Example Grant Project Plan 41

4. **Research Funders and Grant Opportunities** 43  
   Overview of Grant Sources and Grant Matchmaking 43  
   Sources for Library Grant Funding 44  
   Top Resources for Finding Grant Opportunities 60  
   Optimizing Grant Research: From Keywords to Funders 68  
   Recording and Organizing Your Research 71  
   Determining the Best Match 73  
   Staying Aware of New Grant Opportunities 75
5. Create the Winning Proposal 77
   Overview of Proposal Writing 77
   Types of Applications and the Review Process 78
   Key Grant Proposal Components 79
   Grant Application Deconstruction: Determining Specifications and Requirements 87
   Writing Tips 89
   Communicating with Funders 91
   Submitting Your Application 92

6. Implement, Evaluate, and Continue 95
   Proposal Outcome: What to Do Next 95
   Winning Proposal Strategies: Avoiding Common Pitfalls 97
   Grant Project Implementation and Management 97
   Reviewing and Continuing the Process 102
   Best Wishes 104

Part II: Library Grant Success Stories

Mobile Chromebook Lab 107
   Haddonfield (NJ) Public Library

Scott County Community Memory Project 109
   Scott County (IA) Library System

Iconic America Micro-Grant 113
   Ridgeland (MS) Public Library

Transnational Dominican Activism: Documenting Grassroots Social Movements 115
   Bronx (NY) Community College

Present in the Past: Connecting National and Local History with Primary Resources 117
   Gwinnett County (GA) Public Library

Accessible Narrative Medicine 121
   Oregon Health & Science University Library

Reaching Out: Meeting the Needs of Rural School Librarians 123
   LAN Crew Colorado

Community Room Remodel and Digital Literacy Courses 127
   Carnegie-Evans (IA) Public Library
Wokini Knowledge Circle: Creating Library Space  
Honoring Oceti Sakowin Culture  
South Dakota State University Hilton M. Briggs Library

Part III: Worksheets, Checklists, and Forms

- Key Commitments for Winning Grants Checklist  
- Grant Partnership Agreement Worksheet  
- Data and Statistics Handout  
- Needs Statement Worksheet  
- Library Planning Checklist  
- Grant Project Planning Worksheet  
- Logic Model Worksheet  
- Grant Opportunity Decision Matrix  
- Grant Application Deconstruction Worksheet  
- Funder Summary Worksheet  
- Winning Grants Sources and Resources Handout  
- Grant Proposal Worksheet  
- Sample Cover Letter and Proposal  
- Questions for Funders Checklist  
- Grant Proposal Submission Checklist  
- Project Charter Worksheet

GLOSSARY  
165
BIBLIOGRAPHY  
173
INDEX  
177

Supplementary materials can be found at www.stephaniegerding.com/webextras.
# Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>Key Commitments for Winning Grants Checklist</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Library Planning Checklist</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Strategic Plans: A Grant Shortcut!</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>Example One-Page Strategic Plan</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Project Planning Steps</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Crisis Avoidance Tool</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Project Timeline</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Project Budget</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Logic Model</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>Example Grant Project Plan</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Types of Funding Sources</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Dollar General Literacy Foundation Grant Programs Web Page</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Grants.gov Search Grants Web Page</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Grantsmanship WA State Funding Sources Web Page</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Grant Opportunity Decision Matrix</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Example Grant Application Deconstruction Worksheet</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Questions for Funders Checklist</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Grant Proposal Submission Checklist</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>Project Charter Worksheet</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Welcome! You may be new to the grant-making world, or perhaps you have written a few grants. You may be looking for a specific title dedicated to a successful approach to writing and winning grants. You have come to the right place!

It is my honor to write the foreword for the third edition of *Winning Grants*. Stephanie Gerding is an exceptional grant writer, with experience in securing funding for a wide range of projects as well as support for libraries and information centers. I have used *Winning Grants* as the primary textbook in my class on grant writing and alternative funding for LIS education since its initial publication in 2015. It is easy to read and understand and comprehensive; many students use it and retain it in their collection as a reference tool for future work in grant writing.

The focus of *Winning Grants* is just that—the steps and tips to securing grants—and its greatest strength is the approach on supporting libraries. It is easily the best title available on this subject. The book includes many examples of successful grants so readers get an idea of thinking about grant writing as both science and art—the ingredients needed and the persuasive language to appeal to grant makers. Gerding reviews the grant cycle and thoroughly examines each step and the various techniques to use. Readers from all backgrounds will appreciate the progressive writing style, and it is a perfect guide to seeking grant funding!

*Winning Grants* is also chock-full of insight and advice, and Gerding’s very natural writing style encourages even the most novice grant writer. However, this title is not just for beginners; I would recommend it to anyone seeking grants for libraries, information centers, and similar institutions. You can use *Winning Grants* to write a targeted grant for dedicated funding for a specific purpose or when seeking a grant from a corporate, private, or community foundation. Grant writing can be difficult to decipher; the glossary of frequently used terms will help navigate funder criteria. Funders require different kinds of data, goals and objectives, evaluation and outcomes, budget entries, and planning documents. Gerding provides examples and forms that you can shape to your needs to provide the required information in a way so funders can make their best decisions. The forms are also available online so you can share them with colleagues and edit them as needed.

As an experienced grant writer and former program officer for a municipal grant maker, I appreciate the section on partnerships and collaborations. Funders are seeking innovative and creative ways of serving people. Incorporating the talents of a partner and demonstrating their value in providing a critical service to the community served by the grant can leverage the evaluation of your proposal in an increasingly grant
competitive environment. Gerding brings all of the tools necessary to complete any type of grant and enhances your ability to be successful with insights and advice sprinkled throughout the work.

Libraries of all types will find themselves coming back to *Winning Grants* as a playbook for their own grant design and writing for success. Grant writing enables libraries and their staff to diversify their funding. It is a skill set that can assist anyone in showcasing the good work of their institution. Libraries will be able to more easily request funding and tell the stories of how they impact lives with *Winning Grants*. Good luck with your diversified funding work. *Winning Grants* is a critical investment in the financial future of your organization.

—PATRICIA “PATTY” WONG

Patricia “Patty” Wong has been city librarian for Santa Clara City Library since October 2021 and part-time faculty for the iSchool at San José State University since 2004. She served as ALA president from 2021 to 2022.
Preface

This book is born from a love for libraries and a deep commitment to empowering library grant writers with the unwavering belief that they can succeed, regardless of their level of experience or the size of their library. In an ever-evolving world, libraries hold a unique and invaluable position at the heart of their communities as dynamic hubs of knowledge and culture. I’m endlessly grateful for everyone supporting the work of libraries and library workers—the true superheroes, the stalwarts of books, learning, democracy, and intellectual freedom.

The revisions in this latest edition result from several years of dedicated effort through which I honed my instructional methods for grant writing, aiming to offer the most effective and reader-friendly guidance. My experience in teaching grant skills to diverse audiences, ranging from graduate students at three library schools to beginners at rural libraries, led to the development of several new processes and resources. Through this book, my objective is clear: to support libraries by sharing best practices, streamlined strategies, and proven methodologies that can be adapted to each unique community’s needs. I wrote this book for all the aspiring library grant writers as well as the seasoned library grant winners—everyone who is passionate about ensuring libraries remain vibrant cornerstones in our communities.

Adapting to Challenges

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the closure of library buildings, reduced operating hours, and changes in service delivery models affected library funding sources. Many municipalities faced economic challenges, leading to belt-tightening measures that impacted library budgets. Also, fundraising efforts and community events, often important sources of revenue for libraries, were limited or canceled due to social distancing measures and restrictions on public gatherings.

In the face of these challenges, libraries worldwide persevered and devised innovative strategies to adapt to new demands and to maintain essential services that communities relied on more than ever before. They sought alternative funding opportunities, applied for grants, and explored creative solutions to stretch their budgets and support their communities. Limited and stressed staff with strained resources continued to serve their patrons with resilience and resourcefulness while prioritizing public health and safety. Libraries demonstrated their adaptability and commitment to their
communities, leveraging technology and innovative approaches to ensure continued
access to information and connection.

There was an increased awareness of the vital role that libraries play in supporting
their communities as vital information hubs and community centers. As a result, numer-
ous philanthropic foundations, grant-making organizations, and government agencies
established emergency relief funds or allocated funds specifically for libraries and their
community efforts. They recognized the importance of sustaining library operations
and ensuring equitable access to information and resources.

Millions of dollars in grant funding, specifically aimed at supporting libraries, became
available. The American Library Association (ALA) received the largest unrestricted
grants in its history and allocated more than $10 million to school, public, and aca-
demic libraries. These applications were often simplified, with billions of grant funds
streaming in from federal sources. In addition to COVID-related grants, libraries also
had access to various ongoing grant programs that continued to provide funding for
community initiatives, educational programs, and technology upgrades.

Value of Preparedness

However, it was crucial for libraries to be prepared to apply for these grants. Libraries
that were ready for grant work, even with limited staff and resources, could identify
specific community needs, rapidly plan responsive programs or services, and align
proposals with the funding priorities of grant providers. Many libraries leveraged
grants to support their communities and enhance services in response to challenging
circumstances. Grants provided an avenue for libraries to adapt, explore new ideas,
implement technology, expand digital access, and develop virtual programs to meet
the changing needs of their communities.

