

Grant Reporting Tool

Gateway Center for Giving, 2015

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Intended Audience

This tool is intended for grantmakers who are developing or enhancing their processes, tools and forms related to grantee reporting.

Intended Use

This tool is intended to be used as a “menu” of ideas and questions that can be incorporated into grantmakers processes, tools and forms for grantee reporting. Grantmakers should feel free to select from the various categories of tips and questions below, and to modify this language to more specifically suit the interests and needs of their own organizations.

About the Gateway Center for Giving

The [Gateway Center for Giving](http://www.centerforgiving.org) helps donors do more. We strengthen philanthropy and promote community impact by sharing best practices and supporting collaborative action to help address our region’s most pressing issues. The Gateway Center for Giving was founded in 1970, and our members include corporations, donor-advised funds, foundations, trusts and professional advisors actively involved in philanthropy. To learn more, visit www.centerforgiving.org.

Contents

Part I.

Tips for
Grantmakers
Requesting
Reports

Part II.

Tips for
Grantmakers to
Give Their
Grantees

Part III.

Sample Questions
for Grantmakers
to Ask

Part IV.

Other Resources
for Best Practices
in Grant
Evaluation &
Reporting

Part I. Tips for Grantmakers Requesting Reports

Preparing Grantees for Reporting

- Make sure your grant-seekers are acquainted with your reporting process.
- Provide the reporting expectations and questions in your RFP, or your initial grant agreement, so that everyone is clear on expectations. Consider posting it on your organization's website.
- Your reporting tool (database, form, etc.) should reflect the questions and commitments outlined in grant applications and grant agreements.
- Hold a technical training to review the reporting process and answer questions.
- If your organization does not already, consider providing funding to support grantees' evaluation and learning efforts, in the form of staff time, consultants, software, training, measurement tools, etc.
- Consider implementing some form of interim progress monitoring, such as interim reports or site visits. This supports the value of continuous learning and improvement and allows grantmakers and grantees to make mid-course corrections prior to the close of the grant.
- Consider providing some mechanism for grant-seekers and grantees to provide feedback on your grant-making and grant reporting processes.

Choose the Right Questions

- Ask questions that will elicit information your organization will use.¹ For example, if your organization's funding strategy is directed at achieving specific goals or impacts, consider assessing the degree to which the grant has supported or furthered the foundation's strategy. Be wary of asking for information that will simply sit on a shelf after it is collected.
- Be clear with grantees about how information will be used.
- Limit the number of narrative responses, as they are more time-consuming. Consider collecting multiple-choice responses, which are also useful for aggregating data and identifying trends.

¹ Report information can also be used for: building a knowledge base, fostering/assessing grantee learning, building grantmaker/grantee relationships, informing future grant making decisions, identifying best practices, aggregating outcomes across grantees, monitoring change over time, and identifying unmet needs of those served and grantees. What you ask (and in what level of detail) will depend on how you plan to use the information. If you want to aggregate grantee data to assess grantmaker impact, then how you ask for quantitative data needs to be very specific.

Save Your Grantees' Time and Administrative Resources

- Consider offering more than one option for how materials are submitted (e.g., email, faxed, hard copy, etc.)
- Consider your submission requirements for physical documents. Can copying, hole-punching, stapling, etc., materials be completed by foundation staff after the documents have arrived at your office? (Keep in mind that the grantee may have many funders with varying administrative requirements they are trying to meet.)
- Consider accepting budgets and other materials in formats other than the format that you provide. (Bear in mind that your grantee may have to present varying formats to multiple grantors.)
- Consider graduated reporting requirements that increase with the duration or size of a grant. (Grant monitoring, to any degree, is a best practice important to ensuring the responsible stewardship of foundation funds. However, making reporting requirements proportional to the grant is one way to minimize the burden on grantees.)
- Consider aligning reporting deadlines with the program's life cycle or the grantees reporting schedules, rather than an arbitrary timeline set by the foundation.
- If your organization is heavily reliant on data from grantee reporting, consider adopting practices that will encourage grantees' participation, such as incentives, reminders, or withholding a small portion of grant funds until all required reports are received.

