RENAISSANCE®

Creating Effective
Funding Requests
to Accelerate Learning

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Introduction

Renaissance® created this document to guide you through the process of finding and being awarded the funds you need to accelerate your students' learning. While this might seem to be a challenging task, the unique perspective, insights, and observations you bring to the funding process can lead to success—regardless of your previous experience in securing funding. Your expertise, bolstered by a personal passion for the proposed project(s), is key to creating effective funding requests. In this document, we will introduce you to the five funding sources our customers typically use, each one increasing in complexity based on the amount of effort needed to obtain the funds.

Budgeted Funds

What if the funds you seek are already available in the school or district's budget? By examining existing budgets, many of our customers find the funds they need without having to look to external funding sources. In *Using Budgeted Funds*, we describe where you might find these funds and steps to take when requesting allocations for your project.

Fundraisers

Fundraisers can be an effective way to involve staff, parents/guardians, and volunteers in generating dollars for lower cost purchases. In *Planning Fundraisers,* we suggest classic and online fundraising ideas, how to organize a fundraiser, and how to get free merchandise.

Community Support

There are businesses and organizations right in your area with the capacity to help fund your projects. Not only would their donations help generate positive publicity for them, many would also appreciate the opportunity to invest in their community's youth. In *Asking for Community Support,* we provide suggestions for how to identify and approach community businesses and organizations to fund your efforts.

Foundation and Corporate Grants

Grants from foundations and corporations are a common source of support for education. Some of these sources require only a 2- to 3-page letter to apply; others require fully detailed proposals. In *Applying for Grants*, we share suggestions for creating these requests.

State and Federal Grants

State and federal grants generally offer larger funding amounts and the possibility of multi-year funding. Rather than accepting unsolicited requests such as those you might submit for foundation and corporate grants, state or federal agencies publicly announce funding opportunities for applicants who meet specific eligibility criteria. These grants are very competitive and require considerable effort to prepare. In *Applying for Grants*, we provide proven strategies for submitting competitive proposals.

Remember: Before you plan or prepare any funding request, it is important to have the support of your administration—at the district and/or school level. This prevents the administration from being "blindsided" by questions from a funding source, a notice of award, or even an informal comment about a grant of which the administration was not aware. This also helps ensure that the district, or another school within the district, is not applying to the same source at the same time. Additionally, the support of administration is often helpful in assembling a team to develop a proposal. Since many funding opportunities arise from personal relationships among influential individuals within a community, it is possible that an administrator may be able to make a personal contact on your behalf.

Getting Started

If you have ever prepared a detailed report, submitted a term paper, led a workshop, imparted information at a school board or parent organization meeting, or even told a story, you have demonstrated some of the skills required to create successful funding proposals.

Your capacity to submit a successful proposal will be enhanced if you can assemble a team which complements your skills and experience. Depending on the nature of the proposal, the team might include early childhood personnel (within the district as well as representatives from high-quality, community-based programs), other classroom teachers, reading or math specialists, federal programs managers, librarians, and administrators from special education, curriculum and instruction, and finance. Parents/guardians, community volunteers, or other stakeholders could also be included, as appropriate. If the grant requires an outside evaluator, identify that person or organization as early as possible so they can be included in the planning process.

Bear in mind that managing a team has its own set of demands. It requires clear and frequent communication among members, the setting of expectations and tracking of progress, and the ability to reach consensus. While the team is representative of different functions, its work is accomplished by individuals. Therefore, gather a team of people who will work well together, who can each commit the required time and energy, and who have the support of their supervisors. Spell out roles, responsibilities, and deadlines early in the proposal process.

Effective Proposals:

- Tell a compelling story (e.g., what the problem is, why it is a problem, what your solution for fixing the problem is, what it will cost, and what will happen if the problem is not addressed).

- Include data that supports the proposal's premise, adhering to an outline that follows content requirements and citing references where needed. Ensure the data is free of grammatical, typographical, and calculation errors.

- "Hook" the reader at the outset and keep the reader engaged throughout.

- Demonstrate internal consistency: goals lead to objectives, which lead to strategies, which lead to activities, supported by a budget which recaps your plan in dollars.

The following suggestions apply whether you are submitting a written request for re-allocation of existing district funds, writing a letter to a local business, or creating a proposal to an outside funding source. The difference in approach will be in the level of detail you provide.

1. **Identify your needs.** If you are looking for funds, you have already identified a need. However, the need is <u>not</u> for money. The need is to address a specific problem. Whether funding is required for an assessment solution, library expansion, professional development, or a reading practice program, the need should always be described in terms of students. A good need statement will be factual but attention-grabbing, such as these examples:

   Eighty percent of students in ABC High School read at least two years below grade level, contributing to a worrisome drop in graduation rates. One of the reasons our students struggle with reading is that the book collection in our library is seriously deficient in quantity and quality.

   OR

   At XYZ Elementary," accountability" and "school improvement" are not merely labels for various education initiatives. They are principles that underlie the school's efforts to ensure that every student

can succeed. While some of our students are doing well, 49% of our economically disadvantaged students and 60% of our English learners do not meet English Language Arts standards. Math achievement is only slightly less of a concern, with 41% of our economically disadvantaged students and 44% of our English learners performing below grade level.

An example of a full Need Statement is included in the Appendix.

2. **Define your goals and objectives.** Goals are broad, general statements that describe a desired condition. In other words, what do you want to happen? Objectives are specific outcomes intended to attain the goal. Objectives must be S.M.A.R.T.: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Time-measured.

   Every objective you write should answer the following four questions:

   – Who will be directly affected by the proposed project?
   – What is the key area we are seeking to improve?
   – How much improvement do we expect?
   – When do we expect this improvement to occur?

   Objectives targeted to improvements are most frequently described as "increases" in desired results: higher test scores, more students engaged in reading, better grades, etc. However, they may also be described as "decreases" in undesirable outcomes: lower drop-out rates, less school failure, decreases in absenteeism. Create objectives consistent with the need you have stated.

