Needs Statement Toolkit

This toolkit contains tips and tools to assist you in development of a comprehensive Needs Statement for grant proposals.

The Harvest Foundation
www.theharvestfoundation.org

General Overview

The **Need Statement** of your grant proposal is where you want to start writing your proposal since it answers the question: What is the need that my organization will address in Martinsville Henry County?

The Need Statement is important as it is where Harvest will first look to determine if the proposed project addresses an identified need in MHC and whether it aligns with the Foundation's priorities.

The basic elements of a well-written Need Statement are just commonsense:
- **General description of the situation**
  - Clearly and concisely define the need. Keep it simple, avoid jargon and make it easy to read.
  - Document the need. It should be well supported with evidence such as statistical facts, data, documented research and expert views.
- **Target population to be served**
  - It should focus on the people to be served, rather than the organization's needs.
- **Project impact**
  - What change will occur as a result of the proposed project?
  - To what extent will the people served be impacted?

Why is the Needs Statement Important?

A needs statement answers the question: "Why care?" It demonstrates there is a problem that is important; is significant; and is urgent. A needs statement must relate to your organization's mission statement and to the Harvest's priorities.

The needs statement establishes the problem and describes the conditions in the community that your organization will address. The needs statement is an opportunity to demonstrate your understanding of the community issue and your organization's ability to address the need.

Needs Statement Process

• Define problem
• Describe implications, importance
• Relate to your organization's mission and funder's
• Show gaps
• Back it up

Needs Statements – What to Include

Problem description: what is the problem? Be sure to answer the questions: Who? What? Where? When? and Why? Use the needs statement to illustrate your understanding of the problem; don't just describe the symptoms.

Problem recognition: why is it a problem? Who else sees it as a problem? What are the community stakeholder views?

Problem implications: what will happen to the population served and the community if the problem is not resolved? Is there a cost to society?

Problem hurdles: Clearly identify the challenges to addressing the problem. Describe the gap between what exists now and what ought to be? What has prevented resolution of the problem?

Problem urgency: why does it need to be addressed now? What is currently being done about the problem?

What solving the problem means: why should outside funding be used now to solve the problem or reduce the gap? Be clear about what can be accomplished within the time frame of the grant. Is the proposed action plan achievable and measurable?

Human interest story: provide a real example of how the problem is affecting someone's life and how the proposed program will impact his/her life. Make it real. Statistics can be informative or startling, but they're impersonal. Put a face on the problem by describing a similar client and circumstances that yielded a positive result.

Data and Statistics

The Role of Data and Statistics
• Supporting: should back up the issue you want to address
• Rely on Context: try to compare apples to apples
• Objective: provides outside information to substantiate the issue

Basic Rules
• Timely: data needs to be as recent as possible
• Unbiased: who did the research? Who funded the research?
• Reliable: it is considered reputable by other?

Data Searches

Demographic information clearinghouses, federal agencies, state agencies, foundations and other nonprofits, scholarly journals and articles, and industry publications are key resources for gathering statistics and data. Search engines, like Google, and knowledge-bases, like Wikipedia, can be good starting points; however you should use them to reach well researched, objective, data sources.

Qualities of Good Needs Statements

• Clear, Concise, Cogent and Compelling
• Written for the intellect and the emotions—contains both hard data and a human element
• The information flows logically to build a case for your proposal
• Engage the reader

Need Statement Weaknesses

• Not providing information requested
• Proposing something outside the scope of funder's identified priorities
• Using outdated or unsubstantiated information
• Gathering insufficient data
• Statistical pile-up
• Including unfamiliar concepts or terms
• Long, convoluted sentences

Needs Statement Tips

• Make the language tight—pare down and condense into what is the heart of the problem—and what your organization is going to solve or work toward solving. More is not necessarily better!
• Make it cogent—it should make sense and be relevant
• Make it compelling—it should engage and motivate your reader
• Avoid circular reasoning, which is making the absence of a solution the actual problem (i.e., the problem is that we have no senior center in our community. Building a senior center will solve the problem.)

The bottom line is that to have a fundable project, it must potentially solve the problem your organization and Harvest are interested in and must generate results that can be measured in some way.

This toolkit has been adapted from resources developed by the United Way of Central New Mexico - Center of Nonprofit Excellence

<u>Tools</u>
3 Questions to Get Started on Your Statement of Need
developed by the Foundation Center

Statement of Need Worksheet
developed by the Foundation Center

Example of Need Statement
example courtesy of GrantSpace (www.grantspace.org)

<u>Resources</u>
Foundation Center
Proposal Writing: The Statement of Need
http://foundationcenter.org/getstarted/tutorials/shortcourse/need.html

GrantSpace
Provides easy-to-use, self-service tools and resources to help nonprofits become more viable grant applicants and build strong, sustainable organizations
http://grantspace.org/

Use the following three questions to start writing your statement of need:

1. What is problem your project will address?

2. Who is affected by the problem and how?

3. What facts and statistics can be used to substantiate the problem and the impact on the affected population?
(data gathered by your organization or publicly available information)

Use the following five questions to guide the creation of your statement of need.

1. What is the need for the project? Is it a serious problem or issue, or a lack of a needed service?

Example: Hamilton County elementary students are reading below grade level. Students leave the elementary schools unprepared for more advanced studies. The average elementary school student in the district reads two grade levels below his own.

Your project:

2. What are the facts and the sources that back up the need for your project?

Example: The latest standardized reading scores place Hamilton's students in the nineteenth percentile. Last year the district's high school graduation rate dipped below 50 percent for the first time ever.

