

What's in a Name?

The Power of Words

We hear the words "grant writer" and "grant writing" all the time. But how about swapping those words for something better—more accurate, more inclusive, and more effective?

Who cares? Why get picky with this language? Because we know words matter, affecting how we think and ultimately impacting what we do.

The field of grant development, formally initiated in 1972 with training by The Grantsmanship Center, has grown, evolved, and become more complex, touching a vast number of lives. We get it, "grant writer" is often meant as shorthand, an abbreviation used by busy people moving mountains to make the world better. Here's why we'd like to change this terminology:

First, it's incorrect.

If you're a grantmaker, then you write grants. But if you're trying to get grant funding, then you write proposals or applications, not grants. And a more accurate title would be: **grant proposal writer, grant developer, grant specialist, development specialist, grant professional**, or something else. But not "grant writer." Grantmakers write grants.

It's a misdirect.

"Grant writing" implies that the "grant" (the award) plus "writing" sums it all up. It can inadvertently trigger chasing money instead of pursuing impact—a counterproductive, even dangerous approach.

What matters more than the money is what your program will accomplish—the results—the outcomes you're proposing. Sure, money's a factor—a tool—but it's just not the most important ingredient.

And it's misleading because developing a successful grant proposal requires so much more than writing. Yes, writing is certainly part of it, but writing is the culmination of a more complex planning process. Critical thinking, logic, data, and a sense of humanity inspire funders to award grants. Careless thinking, with faulty assumptions and bloviated claims, results in declines, no matter how lovely the written words.

"Grant writer" suggests that people simply put words on a page to get money—like pulling a rabbit out of a hat. It doesn't work that way.

It shortchanges people and the process.

You'd never intentionally disrespect colleagues or the people you serve, right? Of course not! But this terminology does just that by leaving out key people and essential processes.

Successful grant proposals rely on solid program planning, research, and teamwork. They show an understanding of the community, its needs, and the causes of the problems it faces. It's a thoughtful process, which at best is logical, culturally sensitive and inspired by a drive to help others.

Funders ask: "What about the people you serve—did you engage them in planning?" Those people, your beneficiaries, are critical to this process. When their vision, voices, and experience are neglected or left out, a project is usually doomed.

And what about program staff? Ever heard the wails after a grant was awarded and program staff who weren't consulted asked, "You want us to do what?"

When administrators and the board are overlooked or ignored, valuable insight, guidance, and muscle are lost. They're left feeling blindsided and the work may be jeopardized. Other community leaders and organizations also have a stake in your work. Collaborations that including their energy and knowledge benefit everyone.

Developing a grant proposal requires connecting people, getting informed, listening to various viewpoints, juggling divergent personalities and priorities, building coalitions, being an advocate, and ultimately creating and articulating a compelling plan for action that reflects the community. It's so much more than just writing. When the process succeeds, it's because it wraps its arms around the entire community, authentically meeting needs so that grant funding does actually make the world better.

Whatever your job title—proposal writer, program planner, development director, executive director, grant professional, board member, volunteer, or something else—we know that your hours are often long as you bring vital change to your community. Thank you for your passion, hard work and dedication—for what you contribute and accomplish every day!

We wish you great success and satisfaction!



Want more?

[The Grantsmanship Center](#) has a wealth of resources for you! For 50 years, we've served nonprofits, academia, and government and Native American groups by providing [training](#) and the textbook, [Grantsmanship: Program Planning & Proposal Writing](#). Choose a training to fit your budget, schedule, and experience and join 145,000+ alumni helping to build a better world!