3. **Describe your approach.** Your approach is the overall direction you will take to accomplish your goals and objectives. There may be several approaches to meeting a need; explain why the approach you are planning is the most appropriate.

4. **State your plan.** Describe your plan in terms of specific activities which will put the approach into practice, enabling you to meet your objectives and ultimately accomplish your goal.

5. **Specify the amount of money you need and explain how the funds will be used.** The level of detail in your budget is usually determined by the funder's requirements. To work actual dollar amounts into your proposal, contact Renaissance at (800) 338-4204. Your account executive can provide you with pricing for all Renaissance solutions to ensure you have adequate products and services to meet your goal.

   An example of Goal−Objective−Approach−Activities linkage:

   – Goal: Improve math skills of students in grades two through four as measured by state assessment scores.
   – Objective: Students in third grade who have not passed the state assessment in math will increase their scores by 10% by the end of the school year.
   – Approach: Implement a technology-based program to help teachers make data-driven instructional decisions.
   – Activity: Both third-grade classes will begin the math improvement program by implementing Renaissance Star Math® and Renaissance Accelerated Math®.
   – Activity: Teachers will assess students' skills using Star Math, make appropriate instructional decisions, and monitor student progress.

– Activity: Teachers will give one-on-one instruction to struggling students during Accelerated Math practice, making instructional changes to address specific math concepts that students are struggling with based on the program's immediate feedback.

Remember:

A goal is your overall statement of intent (e.g., "improve reading skills so that all children are proficient by third grade").

An objective is your specific and measurable outcome (e.g., "increase standardized test scores in reading by 10 percentage points by the end of the funded period").

An approach is your way of accomplishing objectives (e.g., "use a reading management system to manage and monitor reading practice").

An activity is what you are actually planning to do to put your approach into practice, meet your objectives, and ultimately accomplish your goal (e.g., "students will take a short quiz on each book read to determine their level of comprehension").

Using Budgeted Funds

Many Renaissance customers find funds for the purchase of our products and services within their school or district budgets.

The most effective strategy for accessing existing federal, state, and local funding is to ensure the costs are included when administrators prepare budgets for these sources.

Here are some typical budgetary sources:

- General Operating Budget
- English Learners Programs
- Gifted and Talented Programs
- Library Budgets
- Parent Organizations
- Professional Development Funds
- Response to Intervention (RTI) Allocations
- Special Education Funds
- Technology Funds
- Title Funds

How to Request Existing Funds

Follow these steps to develop your request:

1. Find out when your school/district prepares the budget(s) so you can submit your request in ample time to be considered.

2. Determine to whom your request should be submitted (e.g., your principal, the district Director of Curriculum, the Federal Programs Coordinator).

3. Tell the appropriate administrator that you would like to submit a budget request for a specific dollar amount (based on the current quote from your Renaissance account executive) and ask the person in what form they would like your request (e.g., a one-page brief, a formal proposal, charts).

4. Prepare a strong rationale for the request—what problem or need will the product(s) address. Use supporting data such as student demographics, test scores, student-technology ratio, number of grade-level books available, etc. It may be helpful to focus on specific target groups: students who are failing or at risk of failure, students at risk of falling behind, middle-performing students at risk of being overlooked, English Learners, students with disabilities, or others who have special needs. Describe why current programs/products are not meeting the need and how the Renaissance programs you plan to purchase will complement existing instructional strategies or, perhaps, why they should replace what is not working now.

   If you are requesting funds to renew Renaissance programs, explain how the programs have improved student achievement, saved teachers' time, and/or increased teachers' understanding of

best practices. It is even better if you can invite the decision-maker(s) to visit the classroom or attend a data discussion to see the Renaissance program in action.

5. Describe what the proposed program will look like: the number of students involved, how often they will participate, in what setting, over what period of time, etc., as well as outcomes you expect (e.g., increased test scores, more books read, etc.). Include a clear evaluation plan that provides an outline of the instruments that will be used for the evaluation and defines who will conduct the evaluations, when they will be done, and how the reporting will be done. The easy-to-understand data provided by Renaissance Star Assessments® and Renaissance literacy and math programs will be of considerable help.

6. In early to mid-spring, check with your school (the principal, the librarian, the instructional technology coordinator, the parent organization president) about any unspent funds that may be available at the end of the school year. If there are any, and your previous request was not approved, resubmit your request.

More resources to help you find existing funds:

- [Preparing a Proposal to Your Administration](#). Use this document to learn how to draft a short proposal to grab your administrator's attention.

- [Renaissance solutions support ESSA](#). This summary of the funding sources within the Every Student Succeeds Act lists the Renaissance programs and services that quality for funding from each source.

- Contact Renaissance for additional resources (e.g., product information, research, etc.).

Planning Fundraisers

Fundraisers can be an effective source for raising small sums of money. Implementing fundraisers takes organization and a commitment of volunteer time and effort. One of the biggest advantages of fundraising activities and events is the opportunity to involve people and to increase community awareness of the school's needs—especially if you can get publicity about the activity or event. Before you begin, check with your school for policies regarding fundraising.

The following fundraisers have all stood the test of time:

- Food and craft sales—bake sales, concession stand sales, handmade craft sales, book sales, clothing sales, etc.
- Holiday fairs—set up a table at the school with inexpensive items for sale that children can purchase for their families and scheduled times for each class to shop.
- Product sales—secure a catalog from one of the many companies that offer fundraising items which students can sell.
- Raffles and games of chance—raffle tickets, "Las Vegas night," and Bingo can be successful fundraisers, but be sure to check both local and state gambling regulations before proceeding.
- Eating events—pancake breakfasts, spaghetti suppers, themed meals from different parts of the world, etc.
- Exhibition games—invite area celebrities (e.g., police officials, radio personalities, etc.), college or high school athletes, school staff, or others to participate in fun or regulation-style competitions.
- Auctions—secure donations of goods and services. If a professional auctioneer is not available, use a local celebrity.
- Services—car washes, lawn mowing, errand running, etc.
- Loyalty programs—encourage staff, parents, and family members to sign up for loyalty programs at retailers where they shop most often and designate your school as the recipient of funds.

