Core Elements of a Grant Application – Part II

Learning Objectives

Not every grant application, whether for a government agency or a philanthropic foundation, includes the same elements or asks the same questions. However, many grant applications share common components. Understand the purpose of each component or the required sections of a grant application before you address them.

The grant application you are completing may include some or all of the following parts. They are not listed in any particular order and may be labeled differently, depending on the solicitation.

Part I is covered in a separate chapter

Part II

5. Project Design or Methodology
6. Organizational Capacity
7. Project Evaluation Plan (Performance Measures)
8. Project Sustainability Plan
9. Partnerships and Stakeholders
10. Letters of Support, Commitment, and Collaboration
11. Project Abstract

The Budget and Budget Justification are discussed in a separate chapter.

5. Program Design or Methodology

What is it?

The Methodology section is the crux of your grant proposal. It usually carries the most points, requires the most thought, and many consider it the hardest part of writing a grant application.

This section of an application may be called Project Design, Program Design, Project Methodology, Program Methodology, or simply Methods. Think of this section as your game plan or strategy detailing how you will accomplish your goals and objectives and achieve your project's outcomes. Your methodology should demonstrate the viability of the project by describing the key tasks supporting the project, how and where you will carry them out, and a realistic schedule. Present the information in a cohesive, straightforward, and logical manner. After reading through your methodology, the reviewer should be convinced that your project makes sense, is realistic, and has substance.

Complex grant applications such as those required by federal agencies like NSF, NIH, or the Dept. of Education may require you to follow a specific format when proposing the project methodology, especially if you are submitting a research proposal. Think "mini" thesis or dissertation.

Writing for the Project Methodology or Program Design

- Begin the Methods section with a boldface font, such as "**Methods**" or "**Approach**," to inform the reader about the content that follows. This makes your application document easier to navigate.
- Detail the methods, techniques, and procedures that you will employ to address the problem or need. Make it easier for the reader/reviewer by numbering each strategy and using boldface type. Example: **Strategy 1**, **Strategy 2**, or **Method 1, Method 2**, etc.
- Discuss how your selected methodology will enable you to achieve your goals and key objectives.
- If your methodology is based on the successes of others, on Best Practices developed by a recognized organization or institution, or builds on the work of a previous grantee, that's fine as long as you cite this and give credit where credit is due. Your proposed strategy does not have to be original, just well thought out.
- If your methodology introduces an innovative approach to addressing a need, problem, or challenge, if you intend to employ cutting-edge techniques, or propose novel combinations of existing methods, make this clear. Emphasize how your proposed methodology is feasible and expected to potentially

lead to significant outcomes. State how these unique aspects set your project apart from previous applicants and will potentially lead to significant outcomes.

- State how and why your methodology is achievable within your proposed timeframe, given the Scope of Work and activities you have identified. If the success of your project depends on collaborators, partners, or stakeholders, state why they are necessary and how their participation benefits the effectiveness of your approach or project design.
- Demonstrate your project's feasibility by emphasizing the knowledge and experience of the project personnel who will be responsible for managing the project and those contributing to the project such as key stakeholders. Identify key personnel by their project position, using names and degrees or titles only if it adds value. For example, if you are developing a health-focused project, it will lend credence to your program to cite the participation of a medical doctor, a Registered Nurse, or a public health administrator. If you are proposing a job training program, and the training will include classroom and workplace-based skills, identify your industry partners and the type of equipment students will be exposed to. Build the reviewer's confidence in your ability to carry out the project.
- Keep paragraphs concise but informative, avoiding long-winded run-on narrative.
- If the application requires you to address subcategories or a series of questions within the Project Methodology, briefly reiterate these subheadings or a few words from the questions using boldface font before you write your response. This technique helps the reader easily navigate through your text.
- Acknowledge the feasibility of your proposed project design. Reviewers want projects that are not only well-conceived but also realistic and achievable within the proposed time frame and budget.

A template is suggested below. There are other ways to present your project methodology.

Project Methodology Example: Community College Literacy Initiative

1. Overview of Program Design

Lakota Tribal & Community College's proposal, L3: Lakota Literacy Learning, will employ the Reading Horizons Elevate Intervention Model to improve reading proficiency among first-generation college students. In addition to an on-campus option, the 12-month L3 program will be co-located at three partner locations: the Tribal Community Center, the Lakota County Library, and the Lakota County Health Clinic. The proposed program model will incorporate small-group in-person or online classes with required supportive tutoring, digital literacy tools like the interactive Phonetics App, and access to the free Reading Horizons Library Book Library to boost reading speed and comprehension. Family and peer engagement will be strongly encouraged.

2. Implementation Phases

Phase 1: Preparation and Recruitment Activities (Months 1–2)

- **Staff Onboarding**: Hire one Program Manager from College faculty, two part-time Certified Reading Specialists, and four trained undergraduate mentors from the University of Wisconsin School of Education.
- **Student Recruitment**: Partner with the Lakota Tribal Council and Lakota High School to identify 60 at-risk students reading one to two grade levels below the state's standard for high school graduation.
- **Baseline Assessment:** Administer standardized reading fluency and comprehension pre-tests to all potential participants.
- **Enrollment:** Conditionally enroll the first cohort of 60 at-risk students, mandating their participation in the L3 program in their Year One studies.

Phase 2: Core Intervention Delivery Activities (Months 3–10)

- **Small-Group Classes and Tutoring:** Conduct twice-weekly, 60-minute classes along with 45-minute twice-weekly tutoring sessions for groups of five to eight students. Classes and tutoring will use Horizons' evidence-based phonics and guided reading strategies
- **Digital Access:** Instructors and tutors will implement Horizons' interactive reading software and provide access to the digital Phonetics App on dedicated

tablets provided at no cost to the students in the on-campus classrooms, at the three partner locations, and available through an online portal for students who have their own computers or smartphones.

• **Family and Peer Engagement:** The Project Team, including instructors and tutors, will host free, one-hour monthly literacy workshops in-person or virtually, to equip parents, tribal members, and friends with learning support strategies.

Evaluation and Reporting Phases (Months 6–12)

Phase 3: Assessments:

• **Standardized Testing:** Instructors or tutors will administer the Nelson-Denny Standardized Reading Tests every three months and at the end of the twelfth month to measure improvements in vocabulary and reading comprehension skills against baseline data.

• **Corrective Actions:** Instructors or tutors will provide supplementary tutoring for students whose progress falls below the 70th percentile of achievement at any given point in time, employing Lexia's PowerUp Literacy Tools, an evidence-based reading comprehension intervention strategy recommended by the National Reading Panel.