Your project:

3. Who will benefit from the project and how? Define the audience by age, gender, location, ethnic background, country of origin, or a combination of these factors.

Example: The project targets Hamilton County elementary school students who are reading below grade level. One-on-one personalized reading instruction will raise reading levels within 20 weeks' time. Senior citizens will tutor the students providing them with rewarding work, supplemental income, and an opportunity for stimulating intergenerational interaction.

Your project:

4. Can you put a human face on the problem by relating a story, example, or quote that will highlight the problem or the benefits of the solution?

Example: Charlene Jones is a local fourth grader whose reading test scores in the past two years had shown a striking lack of progress. At the beginning of the school year, Charlene was reading at a second grade level. Enrolled in the initial class of the Wisdom Exchange pilot project, Charlene met twice a week with Mrs. Sarah Mulcahy. At the end of the ten weeks Charlene's reading scores improved to almost third grade level. Even more importantly, her classroom teacher reports that her interest level and classroom attention both showed marked improvement as her confidence grew.

Your project:

5. What is the solution to the problem you have identified?

Example: A study entitled "The Benefits of One-on-One Reading Instruction" found that an extra three hours per week of personal instruction can quickly raise reading levels by a full grade. One-on-one reading instruction, twice a week using senior tutors. A 10-week pilot project demonstrated success.

Your project:

Considering the answers to the above questions, you can begin to craft the statement of need. Remember that your final statement of need will:

- **describe the status quo that exists before the solution to the problem**
- **target a population group(s) and a geographic location**
- **present the solution to the problem**
- **describe the benefits to the target audience(s) and possibly to society at large.**

Good Example of a Need Statement from the Grantseeker's Guide to Winning Proposals

Approximately 4,500 foster youth "age out" of the foster care system in California each year and must make the transition to self-sufficiency without the necessary skills or support to become financially independent, contributing adults. Additionally, many youth find themselves precariously teetering on the brink of lifelong poverty as a result of unhealthy behaviors and attitudes inherited from their environment.   "They are, in fact, the most at-risk kids in the country those likely to consistently fail. This group is made up of teens in foster care; youth involved in the juvenile justice system; teens who have children of their own; and youth who never finished high school ...their risk is greatest; their hardship is most profound; and their current and future costs to our communities are the most significant." *(Essay - Kids Count 2004, the Annie E. Casey Foundation)*

Due to the lack of services tailored to their needs, many emancipating foster youth are either at risk of becoming, or already homeless. Though the City of Oakland's unemployment rate averaged 7.3% in 2006, (California Employment Development Department) this number is considerably higher for at-risk youth. Studies show that 24-50 percent of former foster youth become homeless within the first 18 months after emancipating from the child welfare system, 46 percent lack a high school diploma, 62 percent have not maintained employment for one year, 42 percent become parents within 12 - 18 months, 30 percent of youth in San Francisco reported no income in 2003; almost 60 percent live below poverty level, 68 percent of youth in a California Youth Authority facility have spent time in foster care, 70 percent of San Quentin inmates grew up in foster care. *(U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development -All the Way Home Conference and "All Youth 50 Stories One System" -Profiles of Youth Systems in California's Workforce Investment Areas)*

Situations faced by at-risk youth place them at a disadvantage due to lack of housing and transitional living arrangements, education support, employment training, continuing education opportunities, and independent living skills. These factors in many cases lead to high school drop-out, unemployment or underemployment, dependence on public assistance, early parenting, and incarceration. Due to the range and complexity of their issues, dedicated resources are required to target and alleviate specific barriers to employment. In response, Pivotal Point has identified at-risk, low income youth ages 16-24 as a priority group to receive intensive education, employment, vocational, entrepreneurship and other support services.

There also currently exists an unmet need for career technical training, post-secondary education, apprenticeships, and employment in high wage/high growth careers that begins with a lack of basic skills. Among young people ages 18-24 in Oakland CA, 36.2 percent are not high school graduates compared to 24.0 percent in Alameda County and 29.3 percent in the State of California. *(Kids Count 2000 Online Census Data - Education Profiles for Oakland, CA I Alameda County, CA I California)* Another issue plaguing Oakland communities is the propensity for young people to become involved in highly dangerous and illegal underground economies. The draw for these disenfranchised youth is a lucrative way of making money that provides a sense of "street credibility" without working for individuals who are not culturally in tune with the aspirations and desires of these young people.

Project EEVE (Education, Employment Training, Vocational Skills Development, and Entrepreneurship Training) is designed to teach young people on the "eve of adulthood" how to increase their employability, develop a specific vocational skill set and create safe, legal business opportunities for themselves. These skills coupled with the supportive environment found at Pivotal Point will offer the sense of autonomy and self-worth at-risk youth desperately seek, while providing a foundation for academic excellence and future leadership. Through our program we are able to assist at-risk youth in making healthy, productive transitions into adulthood, by providing them with tools to complete their

educations, find jobs that will lead to lifetime careers and take advantage of opportunities to pursue their own business ventures. Youth participating in our program will unlock their unique entrepreneurship creativity, gain a greater understanding of the free enterprise system, improve their quality of life, and dare to prepare for promising futures.

GrantSpace. Grantseekers Guide to Winning Proposals. Retrieved from http://grantspace.org/tools/sample-documents

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Above example encompasses all of the basic elements of a well-written Needs Statement:

- **General description of the situation**
  - Clearly and concisely defined the need. It is simple, avoid of jargon and easy to read.
  - Documented the need. Well supported with evidence.
- **Target population to be served**
  - Focused on the people to be served, rather than the organization's needs.
- **Project impact**
  - Included projected impact as a result of the proposed project
  - Addressed how the people served would be impacted