How to Organize a Fundraiser

Having a written, well-organized plan is essential. It will help keep the planning committee and other volunteers on track and serve as a blueprint for future fundraising activities. The Event Planning Guide Checklist in the Appendix provides an easy-to-follow, 16-step plan that will help you completely organize your fundraiser from start to finish.

How to Get Free Merchandise

Donations of merchandise are a great way to minimize fundraising expenses because every item you can obtain for free represents real dollars that can be counted at the end of the event. Donations fall into two distinct categories: sale item donations and prize donations.

Sale item donations are things that you want to sell for money at your fundraiser (e.g., cookies for a bake sale, used children's clothing for a rummage sale, etc.). Obtaining such items is generally easy because they are things people do not mind donating to a worthy cause. Here are a few general calls to action that have worked for other educators. Try them all, and see which works best for you:

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- Challenge your fellow educators to gather the most items—with the winner getting a free lunch paid for by everyone else.
- Send a request letter home with your students.
- Post fliers and signs around your community.
- Mention on the school or district website, Facebook page, etc.
- Place an advertisement in your local newspaper.

Prize donations are popular or better-quality items that you want to set aside as prizes (e.g., gift cards, bikes, etc.). Obtaining these items may not be as easy as sale items because the best prizes tend to be things that cost a little more money. Here are some suggested sources for obtaining items as prize donations:

- Local businesses (restaurants, hotels, bowling alleys, movie theaters, etc.) are the most approachable sources of prizes—they will likely give your school something because it is inexpensive advertising.
- Civic groups (Chamber of Commerce, Lions Club, Rotary, Kiwanis, etc.) may provide prize donations related to their organizations or of more general interest.
- Sports teams (local and national) can be excellent sources of prize donations because of their popularity with both children and adults and their stock of goods ranging from logo items to free tickets.
- Local artists or craftspeople can be asked to donate items they have created.
- Parents'/guardians' employers may welcome the opportunity to help out, especially if they can donate items that represent their companies.
- See the Appendix for an [Item Donation Contact Form](#).

Professional Fundraising Companies

Sometimes the best way to handle a fundraiser is not to do everything yourself at all; that is when you want to talk to a professional fundraising company. These companies specialize in offering products, goods, and services you can purchase for your own fundraising effort. They can provide complete materials and all the helpful advice you will need to get going. Whether you are interested in selling cookbooks, candles, or candy or sponsoring a 5K, there are plenty of professional fundraising companies out there to choose from. Make sure to shop around for the best contract and items or activities that are appropriate for your school.

Online Fundraising

The Internet has changed how we do almost everything, from shopping and entertainment to education and communication. So it is not surprising that the Internet has become a popular and effective way to fundraise as well. As with anything, it is important that you research your options to find a solution that best meets your needs. The tips below are intended to help you get started but are by no means exhaustive.

Benefits of Online Fundraising

- Efficient—online fundraisers are easy to access via the Internet, especially on mobile devices. Potential donors who do not have time to participate in a fundraising event can support your education initiatives with a simple "click." Additionally, the need for volunteers is kept to a minimum with this avenue.

- Reach a large audience—online fundraising reaches large audiences with ease and speed, instantly communicating your project's details. Advertising your fundraiser through email, social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, your school or district website, blogs, and text messages can expand your scope of potential donors even more.
- Cost effective—creating an online fundraiser minimizes costs including paper, personnel, travel, supplies, and even time.

Choose a Fundraising Site

There are many online websites to help you with fundraising. It is important to research and choose a site that best meets your needs.

- Investigate any fees involved before choosing a website. Some sites charge a monthly fee for use or take a percentage of each donation, while others are completely free.
- Evaluate payment options. Most sites allow your donors to pay via PayPal or credit card.
- Understand how and when you will receive donations from the fundraising site.
- Consider the capabilities. Most allow you to personalize the site by adding text, photos, links, etc.

Popular Fundraising Sites:
- www.donorschoose.org
- www.adoptaclassroom.org
- www.firstgiving.com
- www.fundrazr.com
- www.gogetfunding.com

Note: Renaissance is not affiliated with any of these sites.

Communicate Specific Information

The more specific you are, the better your results will be. It is best to create a sense of urgency. Fundraisers with a lengthy time frame tend to fizzle out. Communicate all information with potential donors.

- Purpose—how will the money be used?
- Date—when is the money needed?
- Amount—how much money do you want to raise?

Find Matching Funds

One of the easiest ways to increase donations is by finding a sponsor to match funds raised through a specific fundraiser. Contact local businesses that might be interested in providing a match. This is a great way for businesses to get extra publicity and for you to reach your funding goal more quickly. People are more apt to donate if they know that their contribution will be worth even more through this effort.

Organize Awareness Campaigns

Get the word out that you are holding a fundraiser by communicating the fundraising purpose, dates, and goal amount. While traditional methods for communicating fundraising efforts such as sending letters home with students will be helpful, the ever-growing popularity of social networking and electronic communication may be more effective. Also, remember to send out regular reminders.

- Facebook—update your status to remind your "friends" of the ongoing fundraiser. Encourage others to "share" your fundraising link too. (You can even make your status update "public" and reach additional people not in your immediate network.)

- Twitter—post "tweets" to let followers know of your fundraiser.

- Text messages—text parents/guardians (if you have access/permission to use their mobile phone numbers) to notify and remind them of your fundraiser.

- Newsletters or websites—encourage everyone involved to post the fundraiser in their newsletters or on their websites.

- Class writing project—have students write persuasive letters to family and friends, letting them know about the fundraiser, as part of a writing or English assignment.

Set a Fundraising Goal and Communicate Progress

It is necessary to set a fundraising goal so you can monitor progress toward your goal while encouraging others to help you reach it. Many fundraising sites (including those listed above) offer "widgets" you can add to your website, social networking site(s), or blog for tracking and sharing your progress to parents and the community. Quick, visual updates with data speak volumes.