Phase 4: Data Analysis and Reporting:

- **Measurement:** Instructors will analyze attendance, retention, and reading score metrics using standardized quantitative tools such as ACCUPLACER.
- **Final Reporting:** The Project Lead will submit a comprehensive final impact report to the Hillmeade Family Foundation detailing outputs and outcomes relative to our initial project goals and objectives, detailing our project successes as well as shortcomings.
- **Student Survey:** All students participating in the L3 project will take part in a mandatory post-program survey soliciting their feedback and level of satisfaction with the program, including any suggestions or complaints they may have.
- **Project Transparency and Dissemination:** The results of Lakota Tribal & Community College's L3: Lakota Literacy Learning program will be posted on the college's website, including a white paper developed by the project team, and an invitation for college, community, and tribal members to participate in a webinar discussing the project, its results, and plans for funding for a Year Two implementation.
- **Publication:** College faculty and staff engaged with the L3 project will submit a white paper discussing the project to The Journal of College Reading and Learning, a peer-reviewed educational journal that covers postsecondary literacy instruction and reading comprehension for college students.

6. Organizational Capacity

What it means

This section of a grant application may also be called the Organization Management Plan, Organizational Capability, or Organizational Qualifications. Regardless of what the section is called, the core question remains the same: does your organization have the right kind of experienced personnel, auditable financial systems, and stable infrastructure to deliver results?

Describing your organizational capacity is a standard requirement in many grant applications. Whether you are writing a grant application for a federal or state government agency, or a community, corporate, or family foundation, the funder wants to know whether you, the applicant, can successfully deliver the proposed project on time, at or under budget, and meet the goals and objectives and predicted outcomes of your proposal. Even if your organization has an established and verifiable record of successfully managing other grants, or if you have been awarded by this funder in the past, making the case for your capacity to do the work is critical. Never assume that a previous grantor will remember you.

Do not confuse the information you provide for describing organizational capacity with the project narrative. The two sections are very different from one another. While the project narrative describes the project that you would like to accomplish, the capacity statement describes why your organization is qualified to execute the project.

Tip

Reviewers note that the organization capacity section is often poorly written, lacks any real meaningful substance, and is unimpressive. Too often, it looks like a rushed writing job. Even if this section is only worth 5 or 10 points, take it seriously. Why pass up an opportunity to earn the maximum available points?

Word to the wise: never refer the reader to ‘just’ read the attached resumes of project personnel or an Audit Statement as replacements for describing organizational capacity or fiscal responsibility. Also avoid the mistake of referring the reviewer to your website for more information. And don’t assume a laundry list of previously awarded grants demonstrates your grant worthiness. Readers will judge this type of response poorly. Whether this is your very first grant application or you have managed dozens of grant awards, write this section as if your entire application rests on effectively demonstrating that your organization is capable, trustworthy, and qualified.

Commonly Asked Capacity Questions

While every grant application is different, anticipate the following questions that you will likely have to address about your organization’s capacity to successfully manage a grant award:

- Full Legal Name

- Date of founding
- Organization Mission Statement, Vision, and Purpose *as they specifically relate to your proposed project,* not just in general
- Organization History *as it specifically relates to your proposed project*, not just in general
- Organizational Structure, including management and Board oversight, *as it specifically relates to your proposed project*, not just in general
- Financial Profile
    - Last year of filed tax returns
    - Last year of Certified Audit Statement or Certified Financial Statement
    - Past and current portfolio of other grant awards (from whom, amount, date of award)
    - Internal Controls, *as they relate to your proposed project*, not just in general
- Qualifications, including experience and credentials of Key Project Personnel and any Subrecipients, *as they specifically relate to your proposed project,* not just in general
- Qualifications and relevance of key partners and stakeholders, *as they specifically relate to your proposed project,* not just in general
- Adequate Facilities, Space, and Equipment for implementing and managing your proposed project, not your ordinary day-to-day work
- Contingency Plan for unanticipated project interruptions or setbacks

A poorly executed Statement of Organizational Capacity is too broad, too vague, and reads more like your organization's LinkedIn profile. The language of a well-executed Organizational Capacity Statement repeatedly ties the requested information to the project's purpose, so each sentence has meaning. Reviewers are not looking for a general description of your organization; instead, they are looking for concrete examples of how your organization will function in relation to what you are proposing.

Compare a poorly executed Organizational Capacity Statement to one that is done well, as shown in the following examples.

Example of a Poorly Written Statement of Organizational Capacity for a grant proposal to provide workforce training for college students

Founded in 1985, the Lakota Community & Tribal Community College Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the lives of our students. Our mission is to provide accessible education

to all, regardless of income. The College is passionate and innovative, and we've been helping students train and get jobs for a long time. We care deeply about workforce development, and we have a game-changing team of rock star leaders who are dedicated to making a difference. Our Workforce Dean is led by an experienced faculty member and overseen by a Board of Directors. We know how to run training programs. We have a room with some computers where folks can come in. Our team is great at networking, and we will definitely use the grant money wisely to do amazing things for everyone who needs a job.

Why it's a Fail

• Vague and Empty Claims: Uses overused buzzwords like innovative, game-changing, rock star, and passionate instead of hard facts.

• No Quantified Results: Fails to state how many students were trained or in what fields, or what percentage found employment.

• Missing Staff Credentials: Mentions an experienced Dean without providing any relevant education or experience. No credible information is provided on why the team are "rock star leaders" as it relates to the proposed project.

• Lack of Infrastructure Proof: "A room with some computers" does not inform the reader why the computers are relevant to the proposed workforce training or if the room is adequate for the project.

• No Financial or Governance Details: Does not mention board oversight, past grants managed, or annual audits.

Example of a Well- Written Statement of Organizational Capacity for the same grant proposal to provide workforce training for college students

Founded in 1985, the Lakota Community & Tribal Community College Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the prosperity of our rural and tribal college students who live and work on or near the Lakota tribal reservation in northeastern Wisconsin. Our mission is to provide financial support for relevant workforce education and skills training to all students so that they can earn a livable wage upon graduation. Over the past decade, the College Foundation has successfully managed $2.4 million in federal, state, and private foundation grants.

Our three workforce faculty have forty-nine years of combined experience designing and executing successful job training programs in our region. Our workforce faculty includes an educator in the skilled construction trades with twenty years of industry experience; a second educator in the advanced manufacturing field with 15 years of industry experience; and a third educator in the IT Technology field with 14 years of industry experience. The College Dean of Education, the College President, and an active nine-member Board of Directors oversee the faculty and enforce strict fiscal policy.

The College and the College Foundation undergo separate annual independent CPA audits, consistently yielding clean, unmodified opinions.

Our flagship "Ready, Set, Go!" workforce training program, operating for eight years, provides classroom and skills training out of our 2,800-square-foot on-campus workforce hub, which features a 15-station computer lab equipped with industry-standard hardware and software, a 6-station welding lab, a 10-station electrical training lab, and a workspace housing three pieces of advanced manufacturing equipment provided by local industry partners on a rotating basis. In 2025, our program enrolled 145 students and achieved an 84% graduation rate (122 graduates). Through formalized hiring partnerships with 12 local employers, 78% of our graduates (95 individuals) secured full-time employment within 90 days of completion, at an average starting wage of $29.50/hour.