Emerging from years of navigating the pandemic, libraries are confronting addi-
tional daunting challenges: an upsurge in digital misinformation coupled with the
urgent issue of book banning. These obstacles pose a significant threat to the missions
of providing open access to diverse ideas and safeguarding intellectual freedom. Amid
our current world of information overload, libraries have the responsibility of being
trusted sources of accurate information while countering the spread of false content.
Censorship and book banning efforts curtail intellectual freedom and restrict access
to a wide spectrum of ideas. Libraries continue expanding vital community services
despite pandemic ramifications, even in some instances where there is declining voter
and political support for library funding and targeting by extremists and book banners.

The Power of Grants

To address these challenges, libraries require proactive strategies, adaptability, and inno-
vative approaches. Within this context, grant work plays a pivotal role in empowering
libraries with the necessary planning approaches, resources, community engagement,
and advocacy efforts. By securing grants, libraries can bolster their resilience, expand
their influence, and continue to be a trusted resource for credible information, intel-
lectual freedom, and community empowerment.
Grants can fund activities such as community outreach programs that address intellectual freedom, professional development opportunities for library staff, initiatives that celebrate diverse voices and stories, plans to modernize facilities, and efforts to foster an inclusive and welcoming environment for all library users. Grants provide the financial backing needed to develop programs and services that meet shifting community needs and emerging challenges, strengthening community support and enhancing the library’s overall impact.

As such, although grant funding is an essential supplemental revenue stream, the benefits of engaging in grant work extend beyond a boost to the library budget. Grant writing is a critical skill that can positively impact a library’s ability to fulfill its mission, meet identified community needs, build strong community partnerships, establish new connections, and increase the sustainability of the library itself. Winning a grant is a great accomplishment, and people want to be associated with successful operations. Even small grants can be worth the effort, as they may be easier to obtain and may better fit the scope and intent of a library project. A small grant can test innovative services or expand programming to underserved populations, and frequently it paves the way for further opportunities. Many library staff members discover that one successful grant leads to others and increases community support and local funding.

**Purpose and Audience**

*Winning Grants* is a comprehensive and approachable guide for anyone interested in grant work and in writing proposals to fund all types and sizes of library programs and projects, in all kinds of libraries, serving diverse communities. Library grant work is demystified and made accessible with expert valuable advice that can immediately be put into practice. The book offers an easy-to-follow, step-by-step Grant Process Cycle and nine success stories from grant-winning libraries across the country to serve as a source of inspiration and motivation.

Sixteen customizable worksheets, checklists, and examples simplify the steps to success, making complex concepts easy to grasp and apply. My favorite resource is the Grant Project Planning Worksheet, essential for streamlining strategic project planning and for effectively communicating the project's value to partners, team members, and eventually potential funders. In this updated edition, you will find over 100 library grant programs and practical insights on how to navigate the abundance of online information to identify legitimate funding sources and grant opportunities.

From the intricacies of proposal writing and finding the right funders to the essential elements of planning, needs assessment, project management, cultivating partnerships, and effective evaluation, this book will help keep you current and refine your grant skills. More important, it's designed to instill the confidence you need to succeed in winning grants.

**My Background**

As a library grant writer, educator, and author of three previous grant books and more than forty grant/fundraising articles published in professional library journals, I share
insights that are tried and trusted. With over two decades of experience working with libraries, cultural institutions, nonprofits, and government entities, including public, academic, school, special, and state library agencies, I’ve had the privilege of witnessing the transformative impact that strategic approaches and well-planned grant work can have. My journey has encompassed a wide array of roles in organizations both large and small, and each experience has contributed to the unique blend of expertise you’ll find in these pages.

I am grateful to be a sought-out library grant expert who has extensive experience in all aspects of library grant work, whether as an applicant, a funder, a reviewer, a project manager, an evaluator, or a consultant. I’ve successfully written, reviewed, and managed grants. My expertise is backed by successful grant acquisitions from government and private sources. As an accomplished survey and focus group methodologist, I’ve conducted multiple needs assessment studies and grant evaluations for a wide range of clients, including nonprofit organizations, universities, COSLA (Chief Officers of State Library Agencies), library consortia, and state libraries.

Small and rural libraries hold a special place in my heart, and I’ve been a part of numerous initiatives that have paved the way for them to thrive. Over the years, I’ve engaged in long-term projects with national library organizations that allowed me to contribute to the broader library community, including the Public Library Association’s Planning for Results, Turning the Page 2.0, Project Outcome, and Dynamic Planning Institute; WebJunction’s Rural Library Sustainability Project and Spanish Language Outreach initiatives; and the Urban Libraries Council’s Edge Initiative. From managing statewide training programs at two state libraries to being a certified trainer for the Public Library Association (PLA), my experiences have offered unique insights into the diverse landscape of libraries and nonprofits.

My time-tested methods are the result of years of not only doing the work but also training thousands of others to succeed through grant workshops, webinars, online courses, and in-person training sessions. I have conducted grant training and curriculum development for more than 100 learning events for small and large library organizations, including ALA, PLA, Infopeople, Internet Librarian, regional systems, state libraries, and TechSoup for Libraries. My step-by-step approaches are easy to understand and have been fine-tuned, making complex concepts accessible to all. From graduate-level grant courses to beginner workshops for all types of libraries, I incorporate what I learn so that the content and processes have been refined with hands-on, real-world examples.

I have had a very engaging career, having been a continuing education consultant and lead grant reviewer of Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) grants, state grants, and scholarships at the Arizona State Library and the New Mexico State Library. I was a public access computer trainer at the very start of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation’s U.S. Library Program, where I later reviewed grants and served as an advisor. My experiences, both humbling and exhilarating, have brought me face-to-face with the realities, challenges, and triumphs of grant work in the library world.

The driving force behind this book is the conviction that libraries have the power to be trusted resources and dependable anchors in their communities, leaving a lasting, positive mark on their patrons and neighborhoods. This vision underpins every chapter, every lesson, and every strategy presented here. I’ve seen firsthand how the right strategies and methodologies can transform libraries, making them even more effective in serving their communities.
When I first started conducting grant training, many libraries did not have strategic plans in place. I would stand before hundreds of conference attendees and make a simple request: “Raise your hand if your library has a strategic plan.” In those early days, only a handful would respond with raised hands. Fast-forward to the present, and the scene has dramatically shifted. Now when I make this request, the response is overwhelming—most attendees proudly affirm that their libraries indeed have strategic plans. However, the challenge lies in ensuring that all staff members actively utilize and engage with these plans.

One memorable experience involved assisting a librarian who was taking her first steps into the realm of grant work. She encountered a common obstacle: struggling to generate grant project ideas. In her moment of uncertainty, I offered a simple yet transformative piece of advice: “Review your library’s strategic plan.” She did just that, exploring the strategic plan of the branch library where she worked. Overwhelmed by the depth of information and clarity it provided, she reached out to me with sheer amazement and asked if she was cheating. I reassured her that, in fact, what she had was a well-designed project plan, perfectly aligned with the library’s strategic goals and ready to adapt for a grant opportunity. I gave her my Grant Project Planning Worksheet, and armed with this powerful tool, she confidently approached her library director, making a compelling case for the grant project she envisioned.

**Embrace the Opportunities**

I aim to demystify the intimidating world of grant work and empower library supporters to create successful proposals and secure new sources of grant funding. In today’s changing landscape, it is more important than ever for those working in libraries to gain grant skills and seamlessly integrate them into their daily responsibilities. Libraries are not just spaces but vibrant, essential resources for everyone they serve. By leveraging external funding, libraries can continue to be trusted, dependable anchors in their communities, fostering informed, engaged, and resilient societies with a lasting positive impact on their patrons and neighborhoods.

Through this book, I hope the grants process will be an enjoyable adventure. You will discover a step-by-step approach, a wealth of practical advice, and successful examples to guide you. It’s essential to understand that the journey of grant work is not merely about securing funding; it’s about enhancing the quality and overall impact of library services and programs. I like to say that it’s about the people, not the money, not the stuff.

Visit my Library Grants blog (librarygrants.blogspot.com) for new library grant opportunities and my website (www.stephaniegerding.com/webextras) for worksheets, checklists, and forms you can use. With these efficient grant success methods, you have all the necessary tools to create a well-written proposal based on a worthwhile and well-planned project that will benefit your community. There will be nothing holding you back, no reason to hesitate.

I hope you will discover, as I have, that grant work is truly empowering and fulfilling. Embrace the opportunities that lie ahead, and I am confident that you will find great joy and fulfillment in your grant work.

Best wishes on your grant-seeking journey, and most important, have fun along the way!
Winning Grants is unique from other grant books with its distinct focus on libraries and on the use of strategic planning and goal setting as the foundation of successful grant work. By embracing the principles of this book, grant work becomes more straightforward and efforts are directly aligned with the library’s broader mission, vision, and the genuine needs of the community served. Practical examples illustrate these concepts in real-world scenarios, allowing readers to easily comprehend and relate to the content, whether they are new to grant writing or seeking to enhance their skills.

The material is arranged in three parts. Part I, “The Grant Process Cycle,” features six chapters that cover the five phases of the Grant Process Cycle. Easy-to-follow examples demonstrate successful grant practices. Part II, “Library Grant Success Stories,” features nine real-life success stories that demonstrate the process in practice and provide motivational tips from library staff of all types and sizes of libraries around the country. Part III, “Worksheets, Checklists, and Forms,” contains sixteen valuable resources, also available online (www.stephaniegerding.com/webextras). Designed to simplify and streamline the grant process, these tools will help readers immediately begin leveling up their grant work.