Thank Donors and Volunteers

Do not forget to take time to thank your donors and volunteers. You can use the same modes of communication which notified them of the fundraiser (e.g., Facebook, websites, newsletters, etc.) to recognize their contributions and communicate your gratitude. Let donors and volunteers know how much you appreciate their efforts, the total amount raised, and what the money was used for. Send individual thank-you letters to donors who made significant contributions or volunteers who chaired committees.

Asking for Community Support

Another way to secure funding is to ask businesses and civic organizations in your community for money. It may be easier than you think because they have an interest in helping educate your students—their workforce and customers of the future.

Contacting Local Sources

When determining potential donors, a good place to start is with your local Chamber of Commerce. They will have a listing of businesses, industries, and fraternal organizations located in your area. In addition, identify the local companies with which the district does business—banks, utilities, office supply retailers, food service vendors, and others.

What Appeals to Them?

There are many reasons local businesses and associations will help fund your students' needs:

1. Helping education is good public relations—and a source of free advertising.

2. These organizations understand the importance of supporting local education.

3. Your proposal will help build a more literate employee and customer base.

4. Business people understand and appreciate the need for the progress monitoring systems you are requesting funds for because management information systems have improved their own workplace.

5. Your proposed programs will demonstrate measurable results.

How Can You Appeal to Them?

Determine to whom your request should be addressed. Always send your request to an individual rather than addressing it to a title. If you are not sure if the individual is a "Mr." or a "Ms." (Chris, Kelly, Robin, etc.), call to find out. If the company has a contributions committee which makes funding decisions, try to get the name of the committee chair. Send your request on school or district letterhead.

Present your case. Craft a letter which details what you are trying to accomplish and why it is important to the academic success of your students. Be explicit in the amount of funding you need.

Seeing is believing. In your letter, invite representatives of the organization to visit your school. Show them what you and your students are already doing and how your proposal will enhance the students' learning. Engage your visitors in a discussion about what they have seen. Be bold. Guests often ask what they can do to help. Ask outright for funding to start or continue a program.

Recognize their efforts. Send a personal thank-you letter (handwritten is best) to each visitor. Even in the event your guests declined to give you funding at their visit or on your first request, your follow-up may nudge a decision-maker to reconsider.

Keep them updated. After you have begun implementing the program supported by their dollars, write your donors a letter to once again thank them for their generous contribution. Demonstrating tangible outcomes builds pride in your school and creates a climate for continued support. The easy-to-understand reports generated by Renaissance software are excellent graphic tools to show them the positive impact that the

program is having on overall student achievement in your classroom or school. Just make sure not to share data on individual students.

> **Remember**: Be sure to use your school or district stationery for the letter, and always address it directly to an individual at the company instead of simply a title. We have included a blank Donation Request Contact Form in the Appendix that will help you organize all the information you collect during your request campaign.

Try More Than One Source

Present your case to several businesses and associations. You can ask each for a contribution toward the total amount you need, or you can package your request in smaller amounts for specific purposes (e.g., Renaissance Star Assessments, Renaissance Accelerated Reader, library books, computer upgrades, etc.), which might be more appealing to potential donors since they can see exactly how their dollars will be used in achieving your objectives.

If you prefer not to earmark dollars for particular items, you can request an amount that designates various contribution levels (*friends, supporters, patrons, partners*; *bronze, silver, gold, diamond;* or some creative terminology that relates to your project, school, or community).

Even small contributions add up. Having a broad base of support will give you a wider starting point the next time you are seeking funds.

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Applying for Grants

A grant is an amount of money given in response to a proposal that describes some plan to be followed in response to a need. Grants differ from donations or other forms of community support because a grant comes with defined expectations on the part of the funder. Donations are usually motivated by a sense of charity or a desire for community involvement—plus a favorable impression of those making the request. The donor is unlikely to need details of how you do the work, who the project personnel are, or aspects of school or classroom management. Grants, on the other hand, are given to address a particular concern or area of interest. The funder will want to know your specific approach in addressing its concerns, how capable you are of meeting the need you have identified, time frames, details of how you will spend the money, and how you (and the funder) will know if the money was well spent.

Whether you are seeking a foundation/corporate grant or a government grant, this section will help you to identify sources of grants and write the grant proposal. Use the Proposal Checklist in the Appendix as you go along to help you through the grant writing process.

> **Remember**: A realistic timetable is of utmost importance! Before you begin writing a grant proposal, ensure that you have enough time to gather needed data, create the proposal, and secure signatures and letters of support, plus any required documentation. Set a preliminary deadline at least 5 days before the real deadline to make last-minute revisions, give you time to make copies, and prepare the application package for submission. If you use an overnight delivery service, know when the proposal must be in the funder's hands (preferably earlier than one day before it is due). If you are submitting your proposal electronically, do not wait until the last minute, since a flood of applicants could overload the website you are attempting to access.

Grant Types

There are two types of grants educators can compete for: public (federal or state) and private (foundations or corporations). Here are the key differences between the two types.

Public grants. Many competitive government grants are available annually at both the federal and state level. You can apply only when a grant opportunity is announced. The US or specific state department of education reviews applications in accordance with the legislative and regulatory requirements established for each particular funding program. Federal grants are submitted by registered users using the eGrants System. The registration process can take up to two weeks. You can learn how to register at http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants.html. State departments of education will have their own systems for grant application submission.

Private grants. Foundation and corporate grants are available at local, state, and national levels. Some have application deadlines, others do not. The foundation board members review applications for those that align to their mission, follow their guidelines, and appeal to them based on the applicant's explanation of the need and approach to meeting it. Boards may meet to make funding decisions monthly, quarterly, or annually. You must be tax exempt from federal income tax under section 501(c)(3) as a non-profit organization (school foundation) or under section 170 (c)(1) as a government instrumentality (public school district). For more information about 501(c)(3) status, visit www.501c3.org.

Searching for Government Grants

The fastest and easiest way to get information about competitive grant programs at the federal and state government level is by using the Internet.

