Third Period: Creative Writing

You do not need to be an experienced dissertation writer or an editor of a recognized periodical to write and win a grant. Teachers already possess several qualities that make them ideal candidates to write grants, especially grants that focus on providing students with a creative project or new experience. You know what your students need, you know the problems they face, and we hope you have an understanding of what it will take to make an impact on your students' learning experiences. In this chapter, you will find the basics of writing three vital components of your proposal: the needs statements, goals and objectives, and project descriptions. After breaking down each section, you will have the chance to read and critique a few examples from submitted proposals.

Teachers already possess several qualities that make them ideal candidates to write and win grants.

What Is a Needs Statement?

A needs statement, sometimes called a *statement of need*, is the portion of your proposal in which you convince the granting organization that there is in fact a problem that needs to be addressed through your grant. A needs statement is more than a complaint; it is, as the name identifies, a statement—a statement that is supported by data and research and identifies a specific problem or challenge that you are going to tackle for the benefit of your students, school, district, or community.

The needs statement is the rationale behind your entire proposal. Think of a lesson plan. You see that your students are still not grasping long division, so you decide to create a lesson to review and practice long division. Every teacher will answer these questions when planning a reteaching lesson:

What is the problem? "My students have not mastered long division."

How do you know this? "According to my students' scores on their long division quiz, 90 percent of them received a grade below 70 percent."

Are there any other outside factors that may be also causing this problem? "Last year this group of students had three teachers during the academic year. Their first teacher left on maternity leave. The replacement quit after one month of teaching. The third teacher was a brand-new teacher and had several classroom management issues. With all of this mobility, the students did not master all the fundamental math concepts needed as a prerequisite for long division."

When combined, the answers to these questions would be the needs statement of this lesson plan. In this example, the teacher is stating a problem, using data to support the reality of the problem, and giving the reader some anecdotal evidence after research about some of the underlying causes. These three skills (identifying a problem, collecting and analyzing data about the problem, and researching the causes and effects of the problem) are all skills that teachers, including *you*, already possess, and these are the same skills needed to write a needs statement.

Many times needs statements are not considered an essential component of the proposal. Big mistake! As educators, we may think that a needs statement is obvious or implied. "Of course schools need money. State budget allocations to schools are being cut and property values are on the decline." However, the needs statement is your first, and sometimes only, chance to really explain the specific problem you or your students are facing.

Pretend for a moment you are the one who decides the winning proposal for a $1,000 classroom project grant. After you decide which teacher and classroom you think should win the $1,000, you have to justify the decision to your board of directors. How will you justify your choice? How will you convince the board that the $1,000 will be more beneficial to students in the grant proposal you chose versus the other submissions?

That is why the needs statement section is so vitally important to a winning proposal and cannot be put to the side or hastily written. You are essentially telling the granting organization the entire scope of the problem. The granting organization will justify their allocation of funds based on the greatest impact for the greatest need, so identifying and describing your problem will allow the granting organization to determine the total impact your proposal can make. Your plan to fix the problem—the project description (described later in this chapter)—is an equally important factor in determining funding. However, without a true sense of the problem being addressed, the granting organization will not be able to justify funding any project, no matter how great of a project or program is proposed.

Every needs statement should contain most, if not all, of the following information. Use this checklist as you view some completed needs statements in this chapter and in appendix A.

- ☐ Clear explanation of the problem or challenge facing the proposer
- ☐ Insight into the classroom, school, school district, and community with current student and school data
- ☐ Anecdotal evidence that allows the reader to connect to the proposer's students and school
- ☐ Data and research to support the problem, challenge, and anecdotal evidence
- ☐ Connection to a larger-scale problem or consequence (national research or statistics of what happens if the problem is not addressed)

What Types of Problems Can Be Identified and Described in a Needs Statement?

Short answer: the request for proposal (RFP) will tell you. Some RFPs will be very specific and require the proposal to address an already-stated problem or need.

> *Example:* "Projects should increase college-acceptance rates in students from public high schools in Oakland, California."

In this example, the problem is already implied—low college-acceptance rates among public students attending schools in Oakland, California. Your needs statement in a proposal for this RFP won't need to identify a new problem but should focus on describing how this problem is affecting your classroom and school. What is the college-acceptance rate at your school? What are some specific factors unique to your school that can be attributed to this problem?

In other cases, the RFP may be very broad, giving you more autonomy in addressing a problem that you identify. If this is the case, you will definitely need to do some research on the granting organization. Go online and read the mission and vision statement for the granting organization. What is the overall mission of the organization? What types of grants did they award in the previous fiscal year? Submitting a proposal about a project to engage students in an after-school drama club to a granting foundation that focuses on math and science advancement in the classroom may be a waste of your time.

Most RFPs do have some focus given to a specific area of interest. They may not be as specific as the previous example, but the RFP may state a focus such as, "Funds will be given to a teacher who plans and implements a classroom project to increase student literacy skills." Here the general problem has been identified for you—a deficiency in literacy skills among students in a teacher's classroom. Your needs statement for this RFP, then, should focus specifically on the literacy attributes of your students. How many of your students are below grade level?

What resources does your classroom lack that are needed to increase student literacy? You can also talk about your class size or the number of students with learning disabilities, from low-income households, or who are English language learners. All of this information will give the funder a clear picture of the "needs" in your classroom specific to the parameters set by the RFP.

Here are examples from education grant RFPs that ask the proposer to identify and explain the area of need. Notice how some of these RFP examples already identify the problem and others leave the identifying to the proposer.

> *Example one:* Describe your classroom. What needs do your students have? How will this project address those needs? (UNITE Classroom Grant)
> *Example two:* What problem does your project address? Why is this issue significant? Why is this a problem? (Carnegie Foundation, Urban and Higher Education Grant)
> *Example three:* Please provide evidence that the program or project responds to a valid need and is superior to other competing programs or projects. (Entertainment Software Association Foundation Youth Grant)

What Data Are Appropriate to Be Included in a Needs Statement?

