

# Writing a Capital-Grant Proposal

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Foundations do not give capital grants to purchase equipment or a building. They give grants to enable the nonprofit organization to do something important with the equipment or building. Remember that important distinction every time you write a capital-grant proposal. The most important thing to the audience is what the nonprofit will be able to do with what it purchases. Perhaps it will increase its capacity for providing service, enable staff to communicate and collaborate better with other organizations, or provide a new and necessary service. As with project grants, the outcomes from a capital-grant proposal must improve some currently undesirable condition.

Some foundations provide different guidelines for capital requests, and many ask for additional sections to be completed. For the most part, however, capital requests follow existing foundation guidelines, but the responses are somewhat different. Following are suggestions for how to approach the basic sections of a proposal when requesting funds for capital projects.

## Problem or Need Section

You can copy the general case statement for a capital campaign into the need section of a grant proposal; they are that similar. Describe the need for the capital acquisition and use data to support your argument. A sample follows:

The Great River City Media Center (CMC), located on the west side of Great River, State, is the premiere public-access media organization in the United States.

Demand for CMC's services has increased as technology has changed. First, it added radio, then Internet and computer services, the I-VAN program for use in K-12 schools to teach digital filmmaking and editing, and a second television station, LiveWire 24, which broadcasts throughout the county with educational programming such as Classic Arts Showcase, NASA Direct, and Free Speech TV.

As programs and demand have increased, so has CMC's staff — from twelve in 1997 when it moved from the Reed Library basement into the second floor of the west-side library on Bridge, to thirty in the early 2000s, when it had staff dispersed to a rectory and church basement next door to the library and to Steepletown, a west-side nonprofit-organization complex. From 1998 to 2002, community members' use of CMC grew as follows:

- GRTV saw a 15-percent increase in locally produced programming. It grew from one broadcast channel to two and from one primary program to three with the addition of I-VAN educational services and Community Media Services video production and AV services.
- GRRadio grew from 65 to 80 volunteers; from 5 or 6 annual concerts to 25 to 30.
- GreatNet grew from 40 nonprofit “clients” to nearly 100.

CMC's programs and expansion would not be possible or necessary without the interest and commitment of community volunteers and public-access users. Before individuals or organizations get involved with public-access media, they attend an orientation about the CMC's radio, television, Internet, and media-literacy programs to determine their areas of interest. Though CMC has not promoted “orientations” in any formal way, demand for the introduction to the CMC's programs has grown in the past several years.

Whereas, five years ago, an average of 19 people attended the monthly orientation, now attendance averages 30 per session. This brings in more than 300 individuals annually to the organization. The community looks to CMC to take on the latest technologies and is therefore increasingly drawing individuals interested in pod-casting, digital imaging, and Internet media.

Because the demand for I-VAN training in the schools has increased, CMC has done two things. First, it has established an I-VAN Club in the recently acquired storefront on Walter Street (formerly called the "annex") for the use of core-city young people. Second, it has developed teacher-training materials on DVD and CD that teachers can use to teach video production and editing in their classrooms. I-VAN staff are available by telephone and online to support teacher training and answer questions. In large part because of the success of I-VAN, CMC has identified a new niche that involves training K-12 teachers throughout the county to use media as a teaching and learning tool through the intermediate school district.

By 2002, CMC had outgrown its facility on Bridge Street. Staff were dispersed to three different sites, exchanging rent for CMC services. CMC began to explore possibilities for expanding in a way that would not disrupt services, but would, in fact, enhance them, and that would preserve the investment in technological infrastructure at the main office.

In 2004, the CMC was approached by key area funders and a neighborhood business alliance and asked to acquire and manage the historic Walter Theatre on the city's southeast side. The Theatre had been restored by a neighborhood organization approximately five years earlier. The restoration effort fulfilled the neighborhood organization's primary goal to serve as a catalyst for further revitalizing the Walter Street neighborhood. However, the Theatre had failed under several directors to sustain operations from programs, and its board of directors had looked for a resolution for more than six months before determining that it would surrender the property and a nearby facility they called the "annex" to an established nonprofit organization. The City Media Center appeared alone at the top of the list.

The acquisition of Walter Theatre and the annex was an opportunity to expand CMC's reach and visibility on both sides of the Great River and to fulfill several of the CMC's short-and long-range goals in that it offered:

- A venue for its many concerts, televised debates, and other programs
- Additional space that was desperately needed following program expansion that had placed staff in three different sites on the city's west side
- Storefront access to CMC's educational programs and a presence in one of the city's most economically depressed neighborhoods

#### Evaluation

Evaluate the programmatic functions of the capital project. If a new building will increase the number of people your nonprofit is able to serve, design a means for gathering data and demonstrating that you have increased capacity for service within a specified time.

There are some capital efforts that do not involve programs. They are often public-works projects such as new sidewalks or public art or some other urban-renewal effort. It's difficult to establish evaluation criteria or tests of such capital projects. If the project has been built, clearly that is success. If it hasn't, the grantee should return any grant funds previously pledged.