Faculty member Jim Brownfeather, BA in Educational Technologies from the University of Wisconsin, will lead the proposed initiative, bringing 10 years of workforce program management experience. Faculty member River Mason, MS in Computer Science from the University of Iowa, will co-lead the initiative. The College will rigorously monitor progress and compliance using the Banner Educational Systems platform to track participant enrollment, milestone completion, and 12-month post-employment retention data.

The College Foundation has demonstrated strong financial controls with a consistent track record of no audit findings for over twenty years and highly qualified staff with a total of thirty years in higher education finance, combined, including oversight by the College's Chief Financial Officer, an M.B.A. from the University of Wisconsin and CPA, with over twenty-five years in fiscal leadership, to launch this project successfully on day one.

Why it's better

- Relevant Mission: Purpose of the applicant is clearly tied to the project purpose.
- Verifiable Track Record: Years of experience managing grants with a total value are concrete.
- Qualified Staffing: Named Project Manager and Co-Manager's relevant education and experience demonstrate the ability to manage the project and not rely on just one person.
- Adequate Infrastructure: Identified square footage and available equipment support physical capacity to run the project.
- Documented Fiscal and Program Oversight: Naming clean audits, prior fiscal accountability, leadership structure, and accounting structure demonstrates high levels of responsibility.
- Proven Results: Citing concrete data in program enrollments, job placements, and wages demonstrates quality program accountability.

Five Key Strategies to Strengthen Your Statement of Organizational Capacity

1. Highlight similar past projects if you can: Detail the funding sources, award amounts, project durations, populations served, and concrete, numbered outcomes.
2. Avoid generic boilerplate "blah" language: Cite relevant examples to make your statement more interesting and memorable.
3. Showcase project personnel: Highlight staff qualifications, emphasize partnerships, and notable subrecipients.
4. Be succinct: Use plain language, avoiding extra, meaningless words.
5. Demonstrate financial health: Reference clean audits, certified Financial Statements, and accounting systems to reassure funders that you can responsibly manage the grant award.

7. Developing Performance Measures and a Project Evaluation Plan

Definitions

Performance Management (in a grant program)

Performance management is a systematic process that supports an ongoing analysis of a grant program's performance. The process depends on regularly collecting data and indicators to assess whether the strategies you are implementing are achieving the desired results. Indicators may include participant surveys, internal or external evaluations, testing, data-driven analyses, or meaningful changes in behavior or skill acquisition. The process should provide the grantee with ongoing information about performance to support continuous quality improvement.

While there is no one singular right or wrong performance management system, the grant reviewer scoring your application will evaluate whether your proposed approach is valid and has merit. In some instances, a federal agency may impose a specific performance management system that you must use. For example, the US Dept. of Justice Bureau of Justice Assistance grant programs typically require grantees to qualitatively measure and report their goals, objectives, barriers, and successes biannually. Applicants should consider a performance management system that is common to the subject matter of their program. For example, a common performance management approach for an education grant application is a SMART-aligned Logic Model Framework tied to the Government Performance and Results Act.

Performance Measures (in a grant application)

Performance Measures are specific, measurable indicators, whether quantitative values or qualitative markers, that capture outcomes of grant activities, demonstrating whether the grant program accomplishes its goals and objectives and projected outcomes. Select measures that are realistic, effectively demonstrate accountability to the funder, and are regularly employed throughout the period of performance to determine whether your program is on track or needs course corrections.

It is incorrect to think that performance measures are only used at the end of your grant. They should be employed throughout your grant on a regular basis (quarterly, semi-annually, or annually) to track your progress. If your performance measures show that you are not performing as expected, you should report

any setbacks to the funder with a proposed Action Plan to course correct and implement any necessary changes. Not informing your funder is a mistake. Transparency is important.

Illustrations and Recommendations courtesy of the Walton Family Foundation, 2022

Performance measures are statements that describe the direct products and services delivered by a program (outputs) as well as the impact of those products and services (outcomes). Performance measures identify:

WHAT	WHO	WHEN	HOW MUCH	HOW WE WILL KNOW
will change or be accomplished through the program	will create the change or accomplishment	the change or accomplishment will occur	change will occur or what the level of accomplishment will be	the change occurred

In general, a grant should have more outcomes than outputs in the performance measures section. Recommendations include:

Grant Amount Per Year	*Length of Grant Period*	
	2 YEARS OR FEWER	3 YEARS OR MORE
Less than $250K	1 output & 2 outcomes	2 outputs & 3 outcomes
Between $250K and $1M	2 outputs & 3 outcomes	3 outputs & 4 outcomes
Above $1M	3 outputs & 4 outcomes	4 outputs & 5 outcomes

Examples of Performance Management Systems and Measures

US Department of Labor

An example of a comprehensive performance management system for a DOL-funded workforce grant such as WIOA and YouthBuild includes these components:

1. Data Collection & Intake Architecture

- **Intake & Demographic Tracking:** A secure Case Management Database designed to capture age, race, employment status, barriers to employment, and public assistance status.
- **Service Tracking:** Real-time logging of individual participant milestones, including basic career services, training enrollment, credential attainment, and supportive services.
- **Automated Validation Rules:** Built-in error-checking at data entry to prevent missing Social Security numbers or mismatched dates of entry/exit.

2. Performance Metrics & Goal Framework

- **Output Metrics:** Number of individuals recruited, enrolled, and completing orientation.
- **Intermediate Outcomes:** Number of participants earning an occupational skills license, industry-recognized credential, or high school equivalency.
- **Primary / End Outcomes:**
    - Placement in unsubsidized employment or Registered Apprenticeship.
    - Median quarterly earnings.
    - Measurable skill gains (basic skills or occupational).
    - Retention rates at 2nd and 4th quarters post-exit.

3. Monitoring, Governance & CQI Workflow

- **Monthly Data Audits**: A designated Grant Data Manager runs audit scripts monthly to cross-reference participant files with payroll, attendance sheets, and employer verification forms.
- **Supervisory Case Reviews**: Case managers undergo monthly file audits using a standard Quality Assurance checklist to ensure case notes substantiate reported outcomes.
- **Early Warning Indicators:** Automated flags that trigger an intervention if a participant misses classes for 10+ consecutive days or if a quarterly milestone falls below 85% of the projected target.

4. Reporting & Grant Compliance

- **Quarterly Reporting:** Federal Quarterly Performance Report
- **Monitoring Readiness:** Ensuring fiscal, procurement, and programmatic records are audit-ready for a Federal Project Officer.

Examples of Other Performance Measures

1. Input Measures

Inputs track the resources invested into the project.

- **Grant funding allocated**: Total dollars spent or budgeted (e.g., $150,000 in direct program funds).
- **Staff and volunteer hours**: Number of full-time equivalents (FTEs) or volunteer hours dedicated
- **Facility or equipment use**: Number of training rooms, computers, or mobile units deployed.

