AMPLIFY YOUR STORY: Using Data for Grant Writing

Purpose: Grant writing is one of the most dreaded parts of working at a non-profit. It's tedious, time consuming, and asks a lot of folks who are already overworked and underpaid. In this emPower Tool, we share a few best practices for using data (both qualitative and quantitative) in grant applications. Using data to *highlight your program needs* and *demonstrate services gaps* will strengthen your application and make you more competitive for funding.

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Create a Powerful Needs Statement

Every good grant proposal contains a *needs statement.* This statement describes the critical conditions that are affecting certain people or things in a specific place at a specific time. The purpose is to let funders know the need in the community that your organization is planning to address. *The needs statement is the heart of your entire case for support.*

Presenting a compelling needs statement is a critical part of the grant proposal. You will connect with a potential funder when they are convinced you both want to solve the same problem. If the funder does not understand or agree that there is a need for your project, they will lose interest in the rest of your proposal. It is often a convincing needs statement that motivates a funder to help.

Data in the form of raw numbers, percentages, and ratios give strength to a needs statement.

Data can be used to answer critical needs statement questions such as:

- **Who** is in need?
- **Where** are they?
- **When** is the need evident?
- **What** is the need?
- **Why** does this need occur?
- **What** are the consequences of meeting the need?
- **How** is the need linked to your organization?

Show you have a solid, achievable plan:

- Avoid undocumented assertions. If you make a claim, ask yourself, "According to whom?" and "How do I know this?" then look for a reputable source to back up your claim.
- Be careful to not be too vague or broad in your statement.
- Be specific about the geographic areas you serve.
- Give a clear sense of urgency.
- Demonstrate your program has just the right approach. Show off your expertise with your data.

HOW Should We Use Data?

Use data points to:

- Define the extent of the problem(s) your program will address
- Demonstrate your knowledge of the population(s) you will serve
- Explain the efficacy of the approach you propose.

WHY Should We Use Data?

Funders see data as "evidence" in the case you are making for your program:

- Data give your reader/funder a **deeper understanding** of the population(s) you plan to serve, and how they will benefit from your unique approach.
- Data establish a **baseline** for comparisons when your program makes impacts.
- Using **follow-up** data in grant reports is a great way to show the impacts of you work and show changes to the group(s) you serve over time.

WHERE Do We Get Data?

- Look for **publicly available data**, like Census or state/county/city data *(see the Using Public Data emPower Tool).*
- Look at your **internal data**, including case notes—what patterns have you and your staff observed?
- **Plan ahead:** collect data now to help build your case to funders in the future.

Do's and Don'ts of Using Data in Grant Writing

Example Organizational and Community Need: Breastfeeding Support Group for Somali mothers in South Seattle

LESS OF THIS	MORE OF THIS
Avoid using generalized data that does not apply to the focus population or statement of need in your grant application. **Example: generalized data that doesn't apply specifically to the need of** <u>Somali</u> **mothers:** "35% of birthing parents in Washington State have identified breastfeeding as the leading stressor in becoming a new parent."	**Use data specific to your focus population or population(s) identified in the statement of need** in your grant application. **Example:** "In our latest organizational needs assessment, 68% of Somali parent participants reported wanting more breastfeeding support."
Avoid using data or program outcomes that were collected more than five years ago, unless you are using that data for a comparison of past-vs-current services, community trends or needs. **Example of data that's too old to show current need:** "In 2004, our program served over 200 children and families in the Somali community."	**Use data or program outcomes that are recent** (within 5 years), **and specific to your application statement of need**. **Example:** "Last year, our program served 347 Somali families in the Seattle Area."
Avoid using borrowed data (data from outside your organization), **without citing your sources**. If it is not your internal data, it needs a citation to be credible. **Example of uncited data:** "A recent academic study found that 1 in 7 immigrant families have children once they arrive in the United States." *(Who did the study? When?)*	**Use data that is citable and makes sense in the context of your grant proposal**. Clearly give credit to the original data source in your application. **Example:** "A recent study found that 1 in 7 immigrant families have children once they arrive in the United States (Example University, 2020)."

Using Qualitative Data in Grant Writing

While it is true that many funders are looking for quick, easy numbers in your grant application, they are also often looking for narrative data to support your identified need – what are you clients saying? In many cases, qualitative data is just as important as quantitative data as it provides context, elaborates on client needs, and provides a personal connection to participants' lives.

Qualitative data can come in many forms: case notes, client satisfaction surveys, conversations with clients, video interviews, etc. While qualitative data is often collected in a similar way to quantitative data, it does require informed consent from the participant. Before you use a client's story, direct quote, or case notes, it is <u>incredibly</u> important that you, a) ask the client permission to use their data/story, b) document their approval (or disapproval), and, c) respect the confidentiality of the client and their family. *See the **Data Confidentiality for Nonprofits** emPower Tool.*

Qualitative Data Example

"Last year, our organization conducted a client satisfaction survey with clients receiving home visiting services from our Doula Program. Surveys asked that clients report on other services they wish were provided by our organization. One respondent replied:

> *'I wish I could talk to other Somali moms who are learning how to breastfeed. I think having a breastfeeding group would be really helpful for me and my baby.'* – Doula Program Participant, age 27"