For classroom or school-based proposals, most data and research you will use in your needs statement are already at your disposal and should be included, because many funders will be looking for information about your students or school. Most of this information can be found on your school or district website or from your school secretary, clerk, or administrative assistant. Most of this information is also listed on a school's state report card. Possible data may include the following:

- Student demographic data
- Student socioeconomic data
- Student mobility rates
- Student data from standardized tests
- Student attendance data
- Student behavior incident reports and data
- Student drop-out rates
- Teacher attrition rates
- Average experience level of teachers

Remember, you are trying to convince the funder that there is a substantial and documented need within your classroom, school, or district. Using data and research can help the reviewers of your proposal grasp the urgency and volume of the need at hand. Take the two following examples. Which one do you think shows a greater need?

- My fifth-grade students are reading at a second-grade level. This is a major problem for our classroom. My students will continue to fall behind if they cannot read at the appropriate grade level.
- Nineteen of my twenty-six students are reading below grade level, with twelve of these students more than three grade levels behind in reading. According to research by the Center for Public Education, students who are behind in reading in elementary school are four times more likely to drop out of high school.

Just stating that your fifth-grade students read at a second-grade level is not enough to create the recognition of a substantial need from a funder. Although fifth-grade students reading at a second-grade level indicated incongruency, you need to explain why it is also a big problem. The second example starts to paint a picture of the needs in your classroom to the funder; the funder sees that you have a classroom of twenty-six students, with the majority of them struggling to read. The second example also brings a respected source into the conversation about the larger scope of the problem and how students reading below grade level in fifth grade can lead to further problems.

Using Anecdotal Evidence in the Needs Statement

Anecdotal evidence can be a great asset to any proposal when used in moderation. Although this type of data doesn't contain facts and figures, it can give the funder more information about the needs of the population being served. Sometimes, a national statistic or research study followed by a quick anecdotal insight from your personal classroom can really help the reader make a connection to your students or staff.

Let's take a look at the following needs statement. This statement was adapted from a proposal submitted by a student teacher in Chicago for a $500 classroom project grant. Look closely at how she uses anecdotal evidence:

> I am a student teacher in a kindergarten classroom in a K–8 elementary school in Chicago. In my class, there are twenty-one students, twelve of whom are ELLs with Spanish as their native language. My students will be beginning a unit on plants and the

> plant cycle next semester. My students are fortunate that they have access to some English resources inside the classroom; however, the ELL students don't have access to many books to read about plant life in Spanish. Although my cooperating teacher and I can speak and teach in Spanish, it does not have the same effect as reading a text. The students also don't have many opportunities for a hands-on-experience with plant life because most of them live in apartment buildings or condos where having a garden is not likely. My students lack the resources needed in order to get a full learning experience with plants.

The anecdotal evidence (students living in apartment buildings) used in this needs statement gives the reader some very important information about the needs of the students. This evidence could be made more valid with a few small pieces of statistical data to have a greater effect. For example, this student teacher could send a short survey home with each of her students asking parents or guardians to identify what type of building they live in and the number of plants in the house.

Here is an example of a simple survey this student teacher could have sent home. (Note that this student teacher's students are kindergartners, which is why a survey probably should be sent home. Depending on the information being collected, middle school or high school students could take the survey themselves.)

EXAMPLE

1. Which of the following types of buildings best describes your home?
   - ☐ Single-family detached house
   - ☐ Townhouse, semi-detached house, or duplex
   - ☐ Building with three to six units
   - ☐ Building with more than six units
2. How many living plants does your family have in your home?
   - ☐ 0
   - ☐ 1–2
   - ☐ 3–5
   - ☐ 6 or more

The answers to this simple survey can be used in conjunction with anecdotal evidence to strengthen your needs statement. Throw in some current and relevant research and you have just written a winning needs statement!

> . . . students also don't have many opportunities for a hands-on-experience with plant life because 87 percent of my students live in a building that contains three or more housing units and do not have a yard for a garden. According to a recent survey of my students' parents and guardians, 67 percent of my students have zero living plants in their house and 22 percent only have one or two live plants. According to education author Cindy Middendorf, children ages four through seven need hands-on learning experiences to assist in the development of the right side of the brain. This development is crucial for students in kindergarten through second grade . . .

What If the Grant Application Does Not Ask for a Needs Statement?

Some education grants, especially grants that focus on teacher training or teacher travel, may not have a specific section dedicated to addressing the need. If this is the case, it is still important to give the funder an idea of how your project will work toward filling a deficiency. While describing your project in the proposal, make some references as to why this project is important to the population being served.

> *Example:* The "Read to Remember" program will increase student comprehension skills in both fiction and nonfiction texts. Last year on our school's end-of-the year assessment, 79 percent of fourth-grade students scored below proficient in reading comprehension skills.

Although not as detailed as a full needs statement, this one sentence will give a quick glance into one of the problems that this program will address.

Here is another example from a teacher travel grant in which the grant writers give the funder a brief needs statement under a different section called "Benefits to Teacher."

This entire grant proposal appears in the appendix as an example of a teacher travel grant. This proposal was funded and both teachers were able to visit South Africa at no cost to them!

> The impulse for this project is that we teach in an embattled inner-city community. Our students are all black, and the community that surrounds the school is 98 percent African American. My colleague and I are both white and we struggle to find common ground with the families who send their children to our school. Obviously as Americans and as stakeholders in the future lives of their students we have a connection, but otherwise there is a clear cultural gap between us and this community. We believe that we can bridge this gap, however, by immersing ourselves in the root culture of African peoples, and by determining for ourselves the inspiration and inherent motives that inspire black communities back home.

The writers of this proposal are able to clearly outline a specific problem and give the funder a picture of the teachers' students, school, and community. This is a great example of giving the granting organization a needs statement without having been asked for one.