Part I, “The Grant Process Cycle,” begins with chapter 1, “Understanding the Grant Process.” This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the grant cycle and offers valuable insights for understanding and navigating the process. It emphasizes the importance of making a commitment to careful planning, accountability, and focusing on community needs. This chapter concludes with the top ten tips for grant success, setting a strong foundation for the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2, “Plan for Success,” covers the basic aspects of strategic planning and demonstrates why it is essential to have a strategic plan and identified community needs in place before beginning grant work. This chapter delves into the collaborative power of grant teams and partnerships for resolving community needs and increasing community support. The significance of strategic planning is highlighted, as it not only saves time but also serves as a key for grant success. The chapter covers the process of community needs assessments and crafting compelling needs statements. It also explores the development of a one-page strategic plan to streamline vision into action and includes a practical example.

Chapter 3, “Design Winning Grant Projects,” covers one of the most creative and enjoyable parts of the process—developing the grant project. By developing worthwhile projects that implement the library’s strategic plan and solve community needs, grant writers demonstrate to funders why the project deserves support. This chapter details all of the essential steps in the grant planning process. This includes developing project
ideas, goals, outcomes, objectives, activities/action steps, timelines, budgets, and evaluation plans. The provided worksheets are invaluable resources when writing a grant proposal. The chapter offers thorough coverage of outcome-based evaluation (OBE) and logic models to effectively measure the impact of grant projects. The chapter ends with an example grant project plan to provide practical insights into the process.

Chapter 4, “Research Funders and Grant Opportunities,” explores how to find the ideal grant opportunity for a potential project. It covers the different types of funding sources, including government and private options, and provides valuable insights into where to discover grants for libraries. It includes resources summarized in part III’s Winning Grants Sources and Resources Handout and a comprehensive list of more than 100 grant programs for libraries. This edition introduces a decision matrix in this chapter to aid in assessing organizations whose purposes most closely match the project’s goals and selecting the most suitable match. Included in this chapter are tips to optimize grant research, from effective keyword searches to identifying potential funders. A practical section on recording and organizing research findings helps with tracking deadlines while maintaining a comprehensive overview of potential funders. Additionally, the chapter provides guidance on staying informed about grant announcements to avoid missing valuable opportunities.

Chapter 5, “Create the Winning Proposal,” integrates all the existing planning, research, and project design into the actual writing of the grant proposal. Many applications request the same basic structure and elements—cover letter, table of contents, proposal summary or abstract, organizational overview, needs statement, project description, timeline, budget, evaluation, and appendix. This chapter explains these components and provides planning and proposal templates to enable easy adaptation, modification, and replication of content for not just one grant but multiple grants, saving time and effort. This chapter covers the types of application, how proposals are reviewed, and how to deconstruct complex grant applications. Writing tips address how to effectively tell the story of a grant project. There are checklists and guidance to create a comprehensive and compelling proposal, along with tips for effective communication with funders and grant proposal submission.

Chapter 6, “Implement, Evaluate, and Continue,” offers insights into the post-submission phase of a grant proposal, regardless of whether it was accepted or rejected. Repeating the grant cycle is easier as experience with the grant process grows, and this chapter includes strategies to avoid common pitfalls and how to learn from previous efforts. Detailed discussion of five essential grant project management elements and a project charter template will help with grant project implementation, meeting funder requirements, and customary grant reporting. This chapter includes ways to improve grant skills through professional development and other collaborative opportunities. Keeping plans and proposal components current is essential to being prepared for the next grant opportunity that comes along.

Part II, “Library Grant Success Stories,” includes inspiring stories from nine grant-winning libraries. These real-life examples help readers envision innovative and successful grant projects and gain tips and practical advice from librarians who have effectively completed the grant process. This selection of best practices from libraries of all types and sizes from around the country offers a chance to see how award-winning programs have been developed, funded, and implemented while providing a comprehensive view of the grant process.
Part III, “Worksheets, Checklists, and Forms,” contains sixteen valuable resources, available in both Microsoft Word and PDF formats at www.stephaniegerding.com/webextras, that can be customized and shared with grant teams to stay on track and organized throughout the Grant Process Cycle. With these versatile and carefully crafted tools, readers will be well prepared to develop winning grant proposals. These practical resources cover every aspect of the grant process, from initial planning to proposal submission, offering clarity and structure for grant success. Whether readers are new to grant writing or a seasoned pro, these resources guide them in aligning project ideas with library missions and community needs, making grant writing experiences efficient and effective.

Two highlights include a Grant Project Planning Worksheet, essential for streamlining strategic project planning and for effectively communicating the project's value to partners, team members, and eventually potential funders. The other is the Winning Grants Sources and Resources Handout, a concise guide that compiles a diverse range of government, private, and local library grant sources and invaluable resources into a true time-saver for finding library grant funding. Seven new tools have been added to this edition. A Data and Statistics Handout helps with finding reliable data to substantiate identified community needs. A Needs Statement Worksheet provides a five-step method to craft a compelling needs statement. There is also a focus on outcome-based evaluation and measuring impact using a Logic Model Worksheet. The included Grant Opportunity Decision Matrix aids in selecting the most suitable grant opportunity. A Grant Application Deconstruction Worksheet helps with gathering all the necessary information for complex applications to create an organized approach for submitting a competitive proposal. A Project Charter Worksheet has been added to help with grant project implementation, meeting funder requirements, and customary grant reporting.

Let these tools be the foundation of your successful grant journey.

1. Key Commitments for Winning Grants Checklist
2. Grant Partnership Agreement Worksheet
3. Data and Statistics Handout
4. Needs Statement Worksheet
5. Library Planning Checklist
6. Grant Project Planning Worksheet
7. Logic Model Worksheet
8. Grant Opportunity Decision Matrix
9. Grant Application Deconstruction Worksheet
10. Funder Summary Worksheet
11. Winning Grants Sources and Resources Handout
12. Grant Proposal Worksheet
13. Sample Cover Letter and Proposal
14. Questions for Funders Checklist
15. Grant Proposal Submission Checklist
16. Project Charter Worksheet

Following part III, there is a glossary of useful library grant terms as well as a bibliography listing resources mentioned in the book and additional recommended readings.
Part I

The Grant Process Cycle

available at alastore.ala.org
Understanding the Grant Process

This comprehensive guide to library grant work covers every stage of the grant process, providing practical advice and tools essential for success. The role of strategic planning is pivotal to align grant efforts with community needs while streamlining efforts. Cultivating meaningful partnerships and assembling effective grant teams are of utmost importance throughout the grant process. This resource helps you craft compelling needs statements and design transformative projects, from initial idea to tangible results. It provides insights into researching funders, navigating a wealth of library grant opportunities, and optimizing research efforts. Demystifying proposal writing, it covers various application types, key components, and effective communication with funders. This book provides invaluable insights for crafting persuasive proposals and using the power of storytelling. Finally, it offers guidance on project implementation, evaluation, and maintaining a successful grant cycle. Whether you’re new to grant writing or seeking to enhance your skills, this resource is an invaluable companion to securing vital funding for your library.

Overview of the Grant Process Cycle

The grant process is organized into five easy-to-understand phases. By visualizing the process in distinct sections or phases, it is considerably easier to understand and approach this type of work.

Applying for a grant may initially appear daunting or even overwhelming. Certainly, there is work involved, but with the help of this book, you will know the necessary steps and find that success is within your reach. Grant work can be approached with ease and efficiency, allowing you to maintain a balanced workload while seeking funding opportunities. You will realize that grant work is a continuous process that unfolds in phases over time and encompasses various activities you may already be engaged in. By following this process, you will be well prepared with the necessary information and resources when the time comes to apply for a grant.

Those in the library world are often pleasantly surprised to discover that they possess many of the skills necessary for successful grant work, such as the ability to research, synthesize, summarize, and
package information. We have a commitment to community outreach, assessing needs, and providing responsive, caring, creative environments for our communities. Furthermore, there is a cooperative and collaborative professional attitude that sets libraries apart. By effectively communicating your passion for your work and the impact it has on the communities you serve within the context of a grant proposal, you are sure to secure grant funding.

In this book, a grant project refers to any library project, program, or service being proposed for external funding. Other resources may define grant project differently or use the terms project grant or grant program. For our purposes, grant projects can take various forms, including equipment projects, capital projects, planning or implementation projects, research projects, model or demonstration projects, or projects addressing specific activities, programming, or operating expenses. They can be designed for children, adults, teens, or other primary audiences.

Notice that the Grant Process Cycle consists of five phases, with three occurring before the grant proposal is written (Plan for Success, Design Winning Grant Projects, and Research Funders and Grant Opportunities). While it's common for new grant writers to dive into proposals without prior planning or research, a more effective approach involves starting by assessing current priorities and understanding community needs. Next, explore project ideas before moving on to research funders and respond to opportunities. This method ultimately saves time and increases success rates. Planning is, in fact, the quickest route to securing grant funding.

**Phase 1: Plan for Success**

The Grant Process Cycle emphasizes planning as the foundation for successful grant proposals and effective project development. Strategic plans and needs assessments are the biggest shortcuts to winning grants. It is essential to identify and prioritize the compelling issues in the community served and determine what makes the library's efforts meaningful and important to develop grant project ideas and demonstrate need in grant proposals. A strategic plan provides the framework needed for the grant process to be effective, aligning grant-seeking efforts with the library's mission, goals, and priorities. Meaningful projects can be developed to achieve the plan's goals and address identified needs, support community engagement, and enhance library services in a purposeful and effective manner. A plan answers many of the questions that are found in the requests for proposals (RFPs) that funders rely on to determine their grant awards. A strategic plan demonstrates organization, dependability, and responsibility to funders. During this stage, it's important to create grant teams and build partnerships, as collaborative efforts lead to greater impact through the sharing of skills, responsibilities, and resources.

