

## **Beyond the Grant: Planning for Sustainability**

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Anticipation is a joyful part of any sought-after experience. You imagine what it will be like, how much you will enjoy it. It may seem a bit unfair that grant applicants must also anticipate the *end* of the experience—what life will be like after the grant.

Most funding agencies don't allow grantees to apply for renewed funding once the original grant runs out. They view their funds more as seed money to help grantees initiate a new and/or innovative program. Thus, funding agencies often require applicants to explain how they will sustain the grant project after funding ceases.

Here, we offer arguments that can be used in writing the sustainability narrative.

Applicants should make clear that they've entertained the question of sustainability even as they developed the proposal. They should note that they've evaluated each budget line for its importance to continuing program operations after the grant ends.

Some budget lines may not be needed (the project director, the evaluation, or equipment purchases), while others may be critical (staff to continue providing the same level of services). After describing critical expenses, applicants should identify resources that can be developed to sustain program operations.

One such resource is collaboration with partnering institutions. A strong feature of many grant proposals, collaborations can be expected to continue after the grant. Collaborating partners may help identify new funding streams or other resources to continue operations. Partners can also augment each other's operations to reduce or even eliminate some expenses.

Other sustainability arguments derive from actions taken during the grant project:

- Explain that sustainability planning will be conducted throughout your grant project and not just as the grant nears its end. Note how all practices will be continuously evaluated in terms of importance to program operations, and what it will take to continue practices deemed crucial.
- Mention how personnel will have received additional training during the grant, which can be used to continue the project.
- Note that equipment and supplies acquired during the grant will be available to continue the project. If equipment (e.g., computers) has a short life, then you may describe a plan for phasing in new equipment purchases after the grant, thus avoiding large expenses in any one year.

- Explain how outputs produced during the grant—a new curriculum, a new website, or an expanded marketing campaign—will continue to support operations afterward.
- Describe any changes in management structure and/or policies anticipated during the grant that will help improve the efficiency and effectiveness of operations and support sustainability.

Don't forget to mention that your agency will continue to evaluate expenses throughout the grant period, looking for ways to reallocate resources to support grant operations. While it is unlikely that you will secure another grant for the same purpose, for the same amount of money, and at the time you need it, it can be beneficial to explain how your agency will continue to pursue additional funding revenues to sustain and/or expand operations.

These last two arguments—reallocation and another grant—are generally seen as weak arguments. You wouldn't be applying for the grant if funds could be reallocated, and the likelihood of winning another grant is probably thin. But they can be important in convincing the reviewer(s) that you are serious about exploring all options to sustain successful practices of your program.

Further resources on grant sustainability include:

- [End Games: The Challenge of Sustainability](#), a PDF from the Annie E. Casey Foundation
- [Ensuring Sustainability](#), from US DHHS
- [How to Write the Sustainability Section of Your Grant Proposal](#), from About.com

#### Keywords

Grant writing, sustainability, budget, collaborations

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