- **Federal:** Go to the US Department of Education's Grant Program Title Listing at http://www2.ed.gov/programs/find/title/index.html. You can also search by subject. Detailed information found for each grant will help you determine if you are eligible, what can be funded using that grant, provide answers to frequently asked questions, and give you directions on how to apply.
- **State:** Visit your state's department of education website for state-specific grant information. State websites can also provide information about upcoming grant competitions using listservs or publications to which you can subscribe.

Searching for Foundation/Corporate Grants

In searching for grants, start with foundations and corporations in your city or state. Who supports other organizations serving children and families (e.g., YMCA/YWCA, Boys & Girls Clubs, scouting)? What are the local banks? Which major retailers have stores in the area? What utility companies serve the district? From whom does your school or the district purchase office supplies, food service items, etc.? Are there companies in the area that employ clusters of your students' parents?

Once you identify potential funders, go to their websites to see what they fund, who is eligible, and how to apply. Read their information carefully since it not only explains what their funding priorities are, it may reveal key ideas or language that you will want to include in your grant proposal.

If you would like to do a wider search, here are some resources that might be of help:

- www.getedfunding.com
- www.grantsalert.com
- www.grants4teachers.com

Note: Renaissance is not affiliated with any of these sites.

> **Remember**: Start your grant search close to home. Your district may have a foundation that provides grants to its teachers or schools for special projects.

How to Pick the Right Grant for You

When evaluating a grant opportunity, ask yourself: Can we write an application for this grant that will specifically meet *all* of its qualifying factors? Are we eligible? Does what we plan to propose match the purpose of the grant or the funders' interests? Can we fully address the selection criteria? Is the amount of funding available sufficient to meet the need? Will the funding be awarded when we need it? Do we have the time and team needed to prepare a competitive proposal?

It will be helpful to fill out a Funding Prospect Worksheet for each funding source you are considering. A reproducible sample is in the Appendix.

Preparing the Proposal

The "look" of your proposal will give the reviewer a sense of how you approach a task. No matter how great the need or how worthy your project, if the proposal itself is not neat and orderly, or is hard to follow, it may be discarded without having been read.

Follow the funding source's format. If a foundation requests a two-page letter, do not submit three pages. If they want a proposal section titled "Statement of the Problem," do not label it "Needs Statement."

There can be no spelling or typographical errors. Be sure the name of the person to whom you are sending the proposal is correctly spelled, and there are no typos anywhere in the proposal. Do not rely on your word processing software to check for spelling or typographical errors—you may have typed a word that is correctly spelled but is not the word you intended to use. Proofread your proposal twice and then ask someone else to do it a third time.

There can be no calculation errors in the budget. Check and re-check the proposed budget and any other calculations you might have shown. For example, if, in the need section, you report student achievement according to the percentage of students scoring at various proficiency levels (50% below basic, 34% basic, 17% advanced), the percentages must add up to 100% (these examples do not). If you calculate a per student cost, be sure you have accurately divided the total cost by the number of students.

A sample Proofreader Review form is in the Appendix.

> **Remember**: It is difficult to proofread something you have written yourself because you tend to see what you think you have written rather than what you have actually written. You are so familiar with what the proposal *should* say that you may not see what it *does* say. Ask someone else to help. Before you begin any grant writing steps, you may want to re-read the *Getting Started* section—it will save you time and make your task more manageable.

Writing the Narrative

The headings for each of the proposal sections shown below are generic. The section titles may be different in various grant applications, but these represent common proposal components within both public and private funding opportunities.

Need for the Project

Describe the need for your project in the most compelling terms possible. Why is your population of students the most deserving of this funding? Provide relevant data from a variety of sources to substantiate the need, such as:

- Student achievement data
- Demographic data (e.g., population changes, family income, educational attainment, non-English speakers)
- Parent/guardian employment data, types of jobs typically held by parents/guardians, unemployment rate in the community
- Health department data (e.g., birth rate, low-birth weight babies, teen pregnancies)
- Social services data (e.g., families receiving public assistance, abuse and neglect, etc.)
- Housing patterns (e.g., homelessness, subsidized housing, substandard housing)
- Percent of students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch

- Juvenile crime statistics

Since many grant applications focus on improving student achievement, discuss test score results for the target population, noting where the most significant gaps are and what the trend has been over the past 2–3 years. Identify any subgroups for whom the gaps are greatest and discuss how the proposed project will address their needs.

Proposed Project

Cover all aspects of your proposed project. How many students will be involved? In what grades? How often will project activities occur? What staff will be involved? What specific activities will you offer? How will these improve achievement? Use research studies and product descriptions provided by Renaissance to explain your approach. What is your professional development plan (topics, frequency, participants, etc.)? Will you be partnering with other organizations? What is their role? Although potential partners are often the "usual suspects"—YMCA/ YWCA, Boys & Girls Clubs, scouting groups—think outside the box. Are there sports teams, arts organizations, health care providers, etc., who could contribute services to the project?

How will parents/guardians be involved? Describe digital and print media you will use to inform the community about the project and its ongoing progress.

Organizational Capacity

If your school receives federal funding, make note of your experience (1) providing curriculum and instructional approaches designed to address the purposes of the Title funding that you have; (2) managing federal funds; and (3) ensuring compliance with federal regulations.

Describe how your school or district has worked on any grant-funded or other special projects: what the project was, how much funding was involved, what the time period was, and what the outcomes were. If there are no such projects, discuss how the district ensures compliance with federal, state, and/or local regulations and requirements. If any of the project staff have prior experience implementing grant-funded projects, note that—even if it occurred outside of the district. In addition, highlight the experience, education, and any special recognition of staff who will implement your project.

Sustainability

If you have a plan in place (e.g., you have already identified a source of continued funding), describe what the plan is, who will be involved, what the implementation timeline is, etc. If you do not have a plan in place, consider how you will secure ongoing funding. Will you ask the school district to allocate funds to meet the ongoing need, submit proposals to other organizations, solicit businesses or civic groups such as Rotary or the Lions Club, develop specific sponsorship opportunities, or hold fundraising events?