**Phase 2: Design Winning Grant Projects**

Every grant project should be a worthwhile solution to a compelling community need identified in the planning process. Developing grant projects is often one of the most enjoyable and creative aspects of grant work. Planning and prioritizing before beginning
to write a grant application will ensure the grant project is designed to meet real community needs and supports the organization’s mission and strategic plans. Project planning includes developing goals, objectives, outcomes, timelines, budgets, and evaluation plans. These are all elements of a grant proposal as well. Projects serve as the implementation arm of the strategic plan and should be designed before researching funders and grant opportunities. Funders give priority to projects aligned with community needs and proposals that clearly convey project significance and relevance.

**Phase 3: Research Funders and Grant Opportunities**

Once you have a project designed, you are ready to find grants to secure the necessary funding. Grant funding can provide the financial means to execute a project effectively, expand its scope, and maximize its impact on the library and the community it serves. This phase involves locating viable library funding sources, such as foundations, government agencies, and local philanthropic organizations dedicated to supporting library initiatives. Selecting the right grant necessitates knowing what a funder is interested in supporting and how closely the funder’s mission matches the purpose of your project. This step of the cycle is often a straightforward one in the library world, as it involves something we are experienced at doing—research.

**Phase 4: Create the Winning Proposal**

At this stage in the grant cycle, most of the planning and research work is completed, and producing a winning proposal involves refining project plans to meet the specific requirements and priorities of potential funders. Focus on creating a clear, professional proposal that incorporates needs assessments, a well-planned project, and an evaluation strategy. Craft a compelling narrative conveying the project’s impact on beneficiaries, balancing data-driven evidence with emotional appeal. It is important to understand how proposals are reviewed and how to effectively communicate with funders. By emphasizing the necessity and potential outcomes of your grant project, you can effectively convince funders of its significance and alignment with their mission.

**Phase 5: Implement, Evaluate, and Continue**

During the final phase of the Grant Process Cycle, you receive notification of whether the grant has been awarded. Once the project secures funding, the important first steps are to celebrate this achievement with your grant team and nurture relationships with partners and funders. This phase involves project implementation, evaluating success, and fulfilling grant report requirements. Project management, such as team building, planning, resource management, and open and transparent communication with stakeholders, remains vital throughout the process to accomplish project objectives, manage resources, and keep documentation in order.

Grant work is an ongoing process, so the cycle should be repeated, using the knowledge gained along the way. Debriefing and reviewing allows you to be better prepared
PART I: The Grant Process Cycle

for future grant successes. Pursue professional development opportunities related to grants for ongoing learning and exploration of new opportunities.

**Key Commitments for Winning Grants**

This book provides a strong foundation for understanding the grant process, but your library grant success relies on making necessary commitments. Commitment is vital at every step of the process: planning, partnering, researching, project development, writing, implementation, and evaluation. Engage library leadership and staff to foster genuine commitment and support in this team effort.

Most grants will have benefits, but also obligations, and in some cases specific constraints or drawbacks need to be considered. The funds gained must be worth the required efforts and resources. These resources include the staff time spent planning a project and writing a proposal, implementing and evaluating the grant project, and communicating with everyone involved. Matching funds and partnerships may be required, materials and building space may be needed, and there may be an impact if existing activities need to be scaled down while focus is on a new project. Depending on the type of organization, applying for a grant may include working with other departments or meeting requirements set by local authorities, systems, or departments. This is especially true in university settings, so make certain you understand any local stipulations that could affect your grant work.

Although there are a lot of considerations to weigh, there is also more to gain from grants than just the boost to a budget. Grants play a pivotal role in enhancing community services by addressing identified needs, encouraging collaboration and community connections, and bolstering the sustainability of the library. Grant work helps develop planning skills, cultivates effective project development and management, contributes to capacity building, increases visibility, and promotes continuous improvement and innovation. Winning a grant is a significant achievement and can be helpful for advocacy efforts as people want to support successful community institutions.

The library must be able to commit to accountability, effective communication, meeting community needs, planning, partnerships, evaluation, sustainability, and following grant guidelines. The Key Commitments for Winning Grants Checklist (see figure 1.1) will help determine if your organization is ready and able to make the commitments for doing grant work. This checklist is also available in part III and online (www.stephaniegerding.com/webextras).

The Grant Process Cycle is ongoing, which means the commitments continue as well. Some commitments should be made before the library decides to pursue grant funding. Others cannot be made until the grant project is designed and the appropriate grant opportunity is selected.

Grant work may seem daunting with this long list of commitments, but rest assured, it’s a process that becomes easier with experience. Once you’ve completed the Grant Process Cycle for the first time, you may realize you have achieved more than expected. By following the guidelines in this book, you can increase community support, discover new partners and collaboration opportunities, and potentially witness an increase in the library’s local budget and usage. Embrace the opportunities ahead and you’ll see how grant work can positively impact your library and its community.

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To ensure a smooth grant process and increase the chances of submitting a successful proposal, consider whether your library can commit to the following:

**ACCOUNTABILITY**
- Ensure alignment with the library’s mission and vision.
- Secure support from library leadership.
- Allocate necessary resources for project success.
- Uphold commitments and maintain financial transparency.

**EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION**
- Craft a clear, concise, and honest proposal that clearly conveys goals and objectives.
- Request the funding you genuinely need to achieve the goals.
- Keep all stakeholders well informed about the grant and its progress.

**MEETING COMMUNITY NEEDS**
- Identify and thoroughly understand the specific needs of the community.
- Utilize data and real-life stories to illustrate these needs effectively in the proposal.
- Develop a grant project that focuses on solutions to meet these community needs.

**PLANNING**
- Align the project with the library’s strategic plan, if applicable.
- Create a comprehensive project plan, including goals, objectives, activities, deadlines, and resource management.
- Establish a realistic budget for the project.
- Implement effective methods for tracking tasks and contacts.

**PARTNERSHIPS**
- Cultivate strong relationships with grant funders.
- Develop strategic collaborations to leverage resources, share expertise, and support the project.
- Identify community groups that share the library’s vision and goals to approach as potential partners.
- Involve community members in focus groups and planning sessions.

**EVALUATION**
- Clearly define what success looks like for the project.
- Develop an evaluation plan and logic model to determine if the project has met its goals.
- Identify the impact and outcomes the project aims to achieve.

**SUSTAINABILITY**
- Consider the long-term sustainability of the project beyond the grant period.
- Plan for the continued existence of positions if new staff members are hired.
PART I: The Grant Process Cycle

Tips for Grant Success

Adapt these tips to your specific circumstances and grant application requirements. Libraries do change lives, and we need to make sure that funders and supporters know that libraries positively impact communities.

1. Focus on the People

The most important thing to remember is that grant work is about people, not things. The goal is not purely to acquire money or resources. Funders want to help people, not buy things. They are interested in supporting projects that make a positive impact on people’s lives. Prioritize community members and their needs in your grant proposals.

2. Plan Ahead

Strategic planning is the foundation for successful grant work. Aligning grant proposals with the library’s mission and goals not only demonstrates to funders that you have a well-thought-out approach but also addresses a common gap in many proposals. Funders often receive proposals brimming with excellent ideas but lacking practical plans, strategies for implementation, and clear goals and objectives. This is where project planning comes into play. Through comprehensive project planning, you showcase the library’s capability not only to envision projects but also to implement them effectively—turning ideas into impactful realities. Careful planning is key, and it’s also essential to have a project in mind before beginning grant research.

3. Meet Community Needs

The heart of effective grant work is understanding and addressing community needs. Conduct thorough needs assessments to identify specific issues, as funders look for projects that tackle compelling problems. Your grant projects should be more than just good ideas; they should make a tangible difference in your community. Be sure to involve primary audiences in project planning to genuinely meet their needs.

4. Develop Community Relationships

Building strong relationships within your community is essential. Explore local community organizations that share similar goals, and actively engage with potential partners, funders, and donors. Networking is key; spread the word about library funding priorities and discuss potential grant projects with various stakeholders. By being visible and involved in the community the library serves, you will find valuable contacts and local funding opportunities.
5. Partner and Collaborate

Partnerships are often a requirement for grants and are a powerful asset in the world of grants. Seek partners who share common goals and responsibilities, as working together allows leveraging of resources and expertise. Whether it’s public agencies, businesses, or service groups, collaborating can add credibility to your proposal and increase your project’s impact. Remember that relationships with funders are a type of partnership, too, so nurture those connections.

6. Measure Impact

Your grant project should be designed to provide specific solutions that address identified community needs. Integrating evaluation into your planning is crucial, as it demonstrates the project’s impact to both funders and the community. Develop measurable goals, track progress, and report incremental achievements to demonstrate accountability and provide evidence of the project’s effectiveness.

7. Ask for What Is Needed

When creating the grant project and budget, make sure to request all necessary resources for the project. It’s essential to be realistic and ask for what you genuinely need rather than compromising on essential elements. Funders appreciate well-planned projects that accurately reflect the requirements to achieve the desired outcomes. Clearly communicate how the requested funds will be used and how they contribute to project success.