Needs Statement Wrap-up

Let's go back to the first example about low college-acceptance rates of students from public schools in Oakland, California. In this RFP, projects are being requested to increase college-acceptance rates in this school district.

We hope you have gathered by this time that if your program does not directly affect students from Oakland, California, you should not even write a proposal for this RFP.

Here is the sample question that may be posed in this sample RFP:

> Please identify root causes of students who do not get accepted into a four-year college on graduation from high school.

Following is an example of a complete, well-written needs statement based on the sample question. Let's use this example to review a completed needs statement. Don't forget to use the checklist at the beginning of this chapter as you read this needs statement.

Notice that in this needs statement the proposer does not tell the funder how he or she is going to increase college-acceptance rates (that comes in the next sections); the author is just painting a complete picture of the causes and problems of low college-acceptance rates.

> Several causes exist for the 34 percent college-acceptance rate among graduating seniors at George Washington High School in Oakland, California. Located in one of Oakland's poorest communities, over 95 percent of George Washington High School students come from low-income households. According to the 2010 United States Census, in this community 53 percent of the residents identified as African American and 40 percent identified as Hispanic. Over 92 percent of families also reported as having incomes below the poverty line in 2010. These statistics only paint a portion of the picture of the inequalities students at George Washington High School face on a daily basis.
>
> Many of the students work after school to help support their family income and in a recent survey given to all 389 seniors at George Washington High School, 78 percent reported spending one to three hours a day watching their younger siblings at home without any other adult present. These time commitments outside of school to support their family cut into students' time for homework and after-school college-enrichment opportunities.
>
> Students entering George Washington High School as freshmen on average are three years behind in reading and four years behind in math compared to the average California freshman student as reported by the state education report card. The average GPA for students who graduate from George Washington but do not get accepted into a four-year college was 1.89 and the average SAT score was 956, far below the national SAT average of 1509 as reported by USA Today. These statistics also decrease the students' chances of being accepted into a four-year college. Based on the most recent report from the National Association for College Admissions Counseling, test scores and high school grades make up the top factors for college acceptance.
>
> A lack of community members who were accepted into a four-year college and ultimately graduated is a major factor on the potential for growth and advancement of the Oakland community and its future students. Students who attend even two years of college are less likely to end up on government welfare and less likely to have a criminal record than students who never attend postsecondary education.

Let's review each step of the checklist in reference to this needs statement. Write down your notes on the lines provided after each check point.

☐ *Clear explanation of the problem or challenge facing the proposer*

Did this needs statement give you a clear picture of the low acceptance rate and some of its root causes specific to students at George Washington High School?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

☐ *Insight into the classroom, school, school district, and community with current student and school data*

What insight did you gain about the students in this school? What do you learn about the district? Can you describe the student population and the community demographics?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

☐ *Anecdotal evidence that allows the reader to connect to the proposer's students and school*

What information does the proposer give that is not supported by data or research but helps you connect to the students, school, or community?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

☐ *Data and research to support the problem, challenge, and anecdotal evidence*

List some data and research that are given to support the problem of low college-acceptance rates. How does this proposal use data and research to strengthen even some of the anecdotal evidence? What credible sources are citied?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

☐ *Connection to a larger-scale problem or consequence (national research or statistics of what happens if the problem is not addressed)*

How does the writer connect this problem at George Washington High School to a broader issue and problem? What will most likely happen if this problem persists?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

We hope this example and reviewing exercise gave you a chance to review and summarize all the information presented in this chapter about needs statements. Don't forget to check out appendixes A and B for examples of needs statements and full grant proposals!

Writing Goals and Objectives

As a teacher, you write multiple objectives every day. Each lesson plan has one to two objectives and clear, measureable outcomes that can be achieved within a class period or at the end of a class project. Teachers also make goals for their students and for themselves. Like in your classroom, goals and objectives play a critical role in grant writing.

Objectives and goals are very different. Goals are long-term, overarching targets that can be reached by continuous dedication and preference. Objectives are outcomes that can be measured within a given time frame. A series of objectives help you keep focused and strive for the overall goal. Sometimes goals can be achieved, and sometimes goals are simply ideal situations that continue to motivate. The following is an example of a classroom goal versus a focused daily objective:

> *Goal:* 100 percent my students will be reading on grade level by the end of the year.
> *Daily objective:* Students will be able to place events from a nonfiction text in chronological order.

Here the goal is a lofty one, but it can be achieved. The daily objective is a focused, measurable step along the path to reach the goal of all students reading on grade level.

When writing educational grants, you will have to distinguish among stating goals, objectives, or both in your proposal. Your project's goals and objectives should be in direct response to your proposal's needs statement. If your needs statement identifies a lack of arts and enrichment at your school, your goals and objectives should present some sort of clear improvements to the arts and enrichments programming.

Each section of your proposal has to fit together! If you identify a problem, how are you going to make it better?

Goals versus Objectives

The majority of the time, when you apply for classroom or school-based grants under $5,000, the funders will want objectives for a specific program or project. In most of these cases, the funding organization assumes that your "goal" is the same as the school's, which we hope is educating and improving the lives of children. However, a funder will most likely ask for you to list your goals if you are proposing an outside school program for the community, traveling out of the school's community, partnering with multiple organizations, or writing a multi-year proposal.

This is a great time to mention again that each RFP is unique. If you find yourself unsure about including goals or objectives in your proposal, you can call the granting organization and ask to speak to the program officer about the proposal. Many organizations that offer grants will have a contact person, including contact information within the RFP. Don't be afraid to take advantage of this and reach out for clarity.

If you are writing the goal of your project, program, or trip, make sure that it is aligned to the granting organization's mission statement or organizational goals and values. It is a great idea to use some of the funder's own language in your proposal. This will show that you have done your research and will make a clear connection between the goal of your program and the mission of the granting organization.