2. Output Measures (Activity / Workload)

Outputs count the direct, immediate volume of services delivered or activities completed.

- **Number of individuals served:** Total unique participants reached (e.g., 500 low-income high school students enrolled in after-school tutoring).
- **Classes or workshops held:** Count of completed sessions (e.g., 24 financial literacy workshops delivered).
- **Units of service or goods distributed:** Tangible items handed out (e.g., 1,200 hot meals served or 300 health screenings conducted).

3. Outcome Measures (Effectiveness / Impact)

Outcomes measure the actual change, improvement, or gain in knowledge, skills, behavior, or condition resulting from the activities.

- **Educational attainment/literacy:** Percentage of students improving reading levels by one grade or passing a final assessment (e.g., 78% of participants score proficient or higher on post-tests).
- **Health and wellness shifts:** Measurable health changes (e.g., a 20% reduction in self-reported high blood pressure or a decrease in local smoking rates via survey data).
- **Economic or workforce stability:** Job placement or retention rates (e.g., 65% of job-training graduates employed at 6 months post-program).

4. Efficiency and Cost Measures

Efficiency measures evaluate how well resources (time or money) are used to produce a result.

- **Cost per outcome or participant:** The financial investment required per successful result (e.g., $500 cost per student who successfully completes the certification).
- **Turnaround or cycle time:** Speed of service delivery (e.g., average time from intake to housing placement reduced from 45 days to 20 days).
- **Budget adherence rate**: Percentage of funds spent strictly according to the approved timeline and budget categories.

Performance Measurement Traps to Avoid

1. Overbuilding Performance Measures
   It isn't necessary to lay out every measurement in minute detail.

2. Including Relatively Minor Performance Measures
   Administrative actions are accepted as work that must be performed to manage the grant and are not considered particularly consequential.

3. Measurable vs. Meaningful
   Just because you can measure something in your grant program does not mean it is meaningful.
   To determine whether performance measures are meaningful, ask:
   - Are the outputs and outcomes tightly linked?
   - Is it a routine activity that really should not be assessed, or is it an essential product or service worthy of being tracked?
   - Have you prioritized informative deliverables, for which success or failure may lead you to do something different in the future?
   - Are your outcomes linked to the ultimate impact that the funder is seeking?

4. Avoiding complex measurements
   Assess progress against all stated measures, even for complex problems. Define the measurement in a way that is meaningful and that the funder can understand.

8. Developing a Project Sustainability Plan

Definition

Sustainability in grant funding means your ability to keep a project, program, or its core benefits operational and impactful after the grant ends. It answers the funder's core question: "Once our money runs out, then what?"

What the granting agency or foundation is looking for

Funders aren't just looking at what you do during the grant period; they want to know whether your work is sustainable and will continue to deliver benefits well into the future without additional funding from them. For many organizations, addressing sustainability is one of the toughest parts of a grant application. Many applicants simply state that they will ask the same funder for another round of funding or look for more grant funding. Your Sustainability Plan should include more than just this statement. The funder expects you to have a better, more comprehensive response.

Developing a Sustainability Plan

A Sustainability Plan is similar to a business Continuity of Operations Plan: a written guide that helps an organization keep running in an emergency. Applicants tend to think that once the grant award is spent, the "emergency" is that everything comes to a grinding halt. That doesn't have to happen if you plan accordingly. Grantors want to know what's in your plan. Here are steps to plan your Plan:

Step 1: Address what will need to continue

Be specific. What exactly are you trying to sustain? An exact replica of your entire grant program? A position like a Tribal Liaison, Career Navigator, or an AI Instructor? Are you hoping the Sector-Based Training Model you developed with industry partners to train students in Advanced Manufacturing will continue to be used, or even replicated, by other industry partners? Do you want the community college, Workforce Board, and local tribe to continue partnering and collaborate on a Phase II of the same project? Do you expect that the curriculum you developed during the grant project will be formally adopted by the College Curriculum Committee and become a standard course? Do you hope Student Support Services will continue to use the Individualized Service Strategy case management approach you implemented during the grant? Do you expect the new data management system procured with grant funds to continue to be used in the foreseeable future?

Funders will respond more favorably to your Sustainability Plan if they know exactly what you are trying to carry forward. The examples cited above do not necessarily require more money.

Step 2: Address what resources will be needed to continue the goals and objectives of your project.

Not all resources require new money. For example, if you used grant funding to send some faculty to professional development training to learn how to contextualize Adult Basic Education courses to a specific trade, your Project Sustainability Plan could include that you will use the Train-the-Trainer Model and teach other faculty how to apply the same skills. If your grant project trained volunteer Tribal Elders to become Reading Coaches and Mentors, your Project Sustainability Plan could indicate that they will teach other tribal members the same skills. If your grant funds purchased new data management technology used by Enrollment, the new technology could continue to be rolled out to other departments like Institutional Research or Advising. If grant funds paid for 40 new Chrome Workbooks front-loaded with interactive courseware in Science and Math, and IT ensured the hardware and software were regularly updated, then the next cohort of students could access the technology until the equipment and programs become obsolete.

Funders will respond more favorably to your Sustainability Plan if they know exactly what resources you will need to carry forward. The examples cited above do not necessarily require more money.

Step 3: Where might future funding come from and how much?

Do your research and identify at least three or more foundations or agencies by name whose mission and grant funding align with your program goals. If you are aware of their application deadlines, state that you will be applying for additional funding. If an industry partner, Board member, Tribal Council, or community member is willing to commit funds, state who they are and the amount of their pledge. If the College's Board or the College's Foundation Board are willing to commit funding to continue your project in next year's Operating Budget, state the amount and for how long. If your project could be continued as a subaward on another organization's grant, state the name of their grant program, the amount, and time period.

Consider asking the funder for consideration of Phase 2 funding of your project in the next round of funding. If you performed well and they liked your outcomes, this sustainability strategy could be convincing. If your program shows positive results, identify what is working and why to make a credible case for continued support.

Funders will respond more favorably to your Sustainability Plan if you cite other financial resources that are available or will be applied for. State whether you plan to continue operating the exact same program or project or whether you are planning to expand from a Phase I to a Phase II. A Phase II should be briefly outlined, including any new goals, objectives, and outcomes.

Example of a Well-Written Sustainability Plan

Lakota's Advanced Manufacturing Training Initiative Sustainability Plan

1. Executive Summary of Sustainability

The College's Advanced Manufacturing Training Initiative is designed as a phased model. Rather than treating external grant funding as a permanent lifeline, grant funds for Years 1–3 will result in three outcomes:

(1) Build the core curriculum to NCCER standards;

(2) Acquire five pieces of state-of-the-industry CNC machinery; and

(3) Establish employer pipelines with Haas Automotive, Elios Mfg., John Deere, and Tesla.

By Year 3, costs will be absorbed into the College's general operating budget and further supported by Perkins V Career & Technical Education funds and WIOA workforce development funds.

