

List of Application Questions

With Guidance and Examples* for Applicants (Updated February 2011)

Seeking grants can be a daunting task as nonprofits must first identify funding sources that have an interest in their work and then decipher sometimes vastly different processes, timeframes, and forms to complete applications and requirements. In recent years, many regions around the country have adopted a Common Grant application whereby multiple grantmakers agree on a single format for applying. The purpose is to make the grantseeking process more simple and effective for all.

What is the WNC Common Grant Approach?

In Western North Carolina (WNC), several grantmakers have been working together to identify a shared approach to streamline the fund-seeking process. They have adopted a model called the WNC Common Grant Approach, which has been tested in numerous communities by the Rensselaerville Institute, a nonprofit consulting group.

Menu of Questions - WNC Funding Organizations Will Draw from These

The following list of 20 questions has been adopted by western North Carolina area philanthropies as a menu from which they choose the questions most important to them. For participating grantors, this menu will be the sole source of questions. Not all the questions will be included in any one application; and they will likely appear in a different sequence from one granting organization to the next. However, if area nonprofits get to know these questions – and how to answer them well – their grant seeking should be easier and more effective in the future.

Note: The questions are divided into sections (Organization, Participants, Project, Results) in the menu only.

Guidance and Examples

For each question, Guidance and Examples are offered to help you understand what information is needed. Individual funders may provide additional Examples tailored to their funding priorities (i.e. examples related to healthcare) to assist you in preparing your responses.

What Funders Are Participating?

To date, the United Way of Asheville and Buncombe County, The Community Foundation of Western North Carolina, and Mission Hospital Community Benefits Program have issued funding announcements using this menu as the basis for their applications. You will notice that other major grantors in the state, including The Duke Endowment and Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust, are also using questions from this menu - developed through Rensselaerville Institute's Common Grant program. We anticipate that other local grantmakers will be shifting to this menu as a resource for their application questions in the future.

WNC Common Grant Approach

NOW, FOR THE COMMON GRANT QUESTIONS... And remember, this is a MENU! It includes ALL the possible questions grantors may ask, and you will only see SOME of them on any SINGLE grant application. The first 14 questions are project/program-related; the last 6 questions are about your results and how you define success.

ATTENTION non-human services organizations: You may need to adapt these questions in order to be able to answer them for your programs. Contact the grantor for more information.

Menu of WNC Common Grant Questions

A. Organizational Profile

1. What is your mission and vision?

Guidance:

We see mission as what you do and vision as the end state you wish to achieve. The best mission and vision statements are short and clear. We are especially interested in how your mission provides focus—and helps discourage taking on more projects because money is available. If you have any principles or values that are actively used in your programs and management please include them as well.

Example:

The Mission of the Mediation Center is to create opportunity from conflict. We envision a self-reliant, empowered community where conflict is resolved peacefully.

2. What strengths and expertise does your organization have that are relevant to the proposed project?

Guidance:

Organizational success may be a matter of adaptability, knowledge, skills, and persuasiveness, planning and collaboration. What makes your organization particularly effective?

Example:

Our Executive Director is well-recognized as a statewide leader in financial literacy and has twice been selected to chair the state association. Our Management Team has a range of expertise and deep experience and meets twice a month to strategize and problem-solve. During the recession we expanded our services, adding assistance in mortgages and family budgeting to meet increased demand. We also provided staff training in compassion fatigue and team building. This has improved staff's ability to address growing demand and reduced staff turnover by 50%.

3. What have you achieved in the past three years that is relevant to the proposed project?

Guidance:

Focus on how many people have tangibly improved their lives versus how much money you have attracted or what awards you may have received.

Example:

Our organization has a solid history of carrying out financial literacy programs that move people from debt and crisis into money management skills and solvency.

Over past three-year period:

- **Women's Financial Assistance Program** – Served 150; 25% eliminated credit card debt; half reduced credit card debt by 50%; 75% making monthly savings deposits; 80% had improved credit score.
- **Mortgage Management Program** - Served 220; negotiated to keep mortgages in 65% of cases; 70% of MMP participants remain enrolled in monthly budgeting and savings maintenance programs (meeting minimum credit requirements).

4. What predicts your sustainability as an organization?

Guidance:

We want to invest in organizations that have long-term viability. Predictors of success may include financial stability, strong leadership, program achievement and/or on-going training.

Example:

During the past year our board completed a strategic plan and has implemented working committees. The development committee has participated in a fund-development workshop and we have adopted a new fund development plan that reduces dependence on grants (from 60% to 38%) and moves donors toward multi-year commitments. Additionally, through an organizational assessment, we identified computerized billing as a way to stabilize our Medicaid funding. Our staff is receiving training to upgrade to this new system which will pay for itself within two years.