8. Combine Data and Emotion

Crafting compelling grant proposals involves a delicate balance between data and emotion. Although factual data is crucial, decisions to fund projects are often emotionally driven. Share stories of individuals who will benefit from your project to evoke empathy and engagement. At the same time, ensure that your project aligns with the funder’s mission and priorities, making it clear how their support will contribute to their philanthropic goals.

9. Pay Attention to Details

Attention to detail is paramount throughout the grant process. Start by following the guidelines provided by the grant application and meeting all deadlines. Present your proposal in a clear and organized manner, adhering to the same format and headings as the application. Even small mistakes or inaccuracies can indicate carelessness, so strive for accuracy and thoroughness in every aspect of your grant work.
10. Stay Positive and Persistent

Grant writing requires a positive and persistent approach. Convey a message of hope and inspiration in your applications. Show gratitude to the funder and acknowledge the support of your team. Celebrate successes and provide recognition where it’s due. Maintain a positive attitude, even in the face of challenges, and persist in your grant writing efforts. Remember that learning from each experience and adapting your strategies can lead to greater success in securing funding for your library.
Index

A
abstract, 81
Accelerating Promising Practices Grant, 109
Accessible Narrative Medicine project, 121–122
accountability, 6, 7
action plans
advice about, 108
in strategic plan, 22
action steps
definition of, 28
in grant project plan, 41–42
project action steps, 34
active verbs, 89
Administration for Children and Families (ACF), 50
administrative costs, 84
Adult Education and Literacy grant, 50
advice
from Accessible Narrative Medicine project, 122
from community room remodel/digital literacy courses, 128
from Iconic America micro-grant, 114
from mobile Chromebook lab, 108
from Present in the Past project, 119
from Reaching Out project, 125
from Scott County Community Memory Project, 112
from transnational Dominican activism project, 116
from Wokini Knowledge Circle, 134
Agriculture in the Classroom grant, 48
ALA
See American Library Association
"ALA Chapters Directory" (ALA), 59
Albia National Honor Society, 127, 129
alerts, 75–76, 152
alignment
of funders, researching, 75
of grant, needs assessment and, 17
with IMLS grant, 125
strategic alignment of grant proposal, 97
American Council of Learned Societies, 60
American Library Association (ALA)
ALA Libraries Transforming Communities grant, 110
ALA Public Programs Office, 59–60
"Awards, Grants, and Scholarships," 60
grant funding during COVID-19 pandemic, xvi
grants from, 59–60
LTC initiative, 16, 18
transnational Dominican activism project, 115
American Rescue Plan: Humanities Grants for Libraries, 115
Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, 56
Antobam-Ntekudzi, Emma, 115, 116
appendix, 85–86
applicant profile, 81–82
applications
See grant applications
Archival Projects grant, 47
Archives Collaboratives grant, 47
"Art of Communication in Project Management" (Rajkumar), 100
arts
government grants for, 151
National Endowment for the Arts grants, 46
Professional Development for Arts Educators, 49
state arts agencies, grants from, 54
assessment
See evaluation
Association of College & Research Libraries, 60
Association of Junior Leagues International, 59
audience
library grant audiences, 30
needs statement example, 31
primary audience, selection of, 29–31
See also primary audience
available at alastore.ala.org
Index

audiences, diverse of Accessible Narrative Medicine project, 121 of community room remodel/digital literacy courses, 127 of Iconic America micro-grant, 113 of mobile Chromebook lab, 107 of Present in the Past project, 117 of Reaching Out project, 123 of Scott County Community Memory Project, 109 of transnational Dominican activism project, 115 Wokini Knowledge Circle, 131

authorized signatures, 86 "Awards, Grants, and Scholarships" (ALA), 59, 60

B


in grant agreement, review of, 96 in grant project plan, 42 in grant proposal appendix, 86 grant proposal budget components, 83–84 in grant proposal, precision of, 97 project budget, development of, 35–36 project planning steps, 30 viability, decision matrix criteria for, 74 businesses local, grants from, 152 local grants, researching, 67–68 as valuable partners, 14

But why method, 31

C

Campbell, Aimee R., 127–129 Candid for finding grant opportunities, 60 newsletters/alerts from, 75–76 990 Finder tool, 55 online learning portal, 103 for researching private grants, 64–65 Winning Grants Sources and Resources Handout, 151, 152 Candid Learning, 65 capacity-building grant, 70 capital/building grant, 70 Captain Planet Foundation, 56 Carnegie Corporation of New York, 56 Carrero, John, 115 case studies, 39 See also Library Grant Success Stories Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) number, 62 centralized database, 72 Challenge America, 46 challenge grant, 70 challenges during COVID-19 pandemic, xv–xvi digital misinformation/book banning, xvi of Present in the Past project, 118 of Reaching Out project, 124 of transnational Dominican activism project, 116 of Wokini Knowledge Circle, 133–134 change management of, 101 project outcomes, 33 charitable organizations, 55–56 checklists Grant Proposal Submission Checklist, 94, 162

Key Commitments for Winning Grants Checklist, 137

Library Planning Checklist, 144

Questions for Funders Checklist, 93, 161

Child Care and Development Fund, 50

children, 50

Chromebook lab, mobile, 107–108

Civitan International, 59

Climate Smart Humanities Organizations, 46

climax, 90, 91

collaboration collaborators for grant project, 31 decision matrix criteria, 74 for grant project management, 100 in grant proposal, 97 for grant success, 9 library needs assessments for success, 17 library partnerships, 13–15 in project description, 83 for Reaching Out project, 123 See also partnerships commitments key commitments for winning grants, 6 Key Commitments for Winning Grants Checklist, 7, 137 strategic plans demonstrate, 22 communication with funders, 43–44, 91–92 by grant coordinator, 12 for grant project management, 100 Grant Project Planning Worksheet for, 29 in grant proposal, 89–91 in Implement, Evaluate, and Continue phase, 95

Key Commitments for Winning Grants Checklist, 6, 7

for local funding opportunities, 67 for partnerships, 14

community connections with, as key to success, 110 data collection methods, 38–39 definition of for book, 15 engagement, decision matrix criteria, 74 grants, power of, xvi–xvii impact of grant project, questions for, 34 impact of Wokini Knowledge Circle, 133 libraries’ vital role in, xvi local grants, researching, 67–68 needs/priorities of, assessment of, 15–16 participation in needs assessment, 17 Present in the Past project, impact on, 118

available at alastore.ala.org
relationships, developing for grant success, 8
Scott County Community Memory Project, impact on, 110
winning grants and, 6
Community Betterment Foundation, 129
Community Collections Grants, 47
community committee members, 12
Community Connect Library, 25, 26
Community Development Block Grant Program, 51
Community Engagement Outreach, 51
community forums, 18
Community Foundation Locator, 57, 66
community foundations funded by public donations, 55
local grants, researching, 67–68
as private grant source, 56–57
workshops of, 103
community groups, 14
community leader conversations, 18
community needs assessment data collection for enhancing, 18
existing, use of, 16–17
as foundational step in grant process, 15–16
in library strategic plan, 24
in “Plan for Success” chapter, xxiii
process of, xxiii
steps for conducting, 17
updating, 103
community room remodel, 127–129
Community Services Block Grant, 50
Connecting Communities Digital Initiative, 47–48
consequences, 20, 21
consultants, 101
continuing education, 103–104
contract for grant, review/signing of, 95–96
Grant Partnership Agreement Worksheet, 138–139
corporate foundations grants from, 57
list of, 58
overview of, 55
as private grant source, 57–58
corporate giving programs, 57
corporations local grants, researching, 67–68
Winning Grants Sources and Resources Handout, 152
costs budget in grant proposal, 83–84
in project budget, 35–36
review of budget in grant agreement, 96
Council on Foundations Community Foundation Locator, 57, 66
Winning Grants Sources and Resources Handout, 151
county grants, 63–64
cover letter for grant proposal, guidance on, 80
Sample Cover Letter and Proposal, 80, 156–160
COVID-19 pandemic, xv–xvi
Create the Winning Proposal phase application review process, 79
application submission, 92, 94
communicating with funders, 91–92
grant application deconstruction, 87–88
Grant Proposal Submission Checklist, 94
key grant proposal components, 79–86
overview of, 5
proposal writing, overview of, 77
Questions for Funders Checklist, 93
types of applications, 78–79
writing tips, 89–91
crisis avoidance tool, 32
criteria, 73–74
customer relationship management (CRM) system, 72
Data and Statistics Handout copy of, 140–142
for list of potential data sources, 18
for statistics/community research, 82
Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS), 64
databases grant databases for researching grants, 66–67
data-driven storytelling, 21
Davis Educational Foundation, 56
DC Memory Lab, 109
DeCampli, Cathy, 108
decision criteria, 73–74
decision matrix for assessing organizations, xxiv
for determining best grant match, 73–75
everything, 74
example of, 73
Grant Opportunity Decision Matrix, 148
scoring, 74–75
Design Winning Grant Projects phase grant project plan, example of, 41–42
OBE/logic models, 36–40
overview of, xxiii–xxiv, 4–5, 27
project definitions, 28
project planning process, 28–36
details, attention to
in grant process, 9
grant team and, 11–12
Dialogues on the Experience of War, 46
Digital Humanities Advancement Grants, 46
digital literacy courses, 127–129
digital misinformation, 16
digitization, 109–112
direct project expenses, 84
discretionary grant, 70
documentation of grant research, 71–72
on project progress/impact, 102
review of, 39
DOL (U.S. Department of Labor), 52
Dollar General Literacy Foundation, 57–58
Dominican activism, transnational, 115–116
drawdown, 96
Dropbox, 72
DUNS (Data Universal Numbering System), 64