You might recruit a steering committee of local business leaders, advocates, and community volunteers to help plan as well as seed these efforts. Involving the community at large demonstrates to funders that the community values the program and has a financial stake in it. Discuss how you will involve parents/guardians in these efforts: What fundraising events can families organize and actively participate in—potluck suppers, craft fairs, read-a-thons, etc.? What are the potential sources of support that parents/guardians can tap into—their employers, businesses they patronize, groups of which they are members?

A sustainability plan is not a guarantee of future funding, but it does demonstrate to grant reviewers that you will explore and implement those activities you believe can be effective and achievable.

Budget

The budget narrative is where you identify the nature and amount of the proposed expenditures. Provide sufficient detail to enable reviewers to understand how and when requested funds will be expended, and the relationship between the requested funds, project activities, and outcomes.

The proposal narrative tells your story with words; the budget narrative tells your story with dollars. Both sections must tell the same story. There should be no surprises in the budget narrative. For example, any positions referenced in the proposal narrative should detail related personnel costs (salaries, payroll taxes, benefits) in the budget narrative. Conversely, there should be no personnel expenses shown in the budget narrative for positions that have not been addressed within the proposal narrative.

Budget narratives typically cover costs for personnel, project staff travel, materials and supplies, consultants and subcontractors, indirect costs and any other project expenses. Use real numbers, based on current expenditures or quotes from Renaissance and other suppliers, not estimates. Be sure to include costs for any grant-specific requirements, such as evaluation

Credibility

Your school must be credible in terms of what it does, how well it works, and its accomplishments. Even schools in need of improvement can demonstrate credibility if they have an achievable improvement plan and some early results.

Credibility can come from a variety of sources:

- Positive media coverage of the school, a student, or a staff member
- Letters from parents about their children's progress
- Letters from district or state officials
- Newspaper, magazine, or professional journal articles on educational issues or the changing demographics of your community, or any other topic which is relevant to your grant request
- Well-chosen anecdotes from staff regarding the need or the proposed solution
- Citable research supporting your proposed solution (to obtain copies of any Renaissance research, call (800) 338-4204 or visit http://www.renaissance.com/Resources/Research).
- Awards and honors for your school and for the Renaissance products you are proposing to buy

Include examples from your "credibility file" as supporting materials where appropriate.

Government Grant Proposals

Government grants are the most rewarding in terms of dollars, but they are also the most challenging and time-consuming to apply for. Government grants, from both state and federal sources, typically provide significant funding, and they are competitive, which means that in order to get awarded your grant must outcompete other schools' proposals. Government grants are often targeted to schools designated as high poverty, Title I Schoolwide, or In Need of Improvement.

Tips for Gaining Government Grants

1. **Determine your eligibility**. Carefully review the grant's criteria to determine your eligibility. Some states provide a list of schools that meet specific eligibility criteria. Do yourself a favor: Do not go through the process of applying if you are not eligible. No matter how great the need or compelling your case is, if you are not eligible, you will not win the grant.

2. **Obtain all grant materials**. When you find a government grant for which you are eligible, download the application from the website or request an application package. The grant application will provide specific instructions, forms, and details you must follow exactly in order to be considered for the grant. Generally, you are required to complete and submit standard forms, a narrative description of your proposed project, and an estimated budget.

3. **Pay attention to the deadlines**. The deadlines shown on government grants are firm: A grant application received even one minute past the deadline will not be accepted. If you do not meet the deadline—even by one tick of the clock—all of your hard work will be wasted. If you find a grant due in less than 15–20 days, seriously consider whether or not you can pull together your application in time. Bear in mind that electronic applications may require more time to upload than you expect. If you already know what you want to do with the grant, have sufficient time for writing it, and you meet eligibility requirements, then go for it.

4. **Utilize a team approach**. Organize a team of individuals who will contribute to the grant proposal. Team members can carry out pieces of the work, such as conducting the needs assessment, interviewing school staff and community members, and brainstorming ideas for objectives and activities. Assign one team member to do all of the writing and compilation of the team's input for a consistent voice throughout your proposal.

5. **Follow instructions**. Government grant announcements provide very detailed instructions on how to describe your project needs and strategic plans, as well as how you plan to manage and evaluate the project. Follow these instructions exactly and stay within page limits.

6. **Complete each section accurately and thoroughly**. Organize your proposal according to the grant instructions, using each section as an outline heading. Be careful not to misrepresent your data or your project; if you receive the funding, you will be legally responsible for the contract with the government agency. Attention to detail is critical. Be sure to address all the areas stipulated by the funder. If you cannot respond to a particular question or proposal section, explain why instead of just skipping it. It is essential to be honest throughout the process.

7. **Review and revise**. Review your work carefully. It is a good idea to ask someone unfamiliar with the project to review it and offer suggestions that can improve the proposal's clarity. If this individual has questions about what you have written, it is likely that the proposal reviewer(s) will also.

How Will Your Grant Application Be Evaluated?

Federal funding applications have clearly stated "Selection Criteria" which not only stipulate what the applicant must address, but also how the responses will be evaluated by the reviewers. Each criterion is worth a specific number of points to be assigned by the reviewers. Each eligible application is evaluated by a team of reviewers working independently. Their scores are averaged to generate a single score which is then ranked along with other applications.

In addition to giving numerical scores, reviewers identify the strengths and weaknesses of the responses to each selection criterion. These comments can be very useful to you in preparing future grant applications. They are not always consistent from reviewer to reviewer, but they are still worth noting.