Remember that a goal is the long-term outcome. Your proposal may not be able to achieve your goal. You may need to search for funds to buy sticky notes, chart paper, markers, and thirty copies of a novel to complete a reading unit. More than likely, this one unit or project will not be able to achieve a goal of 100 percent of students reading at grade level, but it can be a great project to help students grow toward achieving that goal and meet several smaller objectives in the given time frame.

This is why most smaller classroom grants will not specifically ask you for goals, but they will ask you for objectives for your specific unit or project. Unit plan objectives are great places to start when thinking about what objectives to include in your proposal.

Five Essentials for Writing Objectives

- *Alignment:* Much like writing a goal, your objectives should also be aligned to the granting organization's overall mission. Even if the RFP is fairly open,

make sure your project fits within the broader context of what the funder has approved in previous years.

- *Participants:* Make sure the participants are mentioned in your objectives. How many students or participants? What grade or age?
- *Time:* How long will this project last from beginning to end?
- *Results:* What outcomes and results are expected to be achieved? Be specific!
- *Measurable:* How will you measure the outcomes? How will you know if the project or program worked as you proposed?

Take a moment to review the following objectives. Each of these objectives is missing one or two of the essential components we discussed. See if you can identify which essential component(s) are missing. (For this exercise, assume that each of the following objectives is aligned to the granting organization's mission.)

> *Objective A:* During my four-week poetry unit, each student will show an increase in prose recognition and rhythmic stanzas recognition. I will measure this by giving my students a preassessment at the beginning of the unit and a postassessment at the conclusion of the unit.

What is missing?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

> *Objective B:* Each of my twenty-four sixth-grade students will increase their overall math grade-level score by at least 20 percent during Saturday Math Academy. Students will be tested using the National Advancement for Math Curriculum pre- and postassessments for sixth-grade students.

What is missing?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

> *Objective C:* Students at Madero Middle Academy will become better students and citizens.

What is missing?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

How do you think you did?

Objective A is missing two key components: participants and specific results. In objective A, there is no mention of the number of students or participants or their grade level or age. Remember, funders want the biggest impact for their dollar, so make sure to give them the number of people who will achieve your objective. Objective A does mention that students will *increase* in certain literature skills, but the increase is not specific. To a funder, the word *increase* needs to be accompanied by specific numbers, such as, "Students will increase 5 points or 20 percent from their pre- to postassessment." Your specific results don't have to include an increase. The results can be an average score of all participants or even a decrease in discipline marks or referrals, depending on your proposal.

Objective B is missing the time component. This objective does a great job of identifying the participants, the results, and how the project will be measured, but no time frame is given for the Saturday Math Academy. Is this Saturday program happening for one month? One quarter? One school year? Multiple school years? Is it happening every Saturday or every other Saturday? Placing a time frame in your objective will help the funder know exactly when the organization can expect the desired results to be obtained and, ultimately, if your project should be funded.

Objective C is just a mess. Objective C is phrased more like a long-term goal than a well-written objective. This objective is missing all five of the essential components. How many students? How old are these students? How long will the desired outcomes take to be achieved? How will becoming better students and citizens be measured? Becoming better students and citizens is technically a result, but it definitely needs to be more specific. Check out the following objective C after it was revised to meet all five of the essential components:

> *Objective C:* Through the *My Community, My World* project, all 739 students from fifth grade through eighth grade at Madero Middle Academy will show an average of a ten-point increase in citizenship aptitude during the sixteen-week project. Citizenship aptitude will be determined using a teacher-created assessment in partnership with graduate students from the University of Florida.

Where Do I Put My Goals and Objectives in the Proposal?

Some RFPs will have a specific section for you to list the goals and objectives of your proposal. However, most RFPs will ask you to address your goals and objectives within a major section of the RFP, such as the project description (more on this section later in this chapter). Here is an example of an RFP section from the Ezra Jack Keats Minigrant Program:

> *Statement I:* Project Description
> Provide a thorough description of your project, clearly stating what you and your students will do. Describe its objectives. Tell how your project is new or different.

In this RFP, the granting organization specifically asks you to *describe* your objectives. Make sure you don't just simply list your objectives but describe them as part of your project description. Go into more detail about how that objective will be measured or who will be participating. If an RFP does ask you to list your goals and objectives, bullet points or separate lines for each goal and objective are usually appropriate.

If an RFP makes no reference to your goals or objectives, it is still important to include them in some capacity in your proposal. Similar to the needs statement, try to work in your project objectives and outcomes into the meat of your program description. Even making a quick reference to each objective as you explain the results you hope to achieve is a great way to show the funder you have a clear focus and plan for your project or program.

The Project Description

The project description is usually recognized as the most important section of your proposal. Although we are not going to disagree with that statement, it is also important to note that, without an identified needs statement, clear goals and objectives, a focused budget, and a process for evaluating the entire project, the project description becomes simply a great idea instead of the keystone of the entire proposal.

Although every RFP may not ask for a needs statement or goals and objectives, every RFP will have a section asking you to describe your project in detail. This is your chance to tell the granting organization how you will fix or improve the problem you have identified. This is your chance to tell the funder exactly how you will achieve each of your goals. This is your chance to bring home the money!

Think of your proposal as a plot outline and the project description as the climax, the make-or-break point in your proposal when the conflict (needs statement) is resolved (see figure 3.1)!

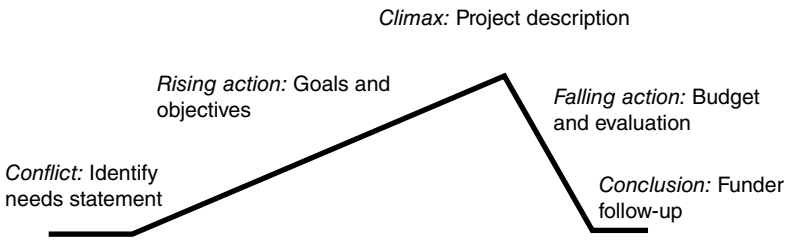

FIGURE 3.1 Grant Writing Plotline

Make sure to refer back to chapter 2 when writing your project description, paying close attention to first person versus third person, tone of voice, grammar usage, and word count!