5. What groups are most similar to you in your geographic area and what differentiates you from them?

Guidance:

Particularly in an era of scarce resources, it is important to know who else is doing similar work so that you can partner where appropriate and not duplicate or dilute efforts.

Example:

The after-school groups in XXX County got together to document who provides what services. These three programs provide one-on-one tutoring: XXX. These three programs provide group homework help: XXX. These two groups -- XX -- have parenting components. Our organization serves public housing families (which are not served by other programs) on-site at community centers. We provide group homework help and a parenting program. We have met with the staff of the other similar programs to share tips and learning about what works in group settings and to increase parent involvement.

B. Participants

6. What challenge are you addressing and approximately how many individuals, households or organizations are impacted within your geographic area?

Guidance:

State the problem in clear terms as it is experienced by people who have it. To come up with numbers, rely on existing data or informed estimates to describe impact.

Example:

We are seeking to increase the number of male African-American students from public housing neighborhoods who graduate high school within four years (via degree or GED with community college support programming). Current data from XYZ City Schools shows that over the last decade, 32% of students within our target graduated in four years.

7. Describe your participants and how many will you serve?

Guidance:

It is essential that you define the people who are most likely to benefit from your program. We want to know if you have matched your approach or intervention with the specific people it can most help. Also tell us about the challenges or barriers you anticipate, as well as the assets and strengths of your participants on which you can build.

Example:

The population we serve includes 120 students in the current freshman school year. We have held focus groups with 25 students at five different public housing developments to get input before designing our program. Our goal is to enroll 40 students in our program via teacher or counselor referral. We have met with all the freshman teachers and counselors to present our program criteria and mission. Our participants typically come from homes below poverty level, with a single mother in the home (40% of the mothers have some employment; 30% have graduated high school). Our students lack male role models but have said they would like to have a male mentor as an academic coach to help them navigate school for success.

C. Your Project

8. Please provide us with a brief project/program summary.

Guidance:

In no more than 50 words, please describe your project or program. Begin with, –ABC organization requests \$___ to do

Example:

Macon County Organization requests \$100,000 over two years for the Empower Women Now Program. This is a pilot project to train 50 women in emerging technology fields to increase their ability to earn a living wage.

9. How does your project meet one of more of the funding focus areas/grant objectives?

Guidance:

Each funding organization has unique priorities they are trying to achieve. These may relate to an issue area (for example, healthcare or the arts) and/or a geographic area (a single county or a region of the country such as Southeastern U.S.). Funders may have broad goals (improving education) or highly specific goals (increasing the graduation rate among African American males living in public housing). Your task is to understand the funder's priority, make sure your project is a match, and use your response to describe how your project reflects and will help accomplish the funder's priority.

10. What key steps will you take to achieve your results?

Guidance:

Describe the core elements of your implementation plan and why it is the best way to achieve success. For example, to tackle childhood obesity, you could choose to focus on food choices, exercise, school cafeteria options, etc.

Example:

The Childhood Obesity Prevention project will select students from 3 schools to participate. After identifying participants, a 6 week nutrition and cooking program will be conducted with the parent or guardian of the child to promote healthy eating habits. The children will take part in a 6 month Exercise is Fun! program. Our project coordinator will collaborate with the schools' physical education programs.

11. Is your approach backed by evidence of success?

Guidance:

Few approaches are completely original and you have more likelihood of success if you can build upon proven models. Please state any research or model – and its results -- that you are using for the basis of your program design.

Example:

The Kids Overcoming Obesity for Life (KOOL) Project is based on the successful model –Why Weight? which involved student participants at schools across suburban Washington, D.C. The program taught nutrition through cooking classes and also had an exercise component that has an incentive-based curriculum. A three and six-month follow-up showed students reduced their BMI by an average of XX% and changed their long-term eating habits to make healthier choices.

D. Key People and Groups

12. Who are the key people responsible for achieving the results? What special skills, qualifications and/or experience does each of them bring to the project?

Guidance:

The people behind a project are the most critical element in predicting project success. Describe why these are the right people to achieve the results you propose. Please go beyond resume details to the qualities that ensure their effectiveness.

Example:

Four native Cherokee speakers will lead the new Community Language Program. They were chosen for the respect they have among the Tribe. They have been trained by and will use a curriculum from a highly-successful community language program in Oklahoma.

- o Ben Longtree is a beloved high school teacher who will offer a special after-school language program for middle and high school students.
- o Mary Swimmer has led a Cherokee pottery program teaching young artisans traditional approaches. She and Lucy Raines will collaborate on offering a language program for artists and craftspeople.
- o Rosanna Myers is owner of the local coffee shop where people gather. She is hosting a late-morning drop-in language program at the restaurant.

13. Who are key people who deliver the service and what factors suggest they can help participants achieve the intended results?