2. Three Pillars of Sustainability

A. Institutional Integration into College Operations

- **Curriculum & Faculty**: By the end of Year 2, the newly developed CNC certificate courses will be fully vetted through the College Curriculum Committee and adopted into the official College catalog as permanent credit-bearing programs.
- **Personnel Transition**: The grant-funded Project Director and adjunct instructors will transition to tenure-track/full-time faculty lines via a phased "step-down" model:
  - Year 1: 100% grant-funded.
  - Year 2: 50% grant-funded / 50% college general fund match.
  - Year 3: 100% absorbed into the college's permanent academic division budget.
- **Facilities & Equipment**: Lab space will be housed permanently in the College's Industrial Technology complex. Maintenance and calibration of CNC equipment will roll into the college's regular physical plant maintenance schedule, backed by a 5-year extended warranty package purchased upfront during Year 1 capital expenditures.

B. Diversified Financial Strategy

- **State Workforce Allocation**: Enrollment-based FTE state funding will occur once the courses transition to state-supported credit programming, covering roughly 65% of ongoing instructional overhead.

- **Industry Partnerships & Equipment Sponsorships**: The College has secured binding letters of commitment from four regional manufacturing partners (Haas Automotive, Elios Mfg., John Deere, and Tesla) to provide:
    - An annual $25,000 tool-and-material scholarship pool for low-income students.
    - In-kind equipment updates and technician time for machine upkeep.
- **Fee-for-Service & Customized Training:** The training lab will be utilized during off-hours (evenings and weekends) to deliver contract training for local manufacturing employees on a fee-for-service basis, generating an estimated $50,000 annually to reinvest directly into program consumable supplies.
- **Follow-on Grants:** The College grants office has identified the availability of FY 28 EDA and DOL workforce grants to fund future stackable credentials in Robotics and AI Manufacturing.

C. Community & Employer Governance

- **Advisory Board Continuity**: The ad hoc Employer Advisory Board will transition into a permanent oversight body meeting semi-annually.
- **Employer Commitment**: Advisory members have formally agreed to:
    - Interview 100% of program graduates for open entry-level machinist roles.
    - Provide paid internships for at least 15 students per cohort.
    - Serve as guest lecturers and curriculum reviewers to ensure training stays aligned with industry tech shifts.

3. Sustainability Timeline & Milestones

Timeline	Milestone	Responsible Party
Year 1 (Q2 – Q4)	Finalize formal articulation agreements with regional high schools and 4-year transfer partners.	Dean of Workforce Development
Year 2 (Q2)	Submit CNC certificate curriculum for review for permanent adoption.	Industrial Arts Department Chair College Curriculum Committee
Year 2 (Q3)	Initiate budget integration talks with College Board for Year 3 general fund line-item inclusion.	College Board of Directors
Year 2 (Q4)	Execute the first round of paid, industry-sponsored local employee training courses using a fee-for-service model.	Dean of Workforce Development
Year 3 (Q1)	Complete full transition of faculty and instructional costs to the college operating budget.	College Board, President, and VP Finance

What makes this Sustainability Plan Strong?

No vague promises: The College avoids saying "we will apply for more grants later" as the entire plan. Grants are listed as a supplement, not the primary engine.

Step-down budget logic: The Plan clearly shows how the college plans to shoulder more of the program cost each year.

Institutional buy-in: Adopting the curriculum into the College Catalog and inclusion in the General Fund demonstrates that College administration is committed.

Succinct, easy to read: The College's Plan avoids run-on narrative text, ad nauseam

9. Partnerships with Key Stakeholders

Why they matter

Funders want to know if you plan to collaborate with others who may have a vested interest in your project. They want to know whether there are others who support your work and have an active interest in the project's goals, objectives, and outcomes. Significant stakeholder involvement reassures reviewers and funders that the applicant will not operate in a silo. Partnerships add another layer of expertise and increase proposal credibility. Active stakeholders indicate a higher likelihood that the program will be sustained after the grant award is over because the program matters to a wide group, not just you.

Credible Partners

Don't look for partners just to drop names. You don't impress the reviewer or the funder by listing organizations without elaborating on why they matter to the success of your program, their role and responsibilities, and whether they are contributing financial or programmatic support. Many funders require partnerships and Letters of Commitment from them as part of their grant application process. Regardless of whether partnerships are scored a high or low number of points, ensure that you are collaborating with partners that are necessary, relevant, and will add significant value to the project while it is occurring and afterward. Examples include:

- Community members
- Partner agencies like Workforce Development Boards, Job Centers, Chambers of Commerce
- Business and industry
- Local or state government
- Board members
- Alumni
- Tribal Councils
- K-12 Schools, Community Tribal Colleges, and Universities
- Charitable nonprofits like United Way, Goodwill Industries, Red Cross
- Service organizations like Rotary International, the Lions Club, Habitat for Humanity

- Unions
- Trade Associations

Soliciting Interest

If you don't have an existing relationship with the types of partners or stakeholders that will enhance your grant application, develop a Project Summary of no more than one page introducing your project and its goals, objectives, primary activities, and timeline. Write a brief cover letter asking for their participation, outlining the role and responsibilities you hope they will consider. Ask for a meeting to discuss your request. Be prepared to address their level of involvement, the time commitment required, any expenses they may incur, and the extent of their commitment. If there is any risk involved, such as on-the-job training for student workers or apprenticing previously incarcerated people, be up front about it and how the risk should be managed. You will want to emphasize the benefits to them if they decide to participate. A good partnership should be a two-way street.

Be aware that cultivating a relationship with a partner/stakeholder takes time, especially if the relationship is a new one. You will have to generate interest in your organization and the project, establish mutual trust, and earn their buy-in. It helps if you know someone who has a working relationship with a potential partner and can lay the groundwork for an introduction.

If you have an established relationship with a partner, it will also take time to discuss their potential role in the project and reach an agreement. Letters of Commitment or Support often take considerable time to develop and obtain an executive-level signature, such as from a college president, Tribal Council chair, or company CEO. Don't wait until the last minute.

Examples of Required Partnerships

From the US Dept of Justice Office on Violence Against Women FY26 Disability Grant Program

Partnership Requirement:

All applications must include a mandatory partnership between both of the following entities:

1. A victim service provider or Tribal organization serving victims of domestic/dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking.

2. A nonprofit, nongovernmental organization serving individuals with disabilities and/or deaf people.

The required partnership must be explicitly detailed in both the Proposal Narrative and a formal Memorandum of Understanding

From the US Dept of Labor Employment and Training Administration FY26 Strengthening Community Colleges Training Grants

Partnership Requirement:

The grant requires community colleges to form and utilize a Strengthening Community Colleges Partnership that integrates industry employers, education providers, and the public workforce development system to scale short-term training and employment pathways.