Here are a few keys items for you to consider before writing your project description:

- *Keep track of your word or character count.* The project description usually contains the most information out of any section in your proposal, so it is easy to reach your word or character count without describing your entire program.
- *Make sure to address your needs statement.* The project description is the detailed explanation of how you are going to fix the problem you identified. You need to make sure that your description will make the funder agree that your program will be able to solve the problem addressed in your needs statement.
- *Pretend the funder knows nothing about you or your school.* Don't insult the granting organization by explaining basic knowledge terms (such as *math* or *assessment*), but be sure to explain terms such as *RTI, project-based learning*, or *differentiation*. More than likely, at least one person on the proposal review panel will not be familiar with some of the newest education terminology. Furthermore, by explaining these keys terms, you will prove to the funder that you know what you are talking about and not just throwing buzz words into your proposal.
- *Keep it consistent.* Your entire proposal must flow seamlessly into one consistent, coherent written work. Language you use in your needs statement, objectives, budget, and evaluation should make an appearance in your project description. If you mention a twelve-week time frame in your objective, make sure that same twelve-week time frame is referenced in your project description. If you have stipends for three teachers in your budget to run an after-school program, make sure you mention three teachers in your project description.
- *Don't exaggerate.* In the description of your program, stay away from fluffy words that tend to make your project sound like the cure for cancer, such as *earth-shattering, exponentially*, or *phenomenal*. **Note:** Go back to chapter 2 to review these and other words to shy away from in your proposal.

Start with the Basics

Who, what, where, when, why, and how questions must be answered here in the project description. It may sound obvious, but you need to let the funder know exactly what you are doing, who is doing it, where it is happening, and so on. The best way to start your project description is to make an outline of your answers to these six common questions. Here is an example outline of a proposal submitted about starting an after-school chess club:

> *Who:* Fourteen high school students and one teacher; ideally have students who either need a challenge or may have behavior problems and need an energy outlet
> *What:* Start an after-school chess club, possibly turn club into a future chess team or enrichment class
> *Where:* In my classroom, at my school
> *When:* Tuesdays and Thursdays after school from 3:30 PM until 4:10 PM
> *Why:* Increase critical-thinking skills of students and build student-to-student relationships
> *How:* Get funding, recruit students, hold informational meeting, build curriculum, teach chess and strategy, hold internal chess tournaments, have students reflect

This outline is only for you, so it doesn't have to be in perfect sentence structure or contain your final diction. This outline will serve simply as a guide for you to follow to make sure you include everything in your final project description. Beginning with the "five Ws and how" questions can really help you start to put your program idea down on paper. More than likely, your outline will change as you start to write your proposal and work through all the details of your program.

Other basics include the following:

- *Time:* Specify how long your project or program will last and exactly when each objective will be completed. This should match your time frame in your objectives.
- *Staff or instructors:* If your project is not necessarily a classroom project and will involve teachers, school staff, or volunteers other than yourself, it is important to include the title and number of other adults in your program. However, names are not necessary in the proposal.

  > *Example:* Four full-time classroom teachers employed at Martin Luther King Elementary and two adult parent volunteers will oversee the development and implementation of the Book Buddies program.

Chronological Implementation Plan

Your project description needs to answer all of the identified basic questions, but it also needs to be written in a logical, easy-to-follow time frame. Most funded proposals contain an implementation plan within the project description (or as a separate section, depending on the RFP). Your implementation plan is your step-by-step timeline of each activity in your project. This, too, may sound obvious, but careful attention needs to be given to how the project will be rolled out from start to finish. Much like outlining the basic who, what, where questions, you should also draft a timeline of each phase of your project, including every activity that will ultimately ensure that you achieve your stated objectives. Depending on the total time of your project, your outline should be in days, weeks, or months. For most classroom projects, you do not need to break down each daily lesson, but an overview of the curriculum on a week-by-week basis may be a necessary component. Following is one template you can use to jot down some of your implementation plan before writing your project description.

Project name:

Dates:
Materials:

Week number	Activities	Meets objective number
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

For any project, planning must take place before any actual implementation. Make sure whatever template you use to construct your implementation plan includes your planning stage in the first week or month. Examples of activities in the planning stage include lesson planning, buying materials, communicating with partnering organizations, making copies, hiring extra staff or securing volunteers, sending out parent memos, or attending a professional development training session.

Each component of your program should be planned out from the time you are notified of your award to the final communication with the granting organization. A project planned from start to finish will show your commitment and dedication to the funding organization.

Expanding Your Project's Impact

As stated previously in this chapter, funding organizations fund projects that align to their own mission and give them the greatest outcome based on the greatest need. In order to decipher this, funders will weigh the targeted population and number of people served by your program in their final decision. One way to give your project an advantage over other proposals is to increase the reach of your program. Many times this can be done without changing or adding to your project, but by simply explaining to the funder how your program will continue to make an impact after the initial objectives are completed.

For instance, let's say that you want to write a proposal to receive funding for twenty-five iPads for your classroom of twenty-five students. You will use these iPads for multiple class projects that you describe in your proposal. A way to make your proposal more attractive is to expand the reach of the requested iPads from your twenty-five students to more than five thousand people. How? Simple. Think about who can use the iPads when your students are not using them and how the iPads can be used in subsequent years.