Dakota, 131–134
data in compelling grant proposals, 9
Data and Statistics Handout, 140–142
in evaluation report, 102
in grant proposal, 89, 97
in needs assessment, 17
in needs statement, 19
available at alastore.ala.org
relationships with, 9, 104
reporting requirements of, 102
requirements of, 22
Research Funders and Grant Opportunities phase, xxiv, 5
See also Research Funders and Grant Opportunities phase
funding
application review process and, 79
government funding for libraries, 45–52
of grant project, final steps of process, 95–96
grant project not funded, 96–97
private grant sources, 55–60
Research Funders and Grant Opportunities phase, xxiv, 5
sources of library grant funding, 44
state government grant sources, 52–54
funding cycles, 61
Funding Information Networks, 64
Funding Opportunity Number (FON), 62
funding request, 81
funding sources
See grant funding sources
fundraising groups, 104

G
Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP), 50
general operating support grant, 70
geographical considerations, 97
Gerding, Madeline, xxi
Gerding, Patrick, xxi
Gerding, Stephanie K.
background of, xvii–xix
Library Grants blog, 60–61
Patricia “Patty” Wong on, xiii–xiv
Glowsforge 3-D laser printer, 107, 108
goals
determination of, 32
in grant project plan, 41
importance of, 134
in library strategic plan, 24
for OBE implementation, 37
for project, as key to success, 128
project definitions for project plan, 28
project planning steps, 30
strategic plan for definition of, 22
“A Good Presentation Is about Data and Story” (Harrison), 90
Google alerts, 76
Google Drive, 72
Google Forms, 39
Google Grants for Nonprofits, 58
Google Sheets, 72
government funding for libraries
federal government grant sources, 45–52
local government grant sources, 54
state government grant sources, 52–54
types of funding sources, 44
government grants
checking websites for new grant opportunities, 76
state, county, municipal grants, 63–64
Winning Grants Sources and Resources Handout, 151
grandparents, 110
grant agreement
Grant Partnership Agreement Worksheet, 138–139
review/signing of, 95–96
Grant Application Deconstruction Worksheet
copy of, 149
example of, 87–88
function of, xxv
grant applications
application review process, 79
clarity of, 119
grant application deconstruction, 87–88
Grant Application Deconstruction Worksheet, 149
Grant Proposal Submission Checklist, 94, 162
submission of, 92, 94
types of, 78–79
See also grant proposal
grant coordinator, 12–13
grant databases, 66–67
grant funding sources
government funding for libraries
overview of, 43–44
private grant sources, 55–60
state government grant sources, 52–54
Winning Grants Sources and Resources Handout, 151–152
grant guidelines
following, 97, 116
Key Commitments for Winning Grants Checklist, 6, 7
grant management software, 72
grant matchmaking
determining best match, 73–75
evaluation of matches, 71
organizational overview in grant proposal, 81–82
overview of, 43–44
grant opportunities
Grant Opportunity Decision Matrix, 148
new, awareness of, 75–76
relationship-building for, 104
Research Funders and Grant Opportunities phase, 5
resources for finding, 60–68
See also Research Funders and Grant Opportunities phase
grant opportunities, resources for finding
government grants, 61–63
government grants
checking websites for new grant opportunities, 76
state, county, municipal grants, 63–64
top ten free online sources, 60
Grant Opportunity Decision Matrix
copy of, 148
example completed matrix, 73
government grants
checking websites for new grant opportunities, 76
government grants
state, county, municipal grants, 63–64
top ten free online sources, 60
Grant Opportunity Decision Matrix
copy of, 148
example completed matrix, 73
grant application, 79
clear, 119
grant application deconstruction, 87–88
Grant Application Deconstruction Worksheet, 149
Grant Proposal Submission Checklist, 94, 162
submission of, 92, 94
types of, 78–79
See also grant proposal
grant coordinator, 12–13
grant databases, 66–67
grant funding sources
overview of, 43–44
private grant sources, 55–60
state government grant sources, 52–54
Winning Grants Sources and Resources Handout, 151–152
grant guidelines
following, 97, 116
Key Commitments for Winning Grants Checklist, 6, 7
grant management software, 72
grant matchmaking
determining best match, 73–75
evaluation of matches, 71
organizational overview in grant proposal, 81–82
overview of, 43–44
grant opportunities
Grant Opportunity Decision Matrix, 148
new, awareness of, 75–76
relationship-building for, 104
Research Funders and Grant Opportunities phase, 5
resources for finding, 60–68
See also Research Funders and Grant Opportunities phase
grant opportunities, resources for finding
government grants, 61–63
government grants
checking websites for new grant opportunities, 76
state, county, municipal grants, 63–64
top ten free online sources, 60
Grant Opportunity Decision Matrix
copy of, 148
example completed matrix, 73
gouvernment grants
checking websites for new grant opportunities, 76
government grants
state, county, municipal grants, 63–64
top ten free online sources, 60
Grant Opportunity Decision Matrix
copy of, 148
example completed matrix, 73
government grants
checking websites for new grant opportunities, 76
government grants
state, county, municipal grants, 63–64
top ten free online sources, 60
Grant Opportunity Decision Matrix
copy of, 148
example completed matrix, 73
government grants
checking websites for new grant opportunities, 76
government grants
state, county, municipal grants, 63–64
top ten free online sources, 60
Grant Opportunity Decision Matrix
copy of, 148
example completed matrix, 73
grant process
Grant Process Cycle, overview of, 3–6
key commitments for winning grants, 6–7
for mobile Chromebook lab, 108
overview of chapters on, xxiii–xxiv
Scott County Community Memory Project, 111
tips for grant success, 8–10
Grant Process Cycle
completion of first round of, 102
Create the Winning Proposal phase, 5, 77–94
Design Winning Grant Projects phase, 4–5, 27–42
Implement, Evaluate, and Continue phase, 5–6, 95–104
key commitments for winning grants, 6
Key Commitments for Winning Grants Checklist, 7
overview of, xxiii–xxiv, 3–4
Plan for Success phase, 4, 11–26
plans, updating, 103
Research Funders and Grant Opportunities phase, 5, 43–76

available at alastore.ala.org
Index

Grant Professionals Association, 104

grant project
- definition of, 4
- grant project management elements, 100–102
- Implement, Evaluate, and Continue phase, xxiv
- implementation/management of, 97–102
  overview of, 27
- Project Charter Worksheet, 99
- project charters, 98, 100
- project definitions, 28
- project management definitions, 98
- winning qualities, 29

grant project idea
- definition of, 28
- discovery of, 31–32
- project planning steps, 30

grant project plan
- See project plan
- Grant Project Planning Worksheet
  - copy of, 145–146
  - cover letter information from, 80
  - function of, xvii, xxv
- GrantStation and, 66
  - library’s strategic plan and, xix
  - for project planning, 29

grant proposal
- application review process, 79
- application submission, 92, 94
- communication with funders, 91–92
- Create the Winning Proposal phase, xxiv, 5
- data/emotion in compelling grant proposals, 9
- grant application deconstruction, 87–88
- Grant Proposal Submission Checklist, 94, 162
- Grant Proposal Worksheet, 153–155
- as helpful resource, 80

grant research
- See research
- grant reviewer
  - becoming, 104
  - comments from, 125
  - responsibilities of, 79
- grant teams
  - for Accessible Narrative Medicine project, 121
  - assembling, 3
  - collaborative power of, xxiii, 11–12
  - for community room remodel/digital literacy courses, 127
  - grant coordinator, role of, 12–13
  - project implementation team, 13
  - project planning team, 13
  - proposal writing team, 13
  - for Reaching Out project, 123
  - for Scott County Community Memory Project, 109
  - team structure/roles, 12
  - for transnational Dominican activism project, 115
  - for Wokini Knowledge Circle, 131
  - grant work
    - experience/benefits from, 95
    - Process Cycle, overview of, 3–6
    - opportunities, embracing, xix
    - Stephanie K. Gerding’s background in, xvii–xix
  - GrantFinder, 66
  - Grant.gov, 45
  - GrantHub, 72
  - for Carnegie-Evans Public Library, 128–129
  - empowering library grant writers, xv
  - funding during COVID-19 pandemic, xv–xvi
- grant writing as critical skill, xvii
  - key commitments for winning grants, 6–7
  - library grant audiences, 30
  - overview of book’s coverage of, xxiii–xxv
  - power of, xvi–xvii
  - preparedness for grant applications, xvi
  - professional development/continuing education, 103–104
  - proposal outcome, next steps, 95–97
  - types of, 70
  - Winning Grants (Gerding) for help with, xiii–xiv
  - Winning Grants Sources and Resources Handout, 151–152
  - for Arts Projects, 46
  - Grants Learning Center, 61
  - GrantSelect, 66
- grants
  - for Carnegie-Evans Public Library, 128–129
  - empowering library grant writers, xv
  - during COVID-19 pandemic, xv–xvi
  - for Community Room Remodel/digital literacy courses, 127
  - for developing library programs, 11–12
  - for 109f, 109p grant
  - for Empowering Library Grant Writers, 11
  - for expanding access to STEM resources for disadvantaged boys and girls, 9
  - for implementing comprehensive literacy programs, 11
  - for implementing community room remodel/digital literacy courses, 11
  - for obesity prevention, 9
  - for outreach center, 109f, 109p
  - for post-secondary education and career development, 9
  - for public libraries, 9
  - for safe and healthy communities, 9
  - for serving people with disabilities, 9
  - for supporting neighborhood development, 9
  - for transforming academic success, 9
  - for veterans and military families, 9
  - for winning grants, xvi