Here are examples of selection criteria from two federal grant applications. The term "the extent to which…" is used as the basis for the score. This is a subjective measure since there is no definition of "extent" for the reviewer's reference. However, the criteria do stipulate what the reviewers will be looking for:

> *The extent to which the applicant's approach to implementing its reform proposal will support high-quality school-level implementation of that proposal, including—*
>
> *(a) A description of the process that the applicant used to select schools to participate.*
> *(b) A list of the schools that will participate in grant activities.*
> *(c)The total number of participating students.*

Note that *(a)* requires the reviewer to judge the applicant's response in terms of the appropriateness of the process, any innovative approaches, the completeness of the description, or any other criteria the reviewer decides to use, while *(b)* and *(c)* are simply factual information. The total number of points for this criterion is 10. The applicant could expect that the score will be weighted in favor of *(a)*—perhaps 6–8 points for the quality of the response to that item and 1–2 points each for items *(b)* and *(c)*. Nonetheless, these guidelines are not explicitly stated.

> *The extent to which the management plan articulates key responsibilities and well-defined objectives, including the timelines and milestones for completion of major project activities, the metrics that will be used to assess progress on an ongoing basis, and annual performance targets the applicant will use to monitor whether the project is achieving its goals.*

This criterion identifies the components of the management plan that must be addressed. There will be some reviewer subjectivity in deciding what are *"key responsibilities"* and *"well-defined objectives"* and whether the *metrics* are applicable, but a thoughtful and complete response covering all of the components should earn the maximum points.

State grant applications usually have rubrics which identify the specific indicators being evaluated on a multi-category scale.

This is a low-to-high category:

> *Inadequate*—information not provided
> *Minimal*—requires additional clarification
> *Good*—clear and complete
> *Excellent*—concise and thoroughly developed

This is a high-to-low category scale:

> *Excellent*—response addresses all indicators and demonstrates an overall high level of performance

> *Good*—response addresses most indicators and demonstrates an overall high or improving level of
> performance
> *Fair*—response addresses few indicators and demonstrates an overall minimal level of performance
> *Poor*—response does not address indicators

This is a 5-point rubric:

> *0 points*—no description of any sub-criteria
> *1 point*—limited description of most sub-criteria
> *2 points*—adequate description of most sub-criteria
> *3 points*—adequate description of all sub-criteria
> *4 points*—thorough description of most sub-criteria, adequate description of remaining
> *5 points*—thorough description of all sub-criteria

This is a 3-category rubric, with the number of points for each category varying according to the total number of points for the specific criterion:

> *Does not meet standard* (1 point out of 5 possible; 1–5 points out of 20 possible)
> *Meets standard* (2–3 points out of 5; 6–14 points out of 20 possible)
> *Exceeds standard* (4–5 points out of 5; 15–20 points out of 20 possible).

Every one of these examples entails reviewer subjectivity. While you cannot know exactly how a reviewer will define "high level" or "adequate" or "thorough" or any other qualitative measure, you can test each section of your proposal against the relevant rubric criteria. Be sure you have addressed every item that the reviewers will be evaluating and that you have done your very best to respond in ways that will earn the highest ratings.

Foundation Proposals

The structure for foundation grant proposals is usually not as defined or rigorous as it is for government grants. While contact with public officials is discouraged (or in some cases, forbidden) as part of the government grant process, it is wise to contact the foundation or corporation prior to submitting your proposal in order to introduce yourself, ask if it would be appropriate to submit a proposal for your particular project, a suitable amount to request, and see if they would be willing to meet with you before you prepare the proposal.

Many foundations have specified areas of interest to which they target their funding. Identifying these areas is part of the funding search process. Once they are identified, tailor your proposal to each foundation that you are considering. This strategy enables you to fine tune a single proposal to match the interests of several foundations. Your proposed project will be essentially the same for each application, but the focus of the proposal—need statement, target population, even some activities—may be different.

Foundation interest areas may relate to:

- School level—pre-K (often designated as "early childhood"), elementary, middle, or secondary
- Subject matter—literacy, language arts, reading, math, science, etc.
- Technology—instructional approaches, computers or other devices for students, digital citizenship
- After-school programs
- Gender-based projects (programs for girls only or boys only)

- Programs for special populations—students from low-income families, student with disabilities, English Learners

It is not wise to force-fit a project that you would not otherwise propose simply to conform to a particular foundation's interests. Instead, there should be a natural fit that you can highlight to demonstrate how your planned project falls within the foundation's interest area.

> **Remember**: Dollars follow the project instead of the project following the dollars. Do not write a proposal for a project you have defined simply because you have uncovered a source that may fund it. Decide what the need is and how best to meet it, and then create proposals to submit to appropriate funding sources.

The Proposal Narrative

The key sections of a successful foundation grant proposal are listed below and on the next page. In drafting the narrative, think about who will be reading it and what questions they may have. Avoid the use of educational jargon. Spell out acronyms and explain any terms that might be unfamiliar to individuals outside of the education field. Give your proposal energy by writing in the active voice.

The page-length guidelines shown are suggestions. Adjust the number of pages according to the funder's requirements. Even if there are no page limits, be succinct. More words are not necessarily more persuasive.

School information—this section should be one-half to one page long and include:

- Brief summary of school's history, mission, and goals.
- Description of current programs and past accomplishments.

Purpose of the grant—describe the following in no more than two to four pages:

- Student or community needs to be addressed and which target populations will benefit.
- Project goals for which funds are being requested.
- Project description, including objectives, activities, time frame, number served, and frequency of implementation. Outline the strategy/methodology and timeline to be used both in developing and implementing the program.
- How this project/program enhances the existing services in the school and community.
- Your plan to evaluate the success of the project, including outcomes and results.
- How evaluation results will be used for program planning.
- Long-term strategies for how the school intends to fund this project beyond the grant period.

Budget:

- Budget narrative

  Each item you are seeking funding for should be tied to your objectives and activities. Do not include any cost items that have not been discussed in the proposal narrative. Conversely, make sure that every program-related cost item described in the narrative is shown in the budget.

- Budget detail

  Break out all project expenses by line item (personnel costs, including salaries and benefits; materials; professional development; travel; etc.) Be sure to check your numbers. Although you should use your quote as the basis for detailing the cost of Renaissance products and services, do

not insert or attach the quote itself, unless requested by the funder to do so. Instead, pull the cost information from the quote (item, unit cost, fees, shipping, total cost) and enter it in whatever budget format (table, columns, etc.) you are using.