Look at figure 3.2. The immediate participants are your twenty-five students. These students will complete the units and activities described in your proposal. However, as you follow the graphic outward, you can see the potential impact of your proposal for the entire school and community. In your project description, you can briefly describe that the other teachers at your grade level will use the iPads, that you will open up the iPads to the rest of the teachers at your school to use in their classrooms on Friday of each week, that the after-school literacy program that meets in your classroom on Tuesdays and Thursdays will use the iPads, and that the counselors who run an adult learning technology course will also have access to the iPads on Wednesday evenings. Now in one school year,

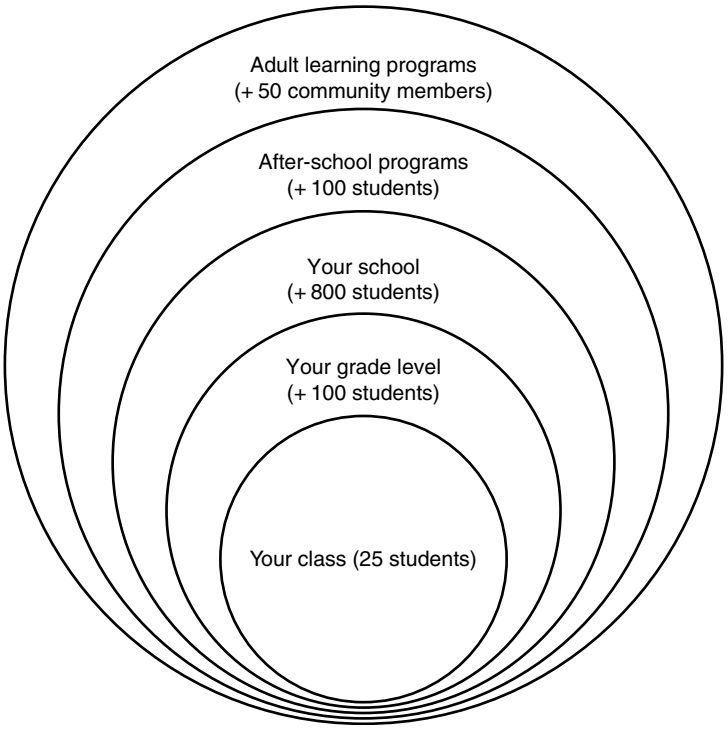

FIGURE 3.2 Expanding a Project's Impact

one thousand students and community members are being serviced by your proposal. Multiply that by five years and your idea to use iPads with your twenty-five students now has the potential to affect five thousand students and community members!

> Each year one thousand students and community members will be serviced by the iPads during various programs at school. Over the course of the next five years, roughly five thousand students and community members will have access to the iPads.

When measuring the longevity of technology, five years is usually a good projection of how long the technology will be relevant and make an impact. Although iPads or computers may service participants longer than five years, funders will usually see any projection over five years as a hypothetical to create a concrete argument.

Another way to expand your proposal's impact is to find an outside partner or stakeholder to partner with. Especially when writing a smaller classroom grant for a particular unit or project, stating that you will have an outside school

partner will be a key feature in helping you expand your project's impact and distinguish you from the competition. Instead of just taking a field trip to a botanical garden after your project on Punnett squares and pollination, think of a way that your class can partner with the botanical garden throughout the year. Maybe a speaker from the botanical garden visits your classroom and facilitates a presentation for your students. Or maybe your class produces a video that is uploaded to the botanical garden website for the public to view. These types of partnerships with outside organizations will definitely propel your proposal to the top of the pile!

This could be a great in-kind match in your budget! See chapter 4 for more details.

Naming the Project

Large corporations have full-time staff to develop clever marketing strategies and eye-catching advertisements and publications. Unfortunately, schools don't have full-time staff for this purpose, but marketing and naming the project is a huge part of writing a winning proposal. Much like the needs statement, teachers already possess some inherent qualities that make them creative advertisers! Here are a few tricks to help you unleash your hidden marketing skills and make your proposal memorable to the reviewer panel.

Acronyms. A teacher's day is filled with acronyms! NCLB (No Child Left Behind), RTI (response to intervention), CCSS (Common Core State Standards), and SIP (school improvement plan) are just a few. Although trying to remember these acronyms may be a first-year teacher's biggest nightmare, acronyms are a great advertising tool when naming your project or proposal. If you can associate an acronym with your proposal, the chances of its being remembered by the reviewer panel will greatly increase. Your acronym should contain information describing the project, the participants, and the expected outcomes. Here are some examples of project titles that have been used in submitted proposals:

- **Project PLAY** (Planning Lifestyle Activities for Youth)
  A project to construct an outdoor area for students to play and learn during recess and after school
- **GET SCIENCE!** (Girl Empowerment Through Science Camp with Integrating the Enhancement of Newly Certified Educators)
  UNITE's summer programming designed to give new teachers experience in the classroom and provide a summer science camp for inner-city female students

- **PLANT** (Preserving and Learning About Nature Together)
  A class unit about plants, forest, and the depleting supply of forests throughout the world
- **IPAD** (Investing in Positive Academic Development)
  Funds requested for an iPad to use a specific application to track and record academic development of students with special needs

Play on words. Come up with a project title using a play on words that will give the reviewer some idea into your project's goals or activities. This may take you several brainstorming sessions, but in the end a catchy project title that uses a play on words will make a memorable impact. One such example was a proposal submitted by a special education teacher entitled *Dollars and $ense*. The project entailed students running a school store for their peers and working on future job-placement opportunities.

Stating outcomes in your subtitle. If you can't come up with an acronym or a play on words, being very direct about the project's outcomes in the subtitle of your project can have a similar effect. Come up with a short two- to four-word title, and then have your subtitle state the end result of your program; for example, *Truth or Dare: Empowering Students to Make Positive Decisions*. In this example, the reviewer will have a clear understanding of the objective of your project. The title's direct reference to your objective can help the reviewer focus on the end result as he or she reads through the entirety of your proposal.

Evaluation and the Project Description

Most likely, you will not include your evaluation process in the project description, because most RFPs will have a specific section for you to state your entire evaluation plan. One or two sentences in your project description stating that you are going to have an evaluation or assessment, along with a statement in your implementation plan explaining your time table for assessments, will add consistency to your proposal. However, going into more detail about the rationale for evaluation can many times take away from the activities outlined in your project description.