Part II. Tips for Grantmakers to Give Their Grantees

Grantmakers may consider including some of these tips in their own training materials, user guides or instructions within report templates in order to provide guidance and support to grantees.

Reporting Instructions to Grantees

- Refer back to your initial grant application and grant agreement as you complete the grant report, to ensure that you are addressing every goal and objective described in the application.
- Present your accomplishments and learnings as they pertain to what was outlined in your grant application and/or agreement. If your grantmaker allows, then feel free to add additional relevant information, but do not omit anything that was outlined in your grant application and/or grant agreement.
- Be specific and honest. You, the grantee, are the expert on your programs and your organization. Your grantmaker wants to learn from and partner with you. If your project has not met its targeted outputs or outcomes, do not overstate your results. If you have encountered unanticipated challenges, then clearly explain your experiences and what you have learned from them. Demonstrations of learning and continuous improvement are as valuable as success.
- Avoid surprises. If your project is experiencing unanticipated setbacks or changes, then notify your grantmaker well before any reporting deadlines, so they can adjust their expectations and offer support and/or direction prior to receiving any surprising or confusing reports.
- At the time of application or when finalizing a grant agreement, discuss with the grantmaker whether or not reporting tools and timelines are negotiable and can be adjusted to best fit your program's specific implementation plan.
- Be clear and concise. Remember that your grantmaker does not know your program as well as you do.
- Find out whether the grantmaker is interested in site visits, or attending program capstone events.
- Toot your own horn! If your organization has experienced unanticipated successes, feel free to share those with your grantmakers in one form or another. If such supplemental information is not permitted in grant reporting, consider sharing news personally with grantmakers through phone calls, letters or emails.
- Even after the grant ends, share examples that illustrate the success or impact of your program (e.g., press releases, news stories, reports, anecdotes, etc.)

Tip!

Feel free to customize the language in these questions to reflect your organization's specific interests and priorities.

Part III. Sample Questions for Grantmakers to Ask

The following questions seek to gather information (both qualitative and quantitative) that is useful to grantmakers and nonprofit organizations when evaluating the success of programs, initiatives and funding relationships, and also to acknowledge learning that has been gained throughout the grant process.

*The questions listed below are offered as examples and are not mutually exclusive, nor exhaustive. **Grantmakers should select from the menu of questions to build their own reporting template.** Again, make sure your reporting questions reflect the priorities and commitments described in grant applications and Grant Agreements. By no means should a grantmaker include all of the questions below. Suggested questions are organized by the type of information to be gathered and how that information is most often used.*

General Program/Project Support

Accountability (Proposed vs. Actual). *Select from the following:*

- Refer back to your initial application (or Grant Agreement) and describe what you have accomplished based on your initial project description.
 - Who has been served by this grant (describe) and how many have been served?
 - What activities have you engaged in or provided to achieve your goals?
 - What have been the short and long-term measurable outcomes achieved by this grant? If some of the long-term outcomes have not yet been determined, please provide anticipated outcomes.
 - If your actual activities/outputs/outcomes are different than what was proposed, please explain.
- How have you collaborated with other organizations over the course of this project? Describe in detail one or two of your most significant collaborations. For project requests, address this question with respect to the funded project only.
- Are there any outstanding commitments or special terms of this grant that you have not yet accomplished? If so, then please explain your current status on those commitments.
- Share a brief story explaining how this grant had a positive impact on someone's life. If available, then please share news clippings, newsletter articles or photos related to your program/project.
- Please list your approved project/organizational expenses and your actual expenses.
 - Please make note of, and explain any major variations between your approved and actual expenses. (e.g., variations of over 10%, or variations of over \$1000).

