



Advancing the Community College

STRATEGIC PLAN

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Many community colleges are cutting their budgets in response to the faltering economy and the resulting reduced state support for higher education. A comprehensive grants development process to advance a community college strategic plan becomes increasingly important during difficult economic times. An effective grants development office, staffed with motivated and trained professionals, can raise millions from federal, state, and local government agencies. With deliberate planning and well-developed systems, it is possible to obtain restricted funding from public grants to not only advance the college's strategic plan but also to achieve a significant return on investment. The methodical planning process and fundamental operating systems of the Grants Development Office at Sinclair Community College, Dayton, Ohio, were described in *New Century Series Resource Paper #1* from the Council for Resource Development.

BY NEIL HERBKERSMAN AND KARLA HIBBERT-JONES

The Sinclair Grants Development Planning Model

During the 1990s, grants development at Sinclair operated on a “bubble-up” model. Faculty, staff, and administrators would “bubble-up” great ideas. The Grants Development Office provided the services needed to complete the proposal. Services ranged from approving the narrative and budget and getting the Provost’s signature, to comprehensive project planning, budgeting, and proposal writing. Although there was value in this model, and it resulted in significant funding for many college projects, its random nature was not planned and projects may or may not have supported Sinclair’s strategic initiatives.

Today the focus and activities of the Grants Development Office support the three pillars of Sinclair’s Strategic Plan: Student Centered Learning and Development;

Workforce Development; and Reallocating, Realigning, Reorganizing, and Reengineering. Grants planning at Sinclair Community College is both comprehensive and strategic and uses the following processes.

The Grants Development Annual Agenda

The Grants Development Annual Agenda is based on interviews with 20 to 30 key customers and stakeholders at Sinclair. The Grants Development Office compiles the major external resource requirements of these customers and stakeholders and categorizes the information in a database. Once developed, the Annual Agenda, consisting of 40 to 50 projects, provides a macro-level view and an annual plan. After Sinclair’s President’s Council (president, provost, and five vice presidents) approves the Annual Agenda, the grants team is empowered to

develop continuation projects and new projects without resource constraints (no significant matching funds or new office, classroom, or laboratory space required).

Analysis of Projects with Decision-making Matrix

New projects with resource constraints (projects requiring significant matching funds or new office, classroom, or laboratory space) and any new bubble-up ideas that surface during the year are further analyzed with a grants development decision-making matrix. The matrix is used to assess the new grant opportunities against the college strategic plan and the other projects on the agenda. The matrix is a management tool consisting of 10 critical measures utilized to make the critical go/no-go decisions based on a rational process rather than, “Wow, what a neat idea—let’s do it!”

SINCLAIR COMMUNITY COLLEGE
GRANTS DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

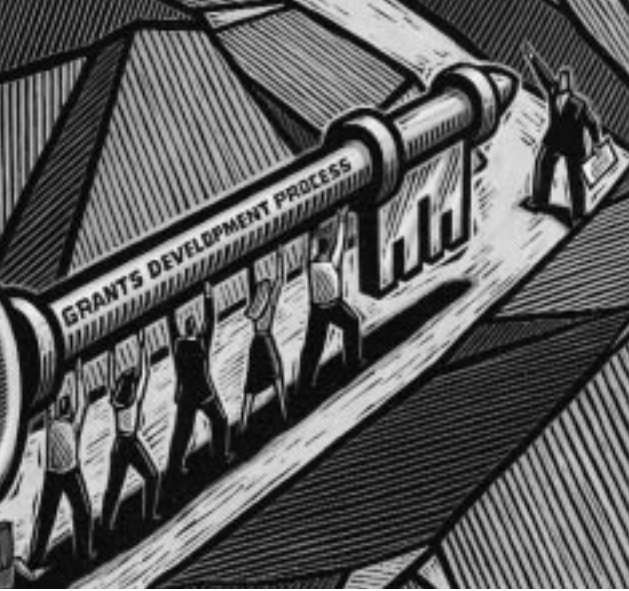
Key Performance Indicators	Operational Definition of Benchmark	Metric
1. Total grant funding per year exceeds benchmark	Total annual grant funding awarded as a result of the Grants Development Office—excluding financial aid, state appropriations for construction, etc.	Last three-year average benchmark = \$5,900,000 per year
2. Percent of funding success exceeds benchmark	Number of grants funded divided by the number of proposals submitted	Last three-year average benchmark = 73 percent funding success rate
3. Percentage of proposals submitted support Sinclair’s 14 strategic initiatives exceeds benchmark	Number of proposals submitted that support the 14 strategic initiatives divided by the total number of proposals submitted	Last three-year average benchmark = 85 percent of proposals support strategic initiatives
4. Return on investment exceeds benchmark	Total annual grant funding awarded divided by the Grants Development Office annual operating budget (salaries, benefits, duplicating, travel, etc.)	Last three-year average benchmark = 45:1 (or \$45 earned for every \$1 invested on the Grants Development Office)

Pre-award Services

1. Research for Funding Sources
2. Design and Develop Projects and Proposals
3. Edit Proposals and Reports
4. Transmit Proposals to Funding Agency

Post-award Services

1. Negotiate with Funding Agency
2. Troubleshoot for College and Project Directors
3. Provide Technical Assistance to Project Directors
4. Negotiate, Troubleshoot, and Contract with Partners



A cross-functional team analyzes each grant opportunity, independently uses the matrix to score the grant opportunity, discusses the results of the independent scoring, and comes to a consensus on whether or not to pursue the opportunity given other priorities and time availability. A no-go decision is made if:

- The grant opportunity does not advance the strategic plan,
- There is not enough time to adequately plan the project and write the proposal,

- The auditable matching funds cannot be obtained,
- The probability of funding is very low compared with the time and effort required to respond to the request for proposal.