When reading through the RFP, make particular note to the words *evaluate* or *assess* in any of the given prompts. If there is not a specific question addressing the evaluation of your program, you may talk briefly about your evaluation process in either your project description or goals and objectives. See chapter 5 for more information about evaluating and assessing your project or program.

Examples of Project Description Prompts

As you have seen from the examples in this chapter, each RFP is unique; as you gain experience writing grant proposals, you will start to see how some sections overlap in RFPs and some are very distinct. Take a look at some examples of project description prompts in the following RFPs.

These RFPs would be a great place to start writing some smaller classroom grants! More information on each of these RFPs and several others can be found in appendix B of this book.

> *UNITE Classroom Grant RFP:* Describe your project in detail. Have you done this project before? If so, what were the results? If not, where did you get the inspiration for this project? How will this project be aligned to one or more state standards? Will your project meet any of the three key components to a well-funded project (measurable student outcomes, inquiry and critical thinking, and service learning component)? (maximum of 1,000 words)

In the UNITE Classroom Grant RFP, the basic question, "Describe your project in detail," is asked, as well as other questions that also need to be answered. When writing a response to this prompt, be sure to include information you created in your outline and your implementation plan timeline, as well as answers to the specific questions addressed in the prompt. In a complex prompt like this, make sure to follow the order of the questions in the prompt. Describe your project, then describe if you have done it before, the inspiration, and so on. Sticking to the order of questions in a prompt will focus your response and make it easier for the reviewers to read and score your proposal.

> *Association of American Educators Classroom Grant RFP:* Concise summary of classroom grant request. (150-word maximum)

This prompt doesn't sound like it is asking for a full project description, but with this RFP, it is! The Association of American Educators Classroom Grant is another small classroom grant award of up to $500 for a classroom unit or project. The RFP asks for you to summarize your request in only 150 words! Later on in this RFP, you have a chance to describe a lesson plan that "clearly demonstrates how the items will be used effectively in the classroom and how they will promote effective student learning." Your 150-word summary should stick to answering the basic questions, giving a very brief implementation plan. Finding

This paragraph, from "This prompt" to "character counts" is 146 words!

other sections of the RFP to include more details about instruction, student needs, the extended impact of your proposal, and your goals and objectives is a strategy that experienced grant writers rely on to overcome word and character counts.

> *ING Unsung Heroes Awards Program RFP:* Provide a thorough description of your project, clearly stating what you and your students will do. Describe its objectives. Tell how your project is new or different.

This prompt is very similar to the Ezra Jack Keats Minigrant Program prompt that was included earlier in this chapter. In this prompt, the funding organization is directly asking you to include and describe the objectives within your project description. Similar to the UNITE Classroom Grant prompt, follow the order given in the prompt. Write a thorough description with your implementation plan and extended impact, then describe your objectives, and finally state how your project is new or different.

Following is a section from the Walmart Foundation Community Giving RFP. Notice how in this RFP, the project description has been divided into distinct sections. This RFP is asking for much of the same information as the UNITE RFP or ING Unsung Heroes RFP, but it is clearly divided making it easier for the writer to follow. Also note how the program description is just a brief overview of the program.

Program description (paragraph, 2,000-character maximum)	*Instructions:* A brief description of proposed program
Program goals (paragraph, 2,000-character maximum)	*Instructions:* Description of program goals and objectives (including target population and number of people impacted)
Implementation plan (paragraph, 2,000-character maximum)	*Instructions:* Plan to accomplish goals and objectives and timeline for implementation
Program distinctions (paragraph, 2,000-character maximum)	Descriptions of what sets your program apart from like programs serving the same need or population
Communication (paragraph, 2,000-character maximum)	Description of how the program, its progress, and outcomes will be communicated and with whom

Putting It All Together

Let's look at a modified project description created from the previously mentioned school chess club project description outline. As you read, complete the following tasks:

- Circle the answers to the basic questions (who, what, where, etc.).
- Underline the activities that the students will take part in to achieve the objectives.
- Place a star by any reference to time or dates.
- Place a box around the project title.

> The project, "Checkmate," is an after-school program focused on developing reasoning, problem solving, and positive social interactions by learning about the game of chess. I will announce the project to all of my sophomore classes with the intent of attaining at least fourteen students. Ideally they would include at least three special education students, three students who typically have behavioral issues, three students who are struggling academically, and five students who typically excel in my classroom and would benefit from extra challenges. We would all meet for forty minutes after school on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The overarching goal of "Checkmate" would be to develop invaluable intellectual and social skills through playing the game of chess. "Checkmate" would run for the last ten weeks of school and we hope to continue the following school year.
>
> For the first week, our time would entail thirty minutes of guided instruction including the history of chess, how to play, and the benefits of playing it. They would conclude with ten minutes to practice with the chess boards. This time would be used to become more comfortable with the game and executing its rules. By the second week, our students will be playing against one another practicing techniques gleaned from instruction for more than half of our time. Overall, the game of chess will be used as a vehicle to teach life skills. In an article from *The Benefits of Chess in Education*, Jerry Meyers describes multiple intellectual skills, such as focusing, thinking ahead, weighing options, and thinking abstractly, that are developed from playing the game of chess. Each session will emphasize the skills needed to play chess and the life skills one can acquire from playing chess.
>
> By documenting the academic performance and the behaviors of my students in "Checkmate" until the end of the academic

> school year, I will be able to reliably determine the effect of learning chess on them. The reason for including the students who struggle academically is to track their academic performance until the end of the year and show an increase in test scores. The reason for at least three students with behavioral issues to participate is to track their behavior after participating in "Checkmate" and show a decrease in referrals, detentions, and suspensions. Critical thinking and problem-solving are skills learned in chess, but the increase in academic performance and good behavior are the measurable pieces that will illustrate the positive outcomes from this project.
>
> In the proposed budget for "Checkmate," I have chosen a book entitled *The Everything Chess Basics Book*. Reading this book will be part of the instruction portion of the forty-minute time allotted after school. It will give the teacher the material to provide scaffolding for students who have never played chess. It will also provide specific techniques that inherently require critical thinking and questioning skills. *The Everything Chess Basics Book* will give our students a foundation on which they will build their chess skills with proper instruction from the teacher.