Learning. *Select from the following:*

- What, if any, challenges or unexpected events did you encounter during the grant?
 - Staff turnover
 - Technology limitations
 - Lack of Volunteers
 - Loss of funding
 - Etc.
- How did you respond to those challenges?
- What specifically have you learned from this project/grant during this reporting period?
 - About your target population?
 - About your service delivery or program model?
 - About the issue you're addressing?
- How will you adjust your organization or project based on the lessons you have learned? How will you apply this learning to improve project implementation or project effectiveness, facilitate collaborative relationships, etc.?
- If available, please attach any recent evaluation results, outcome reports, or dashboards your organization uses to monitor this project.
- Have there been any significant changes to your organization during the grant period? Examples could include staff or board member changes.

Tip!

When writing multiple choice questions, offer responses that are of interest to your organization. This is useful for identifying common themes across grantees.

Sustainability. *Select from the following:*

- Will this project continue in the future, after the close of this grant?
 - Yes, at the same level
 - Yes, at an increased level
 - Yes, at a decreased level
 - No
- If so, then what are your plans, and what do you hope to accomplish with this project in the future?
- If so, have you identified sustainable funding for the project?
- Has this grant helped you obtain other sources of funding? If so, describe.

Additional Questions

General Operating Support. *Select from the following:*

Often, grantmakers and grantees will agree upon milestones, deliverables or strategic objectives that will be supported by general operating funds from the grantmaker. In those cases, common reporting questions might include the following:

- What strategic objectives or milestones did your organization achieve during this grant period?
- Describe any unforeseen challenges that interfered with your organization's implementation of its strategic objectives during the reporting period.
- Describe the ways in which this general operating support strengthened your organization's infrastructure, processes, or capacities and the impact that has had on services to clients/customers.
- If available, please provide your organization's Balanced Scorecard or similar report showing progress toward annual or strategic goals during the grant period.

Capital Campaign. *Select from the following:*

- Indicate whether your capital campaign project is open or complete.
- Did you meet your campaign goals? If not, how will/does this impact the campaign's objectives, and your organization overall?
- Did you meet your match goals, if any?

Part III. Other Resources for Best Practices in Grant Evaluation & Reporting

Websites & Publications

- Center for Effective Philanthropy, *Grantees Report Back: Helpful Reporting and Evaluation Processes* <http://www.effectivephilanthropy.org/portfolio-items/grantees-report-back/>
- Center for Effective Philanthropy, *Room for Improvement: Foundations' Support of Nonprofit Performance Assessment* <http://www.effectivephilanthropy.org/portfolio-items/room-for-improvement/>
- FSG, *The Evaluation of Capacity Building Grants*. http://www.fsg.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/PDF/Evaluation_of_Capacity_Building_Grants.pdf?cpgn=WP%20DL%20-%20The%20Evaluation%20of%20Capacity%20Building%20Grants%20-%20Key%20Learnings%20for%20Success
- Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, *General Operating Support*.
- Project Streamline <http://www.projectstreamline.org/>
- Project Streamline, *Drowning in Paperwork, Distracted from Purpose* http://www.projectstreamline.org/projectstreamline.org/documents/PDF_Report_final.pdf
- For a sample proposal and general operating support report, see: <http://www.dekalbfoundation.org/files/grants/Sample%20Operating%20Support%20Grant%20ProposalGrant%20Report.pdf>
- For additional information on:
 - Nonprofit Program Evaluation, see: [http://www.centerforgiving.org/Portals/0/documents/Nonprofit%20Program%20Evaluation%20Tools%20\(GCG\).pdf](http://www.centerforgiving.org/Portals/0/documents/Nonprofit%20Program%20Evaluation%20Tools%20(GCG).pdf)
 - Foundation Evaluation, using data gathered from grantee reporting and other sources, see: [http://www.centerforgiving.org/Portals/0/documents/Foundation%20Evaluation%20Tools%20\(GCG\)%20\(1\).pdf](http://www.centerforgiving.org/Portals/0/documents/Foundation%20Evaluation%20Tools%20(GCG)%20(1).pdf)

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