From the US Dept of Education Teacher Quality Partnership Program

Partnership Requirement:

Mandatory Core Partners

- A high-need Local Educational Agency or a consortium of high-need school districts and/or a high-need early childhood education program.
- A partner institution of higher education.
- A school, department, or program of education within that institution.
- A school or department of arts and sciences within that same partner institution

Optional / Additional Partners

The funding announcement also allows (but does not strictly require) the inclusion of extended partners such as:

- State educational agencies (SEAs) or state boards of education
- The Governor of the State
- Local businesses or private nonprofit educational organizations
- Teacher organizations or charter schools

Tip

Leveraging partnerships can be a big advantage for grant applicants. Many federal programs favor collaborative projects that demonstrate broad impact and strong stakeholder support. Partnering with neighboring jurisdictions, regional planning organizations, state agencies, nonprofits, universities, or private-sector partners can help strengthen applications by expanding project scope, sharing resources, and demonstrating widespread benefit.

10. Letters of Support, Commitment, and Collaboration

What's the difference and does it matter?

There is a difference, and yes, it matters. Some agencies and foundations require or permit the applicant to submit letters of support from key partners or stakeholders. However, unsolicited letters can result in the proposal being returned without review. Other funders may explicitly require commitment letters specifically indicating what a partner or stakeholder is committing to the project. The National Science Foundation often requires Letters of Collaboration. The three types of letters mean different things to different funders.

It's important to first understand what is allowed and not allowed by the funder and then, if permitted, submit the appropriate type of letter. Don't attach letters just because you think it sounds like a good idea and will convince a funder to award a grant. If a solicitation does not say whether letters of any kind are permitted, ask before you make any assumptions. It's not worth having your application returned without review because you ignored or failed to read the instructions.

Definitions

Letter of Support

A Letter of Support, whether from a project partner or stakeholder, a colleague, a Board or Tribal member, the College President, a member of the community, or an elected official such as the applicant's representative in Congress, is an endorsement of the work you are proposing to do. If the person or organization is relevant to your project, they should state this; otherwise, general support for the sake of support does not mean much to the reviewer or the funder.

An applicant should not submit a letter of support when—

- The funding announcement explicitly prohibits them.

- Agency policy prohibits general letters of support and generic endorsements.
- The guidelines are silent, without checking whether the Program Officer of the agency or foundation authorizes them.
- The letter is generic, vague, poorly written, or written by the applicant on behalf of the partner, which can undermine your proposal's credibility.
- The letter lacks substance or fails to show any real significance to the project.

Letter of Commitment

A Letter of Commitment for a grant application should demonstrate to the reviewer that there is an active collaboration between the applicant and the organization making the commitment and that their commitment adds value to the project's goals and objectives. The letter should include:

- A brief introduction of the person or organization making the commitment to establish their credibility and importance.
- Who is committing to participate in the project (a person, a team).
- What their role and responsibilities are in the project.
- The nature and market value of the commitment (money, time, in-kind services, equipment, apprenticing, other).
- The timeframe of their commitment.
- Why they are committing to the project; why the project matters to them.

Tip

A Letter of Commitment is not a standalone document attached to your submission package. The role of the partners or stakeholders making a commitment should be described in the Project Narrative or Scope of Work, the Timeline of Activities, and the result of their commitment measured as a Project Outcome. If a partner's commitment is integral to your project's success, give it the attention it is due.

Letter of Collaboration

The National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health are the primary federal agencies that require or explicitly use highly structured Letters of Collaboration. The letter is required for any substantial collaboration with individuals or organizations who are not listed as senior personnel or paid through a subaward in the project budget. The letter demonstrates that an external researcher, another facility, or critical partner agrees to participate in the project and will contribute time, expertise, or materials if the grant is funded, without hidden budgetary commitments. Both agencies issue highly prescriptive guidance on which of their grant programs require these letters and what they must include. The letters must be purely factual and not include any general praise, evaluation, or advocacy for the project.

While less common, some corporate and community foundations (such as those that fund scientific or medical grants) may mandate a Letter of Collaboration for projects involving multiple partnerships to ensure accountability; however, the structure is unlikely to follow the format required by federal agencies. Generally, these types of letters are very short, limited to the extent of the collaboration and nothing more.

What Letters of Support, Commitment, and Collaboration have in Common

Time, Template, and Voice

All three types of letters will take more time to solicit from your partners than you might think, including writing and editing them to the standards of the funder. Unless a person or organization is very familiar with writing letters for a grant application, they are very likely to rely on you, the applicant, for guidance. Consider providing a template they can follow, even filling in some facts if necessary. However, the author of the letter should write in their own voice; otherwise, all your letters from whomever you are soliciting will sound alike. A savvy reviewer will pick up on this quickly and score accordingly. Don't do it.

Letterhead

Treat all three types of letters as formal documents, written on organization letterhead. While grant applications are rarely submitted by mail anymore, the letterhead should transmit clearly when uploaded to a grant application web portal as a pdf. Never upload a letter as a Word document or jpeg. Most portals will only accept a pdf format.

Addressing the Recipient Properly

Never say "To Whom It May Concern" or "Sir" or "Ma'am." At the very least, you should have the name of the Program Officer for the grant program you are applying to. If you cannot identify this person, research who at the federal agency is the appropriate Director. If you are submitting a proposal to a foundation, find out the name of the Foundation's Grants Officer, Philanthropy Director, or a similar position. You may have to make some calls or send an email.

Formal Salutation

Use the salutation Dear followed by the recipient's last name and a colon. The most formal salutation is Dear, [title such as Dr., President, Director, or Program Officer], followed by the last name. Another option is using Dear [first and last name], although this is a less common business practice.

Introduction

Unless the funding agency or foundation prescribes something different, the first paragraph should clearly identify the writer, their title and organization, a very brief description of their organization, and their relationship to you, the applicant. This helps funders understand why their letter matters.

Grammar, Syntax, Vocabulary, Spelling, Active Voice, Plain Talk Language, and Formatting

Many people dislike writing. Many people are also not very good at writing, and it shows. With AI tools like Grammarly, Microsoft Editor, WordTune, and others, there is no excuse for submitting a poorly written letter. Avoid clumsy phrasing, complex sentences, jargon, acronyms, or lengthy, run-on text. Keep the letter clean and to the point, using easily understood language. If the guidance says one-page limitation, don't go over. Proofread, proofread, proofread.

Irrelevancy

Avoid at all costs letters from people who have no genuine connection or are unimportant to your project. If letters are permitted, use the opportunity to get them from people who matter.

30-Seconds or Less Test

A grant reviewer will likely scan a letter of support, commitment, or collaboration in less than 30 seconds. They may not read every word. Remember, they are probably reading and scoring multiple applications and letters. Yours might be the first application, the twentieth, or the last.

Employ a few technical writing tips to make your letter easy to read and stand out from others'.

- Make effective use of white space on the page, avoiding paragraphs that are too long.
- Use a boldfaced word to introduce each paragraph.
- Consider using bulleted phrases instead of writing sentence after sentence after sentence.
- Omit descriptive, meaningless language and punctuation like "this is a great project!"