What did you circle? Did this teacher answer all the basic questions?

How many student activities did you underline?

How long was the program? How many stars did you place by reference to date and time in this proposal? When are the student activities taking place?

What was the project title? Did it catch your eye or give you a window into what the project would actually do?

After reading this project description, you should have a pretty clear idea about what will happen during the first few weeks of "Checkmate." The teacher will recruit a targeted number of students, meet twice a week after school for forty minutes, use a book to help teach the game of chess, and the students will get time to play against one another using the skills they learned. The author also makes references to his or her objectives (see the first sentence) and the overall goal to develop intellectual and social skills. A credible research source is cited, and this teacher also mentions what data he or she will be collecting and the rationalization for the targeted students and analysis.

Although this example does a decent job covering the basic components of a project description, the author does not give a detailed description of the project after week two. The project sounds like it will have a great foundation in the beginning weeks, but what is going to happen after week two through the end of

the program? This is why mapping out your implementation plan before you begin the actual writing of your project description can prove useful.

This project description loses its chronological order narrative when the author jumps from activities in week two to citing an article on the benefits of chess and then talking about his or her assessment process. A better order would be for the article citation to appear toward the end of the first paragraph after the author stated the goals and objectives of "Checkmate."

The third paragraph also adds to the confusion in this project description, because it is a combination of secondary objectives and a rationale for evaluation. Depending on the other prompts in the original RFP, this paragraph could be eliminated and inserted into other sections of the proposal, either in the goals and objectives or evaluation and assessment.

Now, read the revised project description for "Checkmate," noticing how the description flows in a chronological order and gives a complete overview without clouding the description with misplaced content:

> The project, "Check-Mates," is an after-school program focused on developing reasoning, problem solving, and positive social interactions by learning about the game of chess and building new friendships or "mates." In an article from *The Benefits of Chess in Education*, Jerry Meyers describes multiple intellectual skills, such as focusing, thinking ahead, weighing options, and thinking abstractly, that are developed from playing the game of chess. Each session will emphasize the skills needed to play chess and the life skills one can acquire from playing chess.
>
> The project will be announced to all of my sophomore classes with the intent of attaining fourteen students. Ideally they would include at three special education students, three students who typically have behavioral issues, three students who are struggling academically, and five students who typically excel in my classroom and would benefit from extra challenges. We would all meet for forty minutes after school on Tuesdays and Thursdays. "Check-Mates" would run for the last ten weeks of this academic year and we hope to continue the following school year.
>
> Before the first after-school session of "Check-Mates," I will make informational handouts to recruit students, buy the chess boards and copies of the book entitled *The Everything Chess Basics Book*, and plan the first two weeks of after-school sessions. *The Everything Chess Basics Book* will serve as the textbook and will be part of the instruction portion of the forty minutes allotted after school. For the first week, our time

> would entail thirty minutes of guided instruction including the history of chess, how to play, and the benefits of playing it. They would conclude with ten minutes to practice with the chess boards. This time would be used to become more comfortable with the game and executing its rules. By the second week, our students will be playing against one another practicing techniques gleaned from instruction for more than half of our time. Weeks three through seven will be the "regular season," in which a schedule will be created and students will play one another keeping a running record of their victories and losses. After each completed chess match, a one-page reflection essay will be written by each student reflecting on the game, their strategic choices, and their attitudes toward the game and their opponent. Weeks seven through nine will be the "playoffs" in which a round-robin style chess tournament will decide the winner of the "Check-Mate" program. Sportsmanship and reflection will be a focus during competition rounds. During the final week of the program the students will get to challenge a staff member from Truman High School in a game of chess. Fourteen staff members have already committed to playing the students in chess during the final week of the program.
>
> The students will be continuously assessed and monitored throughout the program to make sure progress toward the previously stated objectives is being made. More information about the evaluation procedures and timeline can be found in the assessment and evaluation section of this proposal. Results from the project and personal reflection statements from each student participant will be shared with all stakeholders, including the granting organization. With success in this initial phase, "Check-Mates" will continue in subsequent years and expand to engage and affect more students across grade levels at Truman High School.

In this revised project description, the focus is clearly on the implementation of the project. It is described in chronological order, outlining the entire ten weeks of the programming, including the initial planning stages. The name of the program was changed to "Check-Mates" to highlight one of the objectives of positive social interactions while using a play on words. The last paragraph makes reference to the evaluation of the assessment but does not go into the rationale or specific assessment procedures.

Be confident and thorough when describing your program. Refer back to the ten writing tips in chapter 2 as often as needed. Take a deep breath and get started!

Third-Period Review Guide

- Your needs statement is an explanation of the problem or challenge facing your students, school, or district.
- Use data to support the claims in your needs statement.
- Connect your specific problem to a larger-scale consequence.
- Goals are long term; objectives are the short steps taken to reach the ultimate goal.
- Your project description is the climax of your proposal.
- Make sure your project description answers the who, what, where, when, why, and how questions.
- Have a focused chronological implementation plan.
- Expand the impact of your program and make it stand out by partnering with a community organization and having a memorable name.

Third-Period Exit Ticket

1. Which of the following must be included in a proficient needs statement?
   a. Clear explanation of the problem or challenge
   b. Insight into your classroom or school
   c. Data and research supporting your stated need
   d. All of the above
2. *True or false:* Every proposal should state the project's goal and some attainable objectives.
3. Define the implementation plan.