Hacking School Libraries: 10 Ways to Incorporate Library Media Centers into Your Learning Community (Holzweiss & Evans), 125
- Harwood Institute for Public Innovation, 18

Harrison, Kate, 90

Haddonfield Public Library, Haddonfield, New Jersey, 107–108

Gwinnett County Public Library, Lawrenceville, Georgia, 117–119

Gwinnett County Public Schools, 117–119

GuideStar Search, 65

GrantFinder database, 66

Grant.gov for finding grant opportunities, 60

Grant.gov for grant resources, 152

Grant.gov for researching grants, 65

Grant.gov forWinning Grants Sources and Resources Handout, 151

GrantStation for finding grant opportunities, 72

GrantStation for researching grant opportunities, 66

GrantStation Insider (newsletter), 76, 152

GrantStation Insider guidelines
- See grant guidelines

GuideStar Search, 65

Hacking School Libraries: 10 Ways to Incorporate Library Media Centers into Your Learning Community (Holzweiss & Evans), 125

Harrison, Kate, 90

Harwood Institute for Public Innovation, 18

available at alastore.ala.org
Index

Library Grant Success Stories (cont’d)
- community room remodel/digital literacy courses, 127–129
- Iconic America micro-grant, 113–114
- mobile Chromebook lab, 107–108
- overview of, xxiii, xxiv
- Present in the Past project, 117–119
- Reaching Out project, 123–125
- Scott County Community Memory Project, 109–112
- transnational Dominican activism, 115–116
- Wokini Knowledge Circle, 131–134

Library Grants blog
- for finding grant opportunities, 60–61
- for grant resources, xix, 152
- newsletters/alerts from, 76
- for RFP examples, 78

library introduction, 81

Library of Congress
- as federal government grant source, 47–48
- Present in the Past grant project, 117

library partnerships
- See partnerships

Library Planning Checklist
- copy of, 23, 144
- for strategic planning capabilities assessment, 22

Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) grants
- Accessible Narrative Medicine project, 121
- from IMLS, 45
- library strategic plan for, 22
- mobile Chromebook lab grant, 107
- SLAAs grants, 53
- Stephanie K. Gerding and, xviii

library staff
- grant project for rural school librarians, 123–125
- on grant team, 12
- hiring staff/consultants, 101
- project idea, discovery of, 31
- Staff Project Submission Form, 32
- staff time in project budget, 35–36

licensing, 86
- likelihood of award, 74
- Lions International, 59
- literacy, 127–129
- local businesses
  - grants from, 152
  - local grants, researching, 67–68

mission statement
- for grant project development decisions, 23
- in library strategic plan, 24
- mobile Chromebook lab, Haddonfield Public Library, 107–108
- MOU (memorandum of understanding), 14

municipal grants, 63–64
- museums
  - IMLS as source of federal grants, 45–46
  - as valuable partners, 14

N
- Nakota, 131–134
- narrative
  - case studies for personalizing narrative, 39
  - in grant proposal, 5, 77, 82, 89–91
  - in needs statement, 19–20, 21
  - narrative arc, 90–91
- National Digital Newspaper Program, 47
- National Education Association, 55–56
- National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), 46, 55–56
- National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH)
  - as federal government grant source, 46–47
  - for finding grant opportunities, 60
  - funding for state humanities councils, 54
  - transnational Dominican activism project, 115
- National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC), 47
- National Leadership Grants for Libraries, 46
- National Library of Medicine, 51
- National Park Service (NPS), 48
- Native American Library Services Grants, 46
- Native Hawaiian Library Services Grants, 46
- NEA (National Endowment for the Arts), 46, 55–56
- NEA Big Read, 46
- The NEA Foundation, 55–56
- necessity, 20, 21
- needs assessments
  - community needs assessment as foundational step, 15–16
  - data collection for enhancing, 18
  - existing, use of, 16–17
  - in grant process, 4
  - grant success with, 17
  - as grant time-saver, 11

mailed surveys, 38
- Major Collaborative Archival Initiatives, 47
- managers with decision authority, 98
- matching funds, 6
- matching grant, 70
- matchmaking
  - See grant matchmaking
- Means, Emirra, 132
- media outlets, 31
- memorandum of understanding (MOU), 14
- methodology, 86
- micro-grant, 113–114
- Microsoft OneDrive, 72
- Microsoft Philanthropies, 58
- milestones
  - in project timeline, 34
  - timeline in grant proposal, 83
- mind mapping, 31
- mission
  - decision matrix criteria, 74
  - grant matching and, 82

available at alastore.ala.org
Index

updating, 103
for winning grant proposal, 5
See also community needs assessment
needs statement
community needs, identification of, 29
crafting, xiii, 19–20
creation of, 17
definition of, 28
example of, 21
in grant project plan, 41
in grant proposal, 82
importance of, 19
needs assessment for data, 16
New Parents Need Vital Information example, 31
in “Plan for Success” chapter, xiii
updating, 103
Needs Statement Worksheet

copy of, 143
for crafting compelling needs statement, 20
function of, x xv
NEH
See National Endowment for the Humanities
Network of the National Library of Medicine (NNLM), 51
networking
for developing community relationships, 8
for local funding opportunities, 67
for new grant opportunities, 76
relationships, building, 104
New Jersey State Library, 107
newsletters
subscribing to grant newsletters/alerts, 75–76
Winning Grants Sources and Resources Handout, 152
NHPRC (National Historical Publications and Records Commission), 47
990-PF (Private Funder) tax form, 55
NJ State LSTA Literacy Grant, 107
nonprofits
community needs, 56–57
foundations, 55
private foundations, 55–56
private grants, 64–66
as valuable partners, 14
North Dakota, 123–125
Northwest Narrative Medicine Collaborative (NWNMC), 121–122
NPS (National Park Service), 48

O

OBE
See outcome-based evaluation
objectives
in grant project plan, 41
in library strategic plan, 24
for OBE implementation, 37
project definitions for project plan, 28
project objectives, development of, 32–33
observations, 39
Oceti Sakowin culture, 131–134
OER (open educational resources), 123–125
Of the People: Widening the Path initiative, 47–48
Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE), 50
Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE), 49
Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), 52
Office of Postsecondary Education (OPE), 49
Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSER), 50
one-page strategic plans, 25, 26
online bookmarking tools, 72
online document storage and sharing, 72
online proposal, 78–79
online surveys, 38–39
online training, 103
P

Partnership Agreement grants, 46
partnerships
building/sustaining, 13–15
of Carnegie-Evans Public Library, 127
communication with funders for, 92
cultivating, 3
decision matrix criteria, 74
fostering, 104
with funders, advice on, 128
with funders, establishing, 44
Grant Partnership Agreement Worksheet, 138–139
grant requirements, 6
for grant success, 9
Key Commitments for Winning Grants Checklist, 6, 7
partnership agreement, 14
potential library partners, examples of, 14
for Present in the Past project, 117
in project description, 83
questions for, 15
for Scott County Community Memory Project, 109
See also collaboration
PBS, 113–114
Peña, Lorena Espinoza, 115
Penguin Random House Library Awards for Innovation, 58
Penn, Margaret, 45
people, focus on, 8
permissions, 86
evaluation process in grant proposal, 84–85
in library strategic plan, 24
Logic Model Worksheet, 147
in logic models, 39–40
for OBE implementation, 37
project definitions for project plan, 28
project outcomes, defining, 33
project planning steps, 30
proposal outcome, next steps, 95–97
in proposal summary, 81
See also project outcomes
outputs
Logic Model Worksheet, 147
in logic models, 39–40
outreach
for community forums, 18
for local funding opportunities, 67
overhead, 84
Winning Grants Sources and Resources Handout, 152