Overpromising

Supporters often exaggerate what they will do for a grant project and overpromise. They may feel that embellishing their role and deliverables may help you get a higher score. Similar to listing too many project activities in a short time, reviewers can quickly tell when a partner or stakeholder's commitment sounds implausible. It is a better strategy for the person writing a Letter of Support or Commitment to be highly focused on two or three things that are reasonable.

Closing

Do not indicate to the reviewer that they may contact the person signing the letter through a telephone number or email for more information. That is not going to happen. Do not refer the reader/reviewer to a website or an attached brochure for more information. That isn't going to happen either. It is unnecessary to say "thank you for your time" or "thank you for your consideration."

Signature Block

Formally conclude the letter with Sincerely, or Thank You, followed by the person's signature and title.

Check, then Double-check

Don't assume that the letter will automatically upload to a web portal without any error messages. It happens. Make sure the typeface and logo are legible. Convert the letter file to a pdf. Test to see what the upload will look like on the recipient's side. And don't wait 5 minutes before the deadline to test the upload.

Example

Quality that counts.

Date: October 15, 2026

Graham Knowles, Program Officer
Kettle Foundation
123 Grand Ave.
Portsmouth, NE 12345

Re: Letter of Commitment for Lakota College grant application, *Pathways to Precision Manufacturing*

Dear Mr. Knowles,

On behalf of Apex Precision Machining (APM), I am writing to formally commit our active partnership and resources to Lakota Community & Tribal College (the College) for its grant application.

1. Our Relationship & Shared History: APM**,** a 30-year old company with a national footprint and annual sales averaging $40 million**,** has partnered with the College for the past six years to design, pilot, and scale entry-level industrial training tracks. Over this period, we have hired 34 graduates from their programs, who currently maintain a 91% one-year retention rate at our facility. We are intimately familiar with their curriculum, faculty leadership, and rigorous quality standards.

2. Project Alignment & Market Need: Our region currently faces a critical shortage of certified Computer Numerical Control (CNC) operators and first-tier Quality Assurance Technicians. Without a steady local pipeline, our plant routinely experiences delayed production lines. The College's proposed project directly addresses this gap by modernizing lab equipment and doubling cohort capacity for underemployed local workers.

3. Specific Commitments & In-Kind Contributions: If the College is awarded this grant, APM formally commits to the following concrete deliverables over the 24-month project performance period:

- **Guaranteed Interview Pool**: We guarantee initial job interviews for at least 20 qualified graduates per cohort who successfully complete the training program, with starting wages no less than $24.50/hour plus full medical and retirement benefits.
- **Direct Equipment & Software In-Kind Match**: We are donating three retired, industrial-grade Haas CNC simulation units and providing commercial licenses for computer-aided design (CAD) software, representing a total valued in-kind contribution of $188,500.
- **Industry Mentorship & Curriculum Advisory**: Our Lead Operations Manager, Marco Vanelli, will dedicate 4 hours per month to serve on the program's Employer Advisory Board and deliver guest technical workshops on topics such as shop-floor safety, lean manufacturing methods, using AI in manufacturing, and Advanced CAD.
- **Work-Based Learning Sites**: We commit to hosting up to 6 paid or capstone interns per cohort for hands-on, 120-hour practical field rotations inside our active production facility, located 8 miles from the College.

4. Sustainability and Long-Term Viability: Our commitment is not temporary; it is built on a shared economic interest in local workforce development. After the grant program concludes, APM intends to maintain our hiring pipeline, advisory participation, and internship rotation structure indefinitely. We have zero operational or policy barriers that would prevent us from fulfilling these stated commitments.

Sincerely,

Jim Hanson

Jim Hanson, President and CEO

Key Elements That Make This Commitment Letter Effective:

- ### Specific Tangible Pledges

  It avoids vague praise by listing exact numbers of interviews, 4 hours/month, wages, and equipment.

- ### Established Track Record

  It cites a pre-existing 6-year working relationship and a specific number of past hires to prove credibility.

- ### Active Co-Design

  It mentions staff involvement (Marco Vanelli on the advisory board), showing the stakeholder helped shape the proposal rather than just signing a form letter.

11. Project Summary or Abstract

Definition

A Project Summary written for a grant application may also be referred to as an Extract or an Executive Summary. Technically, they can mean different things.

Abstract

The term “abstract,” more often used in an academic context, is a concise summary of a research paper, thesis, conference proceeding, or scholarly article. Research-oriented grant opportunities offered by the National Science Foundation, the National Institutes of Health, NASA, or the Department of Energy typically require an Abstract. Academic abstracts are likely to be restricted to 500 words and require:

- Background or Problem Statement:
  The context of the study and the specific research gap or question being addressed.
- Purpose or Objective:
  Why the research was conducted and what it aims to achieve.
- Methods or Approach:
  How the study, experiment, or analysis was performed.
- Results or Findings:
  The major data, outcomes, or arguments discovered.
- Conclusions or Implications:
  What do the results mean and why they matter to the broader field.

Project or Executive Summary

“Project Summary” or “Executive Summary” are terms more commonly used in programmatic (versus research) grant solicitations. An agency or foundation offering a particular grant program usually establishes specific requirements for the application, including the Summary. Similar to an Abstract, funders expect a concise, informative description of the project that provides reviewers a quick overview of what the applicant intends to accomplish, including goals, objectives, and outcomes. A Program Summary is likely to be restricted to one page and require:

- Applicant Identity:
  The legal name of your organization, its purpose, and its credibility as an applicant in relation to the proposed project.
- Project Need:
  The specific problem, gap, or opportunity that your organization wants to address.

- Project Description:
  A succinct explanation of the purpose of your project or program, including its goals (long-term, broader vision), objectives (how you will achieve your goals), and target audience.
- Approach or Methodology:
  A concise overview of how the project will be executed.
- Expected Outcomes:
  What results you expect to achieve or produce.

- Significance or Impact
  Why the project matters and its benefits to the target audience, field, or public good.

Tips

Write Last

Because the requirements for completing a grant application often list the Project Summary first, applicants tend to make the mistake of writing it first. This is premature if you haven't yet developed your goals and objectives, project activities, milestones, intended outcomes, or budget. A Project Summary should be written after you have fully developed the scope of work, goals and objectives, methodology or approach, and determined a budget for your completed proposal.

Emphasize Key Points

Capture the readers' attention early. Use the most significant and impactful sentences, data (qualitative or quantitative), or needs that you have described in the Project Narrative to highlight the project's significance.

Alignment

Anything you include in the Project Summary must be described in the grant application. Do not include anything in the Summary that cannot be referenced for further detail in the main body of the grant application. Don't introduce new information in the Summary without ensuring it is discussed and supported in the Project Narrative, Methodology, or Budget.