See Guidance and Example for #12 above. Funders will use question 12 or 13, not both, and the Guidance and Example can be applied to either question.

14. Please list any partners, intermediaries or advisors important to your success and describe their role and evidence of their commitment. Describe successful collaborations with these people or groups.

Guidance:

Many groups realize they can broaden their impact and perhaps save resources by partnering with others who share the same mission. Tell us who is working with you to help achieve results. Also tell us if you have a past track record and future commitment with whomever you include in your project.

Example:

The arts are an important part of Asheville's tourism economy. A new marketing program will unite more than 20 arts organizations in a single outreach program. The impact will be: larger audiences for events, residual spending in the local economy (hotels, restaurants, shops, etc.), and more sustainability for the arts groups that are so essential to the local quality of life. Participating arts groups have signed a two-year commitment to the joint marketing endeavor. (Complete list and sample marketing materials attached.)

NOTE: These last two sections, below, (Results and Tracking to Success) contain the type of information you will be using for your grant evaluation and reporting/verification.

E. Your Results

15. What results are you committed to achieving and for how many people?

Guidance:

Please focus on measureable changes in behaviors and/or achievements—not on the participant's activities in your programs or their level of satisfaction. Please show both the total number of people you serve AND the total number of people whose behavior or circumstance you expect change.

Example:

Sixty women will enroll in Empower Women Now and 50 of them are expected to earn their GED. Thirty-five of them will complete high-tech training to position them to earn a living wage.

16. What broader impact will your organization achieve to bring a successful return on our investment?

Guidance:

You may have benefits to add such as:

- The cost savings from solving a problem (treatment of felony offenders vs. cost of jail)
- The value of a “pilot” or testing that can strengthen other programs (what works best with reaching male potential high school dropouts and how can that be replicated in other programs?)

Please be specific. We are interested in specific benefits for people and the organizations that support them.

Example

Students who graduate from high school are XX% more likely to become employed; XX% more likely to get post-high school education. Male minority students who don't graduate high school are XX% more likely to end up in jail. Additionally, the male mentors we recruit to work with our student participants will gain confidence, skills, and community recognition.

F. Tracking to Success: Critical steps and milestones; data to keep track; making course corrections.

17. What information or evidence will you use to verify/track success?

Guidance:

Select simple data collection processes, such as

- o Existing data or measuring instruments
- o Easy to obtain documents
- o Observations and reports by others OR in some cases self-reported behaviors

Example:

The KOOL program will use the following to verify/track success:

- Exercise logs showing date/type/duration of activity – compared to recommended
- Nutrition journals showing that students wrote down what they ate
- Monthly weigh-ins and BMI rating

18. How will you know when you achieve your results?

Guidance:

It should be easier and less costly in time and money to report your results than to conduct evaluations. Simply state whether or not the projected change occurred.

Example:

We will look at how the students did in the three areas we are tracking, and analyze if/how the first two influenced the ultimate result – weight loss and reduced BMI

- o 75% of students maintain exercise logs that showed they did at least minimum recommended activity three days per week.
- o 50% keep nutrition journals
- o 50% have weight loss of at least 10% of body weight; 75% show positive change in exercise and eating habits

19. Name the milestones and expected dates for achievement within the grant period.

Guidance:

Clearly define your “milestones”; these are successes for those you serve at each stage of your program. Please list 3-5 of these important participant achievements so that we may understand what milestones will be reached and the timing to get to your results. Our assumption is that unless participants or projects reach each milestone, the chances of them achieving the result diminishes.

Example:

Milestone One: Students and a parent/guardian sign contract saying they will participate in the program in the required ways (homework completion, prep time for tests, monthly mentor reports, etc.) during their four years of high school, and if they graduate, they will receive a full scholarship to go to community college. (Contracts due Sept. 1 each year)

Milestone Two: Students are matched with a mentor. Mentee and mentor agree it is a good match. (Mentor matches made by Sept. 15; monthly joint reports submitted to support relationship and show progress)

Milestone Three: Students access resources needed for success (tutoring, help sessions at school, teacher assistance, summer program, etc.). (Resource documentation done mid-semester and end-of-semester)

20. What do you most want to learn from this project?

Guidance:

One of the greatest indicators of sustainability for an organization is the degree to which groups learn from what they do and then adapt to emphasize what is working and cease what is not. It is important to think about this during the design of the project – what elements do you want to watch and continually learn from?

Example:

Cherokee language is dying out as elders pass away. To reverse this, an immersion program has been started for babies and the program is being extended grade-by-grade as the children grow. We are also offering community-based classes to teach Cherokee more broadly so it will be used in everyday life. We know the immersion approach works but it reaches a limited number of people and takes generations. We want to learn from what makes the community programs successful.