available at alastore.ala.org
Index

persistence, 10
personnel expenses, 84
Philanthropy News Digest (PND), 65
Pierce, Pamela, 121–122
pitfalls, 97
Pivot database, 67
PLA
See Public Library Association
"PLA Awards and Grants" (PLA), 59–60
planning
community needs/priorities, assessment of, 15–18
in Design Winning Grant Projects phase, 4–5
evaluation plan, creation of, 36
evaluation plan in grant project plan, 42
for grant project management, 101
Grant Project Planning Worksheet, 145–146
for grant success, 8
grant teams, 11–13
importance of, 11
Key Commitments for Winning Grants Checklist, 6, 7
library partnerships, building/sustaining, 13–15
Library Planning Checklist, 144
needs statement, 19–21
overview of chapter on, xxiii
Plan for Success phase in Grant Process Cycle, 4
project definitions, 28
project plan, 27
project planning process, 28–36
strategic plans, 21–26
See also project plan; project planning
PND (Philanthropy News Digest), 65
positive attitude, 10
pre-award office, 12
Present in the Past project, Gwinnett County Public Library, 117–119
Preservation Assistance Grants for Smaller Institutions, 46
primary audience
definition of, 98
impact of Reaching Out project, 124
impact of Scott County Community Memory Project, 110
impact of Wokini Knowledge Circle, 133
needs statement example, 31
in project description, 83
selection of, 29–31
See also audience
principal investigator, 12
priorities
in library strategic plan, 24
strategic plan for alignment of, 22
private foundations
list of, 55–56
overview of, 55
as private grant source, 55–56
private grants, researching, 64–66
private grant sources
foundations, 55–58
local clubs/service organizations, 58–59
professional library associations, 59–60
tools for researching, 64–66
types of funding sources, 44
Winning Grants Sources and Resources Handout, 151–152
professional development, 103–104
Professional Development for Arts Educators, 49
Professional Development grant program, 51
professional library associations
grants from, 59–60
joining, for new grant opportunities, 76
Winning Grants Sources and Resources Handout, 152
program officer, 100
programming, innovative
of Accessible Narrative Medicine project, 121–122
of mobile Chromebook lab, 107
of Reaching Out project, 124
of Scott County Community Memory Project, 110
of Wokini Knowledge Circle, 132
project audit, 101
project budget
definition of, 28
development of, 35–36
See also budget
project charter
definition of, 98
Project Charter Worksheet, 163
template, xxiv
tips for, 98
Project Charter Worksheet copy of, 99, 163
function of, xxv
use of, 98
project definitions, 28
project description
in grant proposal, 82–83
in proposal summary, 81
project evaluation, 28
See also evaluation
project expenses, 84
project goals
definition of, 28
determination of, 32
project planning steps, 30
See also goals
project idea
See grant project idea
project implementation team, 13
project justification, 17
project management
definitions for, 98
grant project management elements, 99, 100–102
in Implement, Evaluate, and Continue phase, 5, 95
implementation phase, 97–98
Project Charter Worksheet, 99
project charters, 98, 100
tools for organizing grant research, 72
project manager
communication by, 100
definition of, 98
grant project management elements, 100–102
hiring, 111
for library partnerships, 14
on project implementation team, 13
team building by, 100
project objectives
definition of, 28
development of, 32–33
Project Outcome tools, PLA, 38, 102
project outcomes
defining, 33
definition of, 28
measuring project results, benefits of, 38
primary audience for grant project and, 30–31
project planning steps, 30
See also outcomes
project plan
for clear grant application, 119
definition of, 28
development of, 27
tips for organizing grant research, 72
example grant project plan, 41–42
example of, xxiv
available at alastore.ala.org
by project planning team, 13
updating, 103

project planning
community need, identification of, 29–31
evaluation plan, creation of, 36
goals, determination of, 32
Grant Project Planning Worksheet, 145–146
for grant success, 8
Library Planning Checklist, 144
overview of, 28–29
project action steps, defining, 34
project budget, development of, 35–36
project idea, discovery of, 31–32
project objectives, development of, 32–33
project outcomes, defining, 33
project planning steps, 30–36
project timeline, creation of, 34–35
team, responsibilities of, 13

project sponsor, 98
project team
definition of, 98
implementation phase work of, 101
of large organizations, 12
See also grant teams

project timeline
action steps for, 34
in appendix, 86
creation of, 34–35
definition of, 28
in grant project plan, 41–42
project/program grant, 70
proposal
See grant proposal
proposal summary, 81
Public Engagement with Historical Records, 47
Public Humanities Projects, 46
Public Library Association (PLA) grants from, 59–60
Project Outcome tools, 38, 102
Publishing Historical Records in Collaborative Digital Editions, 47
purpose, 17

Q
qualitative data
evaluation process in grant proposal, 85
for needs assessment, 18
qualitative evaluation, 37–38
quality, 85
quantitative data, 85
quantitative evaluation, 37
questions
to justify community need, 82
for partnerships, 15
Questions for Funders Checklist for alignment clarification, 75
copy of, 93, 161

R
Radbill, Olivia, 82
Rajkumar, Sivasankari, 100
Reading Stars program, 91
records, of grant research, 71–72
regulatory approvals, 86
relationships
building, 104, 122
community relationships, developing, 8
with funders, building, 75
grant work about people, 43–44
religious organizations, 14
reporting
common evaluation/reporting elements, 101
grant project management elements, 101–102
grant reporting, time commitment for, 119
in needs assessment, 17
requests for proposals (RFPs)
overview of, 78
for state government grants, 52
strategic plan and, 4
research
goal of government grants, 61–63
in grant proposal, 97
in needs statement, 82
optimizing grant research, 68–70
recording/organizing research, 71–72
resources for finding grant opportunities, 60–68
sources of library grant funding, 44
state government grant sources, 52–54
research grant, 70
resolution, 90, 91
resource managers
definition of, 98
responsibilities of, 101
resources
asking for what is needed, 9
Content and Statistics Handout, 18
for finding grant opportunities, 60–68
for grant proposal components, 80
inputs in logic model, 39–40
for strategic planning, 25–26
in Winning Grants (Gerding), xvii
Winning Grants Sources and Resources Handout, 151–152
See also Worksheets, Checklists, and Forms
results
See outcomes; project outcomes
résumé, 86
review
application review process, 79
funder review of grant proposal, 92, 94
of grant process, 102
of project charter, 98
reviewing/continuing process, 102–104
RFPs
See requests for proposals
Ridgeland Public Library, Madison County Library System, 113–114
rising action, 90, 91
risks
crisis avoidance tool, 32
decision matrix criteria, 74
Rodriguez, Amaury, 115
Rotary International, 58
Rural Business Development, 48
Rural Community Development Initiative, 48
Rural Postsecondary and Economic Development, 50
rural school librarians, 123–125
Rural Utilities Service, 48

S
salaries, 35–36
SAM.gov (System for Award Management), 61

available at alastore.ala.org
Index

Sample Cover Letter and Proposal
  copy of, 156–160
  example evaluation plan in, 36
  as helpful resource, 80
Santana, Nelson, 115–116
Santoro, Jamie, xxi
Save America’s Treasures, 48
scanning, 109–112
scheduling
  by grant coordinator, 13
  project timeline, creation of, 34–35
Schroder, Dorla, 111
scope, 17
Scott County Community Memory Project, 109–112
Scott County History collection, 109
Scott County Library System, 109–112
search
  Grants.gov Search Grants tab, 62–63
  Grants.gov search tips, 61–62
  strategic search for grants, 68–69
seed grant, 70
service organizations
  as grant source, 58–59
  local grants, researching, 67–68
Winning Grants Sources and Resources Handout, 152
signatures, authorized, 86
Sioux, 131–134
skills, grant, 13
SLAAs (State Library Administrative Agencies), 53
SMART objectives
  development of, 32–33
  project planning steps, 30
social media, 76
Soroptimist International of the Americas, 59
sources
  See grant funding sources
South Dakota, Reaching Out project in,
  123–125
South Dakota State University Hilton M. Briggs Library, 131–134
spending, 22
  See also costs
Spotlight on Humanities in Higher Education, 47
spreadsheets, 72
Sprint 1 Million Project, 58
staff
  See library staff
Staff Project Submission Form, 32
stakeholders
  communication with, 5, 100
  definition of, 98
  engaging, 17
  management of, 100
  project charter and, 98
state art agencies, 54
state departments of education, 54
state government grant sources
  overview of, 52
  researching, 63–64
state art agencies, 54
state departments of education, 54
state humanities councils
  for finding grant opportunities, 60
  grants from, 54
state libraries
  for finding grant opportunities, 60
  professional development/continuing education resources, 103
State Library Administrative Agencies (SLAAs), 53
State Library of Oregon, 121
statistics
  Data and Statistics Handout, 140–142
  Winning Grants Sources and Resources Handout, 152
STEM Scale-Up Grant, 128
storytelling
  data-driven storytelling in needs statement, 20, 21
  narrative in grant proposal, 89–91
  in needs statement, 19–20
strategic plan
  as foundation for grant project, 28
  for grant process, 4
  for grant proposal, 77
  as grant time-saver, 11, 22–23
  key elements in, 24
of libraries, xix
Library Planning Checklist, 23
one-page strategic plans, 25, 26
resources for, 25–26
strategic planning essentials, 23–24
strategic planning
  benefits of, 12
  essentials of, 23–25
  for grant success, 8
overview of chapter on, xxiii
Plan for Success phase in Grant Process Cycle, 4
project definitions, 28
resources for, 25–26
role of, 3
strategic priorities, 24, 28
Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy, 49
Student Success Grants, 56
Student Support Services, 49
students
  Present in the Past project, 117–119
  US Department of Education grants, 48–50
subscription
  to Candid, 64
  to Foundation Directory Online Professional, 65
  to GrantSelect, 66
  to Grants.gov, 61
  to GrantStation, 66
success
  evaluation plan for measuring, 36
  funding for grant project, 96
  of grant, tips for, 8–10
  project results, measuring, 38
  winning proposal strategies, 97
success, key to
  for Accessible Narrative Medicine project, 122
  for community room remodel/digital literacy courses, 128–129
  for mobile Chromebook lab, 107
  for Present in the Past project, 117–118
  for Reaching Out grant project, 124, 125
  for Scott County Community Memory Project, 110
  for transnational Dominican activism project, 116
  for Wokini Knowledge Circle, 132–133, 134
summative evaluation, 37
supplementary references, 86
supporting materials, 85–86
SurveyMonkey, 39
surveys, 38–39
sustainability
  in grant proposal, 97
  Key Commitments for Winning Grants Checklist, 6, 7
  library needs assessments boost grant success, 17
  project description for demonstrating, 82

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