First Impressions

While you should write your Project or Executive Summary last, it is often the first thing a reviewer reads. Think about walking into a conference room or logging into a Zoom call for a job interview. What is the

immediate impression you hope to make on the interviewing committee? The same holds true for your Summary. In many ways, it is the 'elevator pitch' for your proposal. You want the reviewer to be intrigued by your proposal idea and motivated to learn more by reading the entire grant application.

- What will the reviewer notice first? Often, it is the Project Title.
- What will impress them? Your idea, the intended audience, or the intended outcome?
- Is the information presented in a clean and orderly fashion with adequate white space, or is it a solid page of run-on text?
- Are there discernible sections made obvious by introducing a paragraph with a few boldfaced words?
- Can the reviewer quickly scan your Project Summary and get a clear idea of what you are proposing in about 3 minutes?

Common Mistakes

Applicants tend to want to tell the reviewer everything about their proposal in the Project/Executive Summary. This is not necessary or desirable.

Avoid long sentences, misspelled words, complex vocabulary, technical jargon, acronyms, or abbreviations.

Avoid dramatic, overstated, or flowery language that is 'fluff' and not substantive.

Don't speak in the passive voice; instead, employ a 'plain talk' writing style that is written in the active voice, with uncomplicated, short sentences.

Examples

Examples of well-written and poorly written Project Summaries are provided below.

Executive Summary for US Dept. of Labor WIOA Grant Application

Poorly Written Example

The Lakota Tribal Community Empowerment Collaboration (LTCEC) was founded in 2004 by passionate tribal members who saw a real need for change in our community. Over the last 22 years, they have done many wonderful things for tribal members in need, like hosting food drives, youth sports camps, and vouchers for computer purchases. Now, we want to help adults get jobs through our new 'Pathways to Tomorrow' program. Our town has a lot of economic problems and our people are struggling to make ends meet because things cost more now. We are asking the Workforce Development Board for some money to run classes, buy some computers, and help folks build a brighter future. We really hope you will consider us because we work very hard every single day to make our community better.

How This Executive Summary Fails

- Leads with irrelevant history:
  Starting with a 2004 origin story wastes the reviewer's first impression; WIOA reviewers care about current labor market deficits, not historical charity work.

- Missing local economic data and target demographics:
  Saying "our town has a lot of economic problems" instead of citing specific data points such as local dislocated worker numbers or regional industry shortages.

- Hides the Ask:
  Does not state the exact dollar amount requested or specific cost categories.

- Lacks measurable outputs:
  Does not indicate outputs such as how many participants will be enrolled, what industry-recognized credentials they will earn, or what placement/retention rate is projected.

- No WIOA alignment:
  Does not mention coordination with local American Job Centers or WIOA performance accountability metrics such as measurable skill gains.

Well-Written Example

Pathways to Tomorrow: The Lakota Tribal Community Empowerment Collaboration (LTCEC) requests $350,000 in WIOA Adult funds for the 18-month "Pathways to Tomorrow" initiative (January 2027 – June 2028). This demand-driven program will provide sector-based occupational skills training to 125 low-income adults and long-term unemployed individuals in the greater Lakota tribal region. By aligning with regional workforce needs, CEPI will prepare participants for high-demand, family-sustaining careers in the local Health Care and Advanced Manufacturing sectors.

Labor Market Analysis: The University of Wisconsin's regional labor market analysis, conducted through the third quarter of 2026, shows acute labor shortages in these fields. According to the state's 2026 Employment Security Department data, regional demand for certified nursing assistants and production technicians has grown 14% over the last two years, leaving over 450 local vacancies unfilled, combined. Concurrently, the Tribe's target zip codes face an average unemployment rate of 8.2%, well above the state average.

Three-Phase Approach: To bridge this skills gap, LTCECI will deploy a comprehensive, data-driven service delivery strategy in close coordination with the Northern Wisconsin Workforce Development Board and the American Job Center network. The program consists of three integrated phases:

1. Intake and Supportive Services: Co-location at local Job Centers to conduct WIOA eligibility verification, comprehensive objective assessments, and the deployment of supportive services (transportation and childcare stipends) to remove barriers to participation.

2. Accelerated Training: Cohort-based training utilizing an Integrated Education and Training (IET) model, leading to industry-recognized credentials including Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) and Certified Production Technician (CPT) certifications.

3. Employer-Driven Placement: Direct job placement through our established employer advisory council, featuring commitments from five major regional employers for paid work experiences and priority hiring.

WIOA Alignment: LTCEC is structurally aligned with the federal WIOA primary indicators of performance and projects the following measurable outcomes for this cohort:

- Credential Attainment Rate: 85% of enrolled participants will attain an industry-recognized credential within 12 months.
- Employment Placement Rate (Q2 Post-Exit): 80% of graduates will be placed into unsubsidized employment in their field of study.
- Employment Retention Rate (Q4 Post-Exit): 78% of placed participants will maintain employment 12 months post-program.
- Median Earnings (Q2 Post-Exit): An expected median wage of $22.50 per hour, facilitating economic self-sufficiency.

Accountability: LTCEC has a proven 15-year track record of administering federal and state workforce development grants, including a fully implemented Banner case management tracking system and clean audits over the past 15 years for finances and compliance with Uniform Guidance (2 CFR 200).

How This Executive Summary is More Effective

This example is more effective because it treats the Executive Summary as a condensed, high-impact proposal rather than an introductory narrative. It answers every critical question a federal, state, or local reviewer has within the first two minutes of reading. The specific reasons this version succeeds under WIOA review criteria include:

1. It Uses Clear, Quantifiable Facts (No Fluff): Instead of a vague statement like "people are struggling," it pins the problem to specific metrics: a 14% sector growth rate, 450 unfilled vacancies, and an 8.2% local unemployment rate. The very first sentence declares the exact dollar amount ($350,000), the explicit funding stream (WIOA Adult funds), and the precise timeline (18 months).

2. It Directly Adheres to WIOA Statutory Priorities: It specifically names WIOA priority populations: low-income adults and long-term unemployed individuals.It targets specific, high-demand industries (Health Care and Advanced Manufacturing), matching WIOA's mandate to fund demand-driven training rather than training for obsolete or low-wage jobs.

3. It Commits to the Exact WIOA Performance Indicators: The rewrite explicitly lists and projects goals for the exact WIOA Primary Indicators of Performance (Credential Attainment, Employment Rate at Quarter 2 (Q2) post-exit Employment Rate at Quarter 4 (Q4) post-exit, and Median Earnings).

4. It Explicitly Connects to the Existing Workforce Ecosystem: The rewritten summary explicitly mentions coordination with the Workforce Development Board, co-location at American Job Centers, and utilizing an Integrated Education and Training (IET) model.

5. It Proves Administrative Capability Upfront: The final paragraph directly alleviates the funder's risk. By citing compliance with Uniform Guidance (2 CFR 200) and mentioning established fiscal systems, it reassures reviewers that the organization has the financial maturity to manage federal funds without fraud, waste, or abuse.