Making this go/no-go decision is critical to ensure that the college can effectively compete for a grant opportunity, and Sinclair has the core competencies and partners to successfully complete the project.

A key question asked of all potential project directors is “Are you prepared to win?” A positive response to this question is critical.

A project director must be a true champion with passion for his or her project, a desire to help develop and write the proposal, and a high level of commitment to implement the project when funded. Without such a champion, a project may be doomed to failure or low levels of success. Sinclair will not submit a proposal without such a committed champion to manage the funded project.

The Preliminary Grants Review

As approved projects are planned and devel-

oped during the fiscal year and additional details are discovered, the Grants Development Office completes a Preliminary Grants Form and submits it to the President’s Council for review. Adjustments are made to the project based on this review and their comments. Occasionally, a project is stopped at this point if it no longer advances the college toward the strategic plan. Once approved, the grants team works with the project director throughout the process providing proactive, hands-on assistance with planning the project, writing the proposal, and developing the budget.

The Transmittal Process

Finally, the proposal receives a financial review and approval by key staff members and administrators, is signed by the Provost, and shipped to the agency. The entire grants development process may take days for a simple proposal to a local foundation, or months for a complex, multi-year project to a federal funding agency.

Advantages of Grant Development Planning

There are major advantages to creating and following a methodical grants development

process and providing comprehensive services. The process results in matured projects, with high levels of institutional buy-in, that really must be done and truly add value to Sinclair. They are not just one individual's "neat ideas." As a result, even if Sinclair receives a rejection letter, the enthusiasm, need for the project, and value of the project plan are not lost. The proposal is overhauled and prepared for resubmission. If it is of major strategic importance to Sinclair, internal funds may be allocated to at least pilot test the project. But all the passion for a project is of no value unless the Grants Development Office has effective services and operating systems.

The Fundamental Operating Systems of the Sinclair Grants Development Office

In order to be effective, the Grants Development Office must clearly describe the services that it will offer and have a set of fundamental operating systems to follow. The Sinclair Grants Development Office provides the following services, which are divided into pre-award (leading up to the submission of the proposal) and post-award (after projects are funded) activities.

Two fundamental operating systems are used to provide these services.

Project Management Approach

Developing and processing 80 to 110 projects per year requires organization and the implementation of project management techniques. Establishing a breakdown of work structure, creating a critical path chart, scheduling resources, and estimating budget are all critical skills for a successful grants development office. These skill sets are the province of project management. The Sinclair Grants Development Office uses these skills and project management software (Microsoft Project®) to juggle priorities and projects. The grants team regularly attends professional development courses and reads textbooks and articles on project management.

Compression Planning® with Storyboarding

According to Leon Bey, manager of the Grants Information Center of the Dayton and Montgomery County Public Library in Dayton, "80 percent of the time and effort in writing a proposal involves planning activities—the final 20 percent is the actual writing." Small group planning and problem solving are essential tools for any grants development office. Yet most grants development professionals are not trained in



small group process. At Sinclair, the Grants Development Office uses Compression Planning® with Storyboarding to significantly improve its grants planning. The grants team members are trained facilitators and use the process daily to develop proposals and operate efficiently and effectively.

Jerry McNellis, President of the McNellis Company, defines Compression Planning® with Storyboarding as “a visual group process, designed to bring out a group’s best thinking and energy on a specific issue, in an environment of fair play and equal participation, led by a skilled facilitator.”

A typical Compression Planning session involves the project director, principal investigators, and other project stakeholders (students, deans, department chairs, vice presidents, etc.). The assembled team, led by a trained facilitator, formulates such project components as the goal, objectives, plan of operation, evaluation, proposed partners, resource requirements, and budget elements. Ideas generated during “pure form thinking” are captured on cards and posted on storyboards. The idea cards are later combined, categorized, and rank ordered to build strong, rich ideas. The end result of one or multiple storyboarding sessions is a stack of cards that form the basis of the proposal.

Grants Development: In Pursuit of Continuous Improvement

To measure Sinclair’s progress toward accomplishing the strategic plan, college operating units develop key performance indicators. In response to this process, Sinclair’s Grants Development Office develops and publishes a spreadsheet of annual performance data (see table summarizing the key performance indicators of the grants office). Outstanding achievement is possible due to high levels of commitment from the executive level (the president, provost, and vice presidents), a close, cooperative relationship with the Sinclair Foundation, and strong support from all other areas of the college, including the duplication and mailroom staff. The Grants Development Office includes a staff of two professionals who report to the vice president for administration and receive regular, strategic advice from the grants and contracts manager and budget office. Sinclair faculty, staff, and departments play an important role in the processes facilitated by the grants team.

Conclusion

A successful grants development office is a valuable resource in advancing a community college mission and strategic plan. Success is derived from a combination of many elements that create an environment to actively support and encourage project development. These elements include highly motivated and trained professionals, high-quality processes and systems, excellent commitment from college leadership,

outstanding support at all levels of the institution, and a pinch of good luck. Community colleges that employ methodical processes and effective operating systems to support grant development will achieve high rates of return.

For Further Information

Full copies of reports and forms listed in this article can be found on the Sinclair Grants Development Web page (www.sinclair.edu/departments/grants). The resource paper entitled *Grants Development at Sinclair Community College: A Case Study from a Single-Campus, Urban Institution*, is

available for \$5.00 from Council for Resource Development, One Dupont Circle, Suite 410, Washington, DC 20026 (202-822-0750) (www.crdnet.org). For more information on Compression Planning® with Storyboarding, contact the McNellis Company, New Brighton, PA, 800-569-6015 or at (www.mcnellis.com).

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