- Funding sources
  List other funding sources being used or solicited for this project, including donations and volunteer time.

Supporting materials:

In addition to the proposal narrative, the following supporting materials may be required:

- Key project personnel
  List the qualifications of key members of the project. Key members should specialize in the areas of the project for which they will be responsible.

- Organizational chart
  Show the positions (by title) of individuals who will be involved in the proposed project and the reporting relationships among them.

- Board membership
  List the names and affiliations of each member of the board.

- IRS Determination
  Provide a copy of your IRS determination letter and/or explanation of your tax-exempt status.

- Letters of agreement
  If the project involves a partnership with another school or community organization, a letter of agreement, or support will be required outlining the responsibilities of each.

The Proposal Cover Letter

Your cover letter sets the tone for your entire grant application and has the unique ability to deliver potentially decision-altering information that may not fit anywhere else in your proposal. It will be the first thing a potential grantor will read, so if you lose them here, your proposal may never recover. For that reason, spend some time to carefully craft your cover letter.

An effective cover letter will:

- State what you are asking for: the amount and its purpose.
- Explain why you are approaching this funder (past support, history of community involvement, interest in education, etc.).
- Reference any previous conversations you have had with the funder regarding this request.
- Include brief information about your school or district.
- Concisely describe the proposed project in a way that builds excitement and motivates the reader to review the entire proposal.
- Convey additional information that did not fit anywhere else in your proposal.
- Offer recognition to the funder as appropriate.

A sample cover letter is included in the Appendix.

Corporate Grant Requests

Many corporations are interested in how their funds will contribute to the communities in which their employees and/or customers live and work. Help them see how your proposed project will help students prepare for college and career, or reduce drop-out rates, truancy, or other situations which impact the quality of life in the community.

Large, national corporations often have foundations through which they make grants. The process for approaching corporate foundations is the same as applying to a charitable foundation: Determine whether the foundation is an appropriate prospect for your request and follow its grant guidelines closely in preparing your proposal.

Smaller corporations or local operating units of national corporations are more likely to consider their funding assistance as "contributions," "donations," or "gifts" rather than "grants." They can be approached with a 1- to 2-page letter which begins with a statement of the problem, the proposed solution, and the amount of the request. Corporate executives and company managers typically do not care to wade through extended introductions and background information. They want to know what you are asking for, why you are asking, what it will cost, and how you will know it was successful. Will this grant add features to the school that are attractive to parents whom the corporation might be recruiting as employees? What "return on investment" will the corporation receive as a result of this grant?

Note what is innovative about what you are proposing, how it involves technology, how it is accountable and results-focused—common areas of significance to corporate decision-makers.

Use brief paragraphs that are easy to read and avoid or limit the use of jargon or acronyms. Be sure your letter is printed on school or district letterhead and is signed by the appropriate administrator.

A sample corporate request letter is included in the Appendix.

Final Review

It is tempting to jump for joy once you have developed your grant application or corporate request to the point where you feel ready for its submission, but do not send it just yet. Before you submit, make one last check using the list below. It may seem trivial, but these few last-minute details could mean the difference between winning and not winning the grant.

Once you have answered "Yes" to all of the questions below, you are ready to go.

Yes/No	Final Review Questions
	Did you occasionally use bold type, bullets, and dashes so the reviewer can easily find your main points?
	Were you neat, and did you follow ALL of the funder's stated requirements exactly?
	Did you have someone check your copy for grammar, typos, continuity, and clarity?
	Are all necessary signatures in place (cover letter, application forms, etc.)?
	Have you included the requested number of printed copies?
	Do you have complete copies of everything you submitted and all backup and reference material handy and organized?
	Did you make a note on your calendar to contact the funder about receipt, or any new additional information you can provide?

After You Submit Your Grant Application or Funding Request

Staying in Touch

It is a good idea to stay in contact with the funder. Contact the person or department to whom you sent your request to ensure they received it. If you have additional information to share once your proposal has been submitted, but before it has been acted upon (e.g., new funding, news article about the school, changes in student enrollment or demographics, etc.), send it as an FYI.

If You Do Not Receive Funding

If you are turned down, make it a learning experience. First, contact the funder to thank them for considering your proposal and to find out when the next funding opportunity will be available. Then, inquire as to how you can strengthen your application. Government agencies are required to give you feedback on your proposal; foundations and corporations are not. The likelihood of receiving useful information from private funding sources is largely dependent on the relationship you have established with them and their interest in your work. If you do get feedback and can incorporate the funder's suggestions, your next proposal has a better chance of being funded.

If You Do Receive Funding

When you receive a grant, developing a relationship with the grant-maker becomes even more important.

It is important to make sure you:

- Send a personal thank-you letter to the funder.
- Understand all disbursement and reporting procedures before you start issuing purchase orders.
- Provide a steady flow of feedback to the grantor about the progress of your project and its accomplishments. Even if the funder does not require scheduled progress reports, send them anyway. You may find that the combination of your application's success and your personal willingness to meet the information needs of the grantor smooth the way for additional grants in the future.
- Show appreciation to the funder by:
  - Sending them copies of school print or digital media which include information about the project, as well as photos or videos of students using the materials their grant funded, etc.
  - Inviting them to school events such as assemblies in which students are recognized and introducing your guests to the audience
  - Inviting them to the school for lunch or breakfast
  - Sharing parent/guardian, student, or teacher testimonials with them

Recommended Resources

Below is a list of resources that you may find helpful:

- Research—see the Renaissance website (https://www.renaissance.com/resources/research/) for evidence of effectiveness such as peer-reviewed and independent research studies, including experimental and quasi-experimental, as well as correlational, case-study, and psychometric (reliability and validity) research.

- Citations—find national citations and accreditations from organizations such as the National Center on Intensive Intervention, National Dropout Prevention Center, and Council of Administrators of Special Education (for more, see https://www.renaissance.com/about-us/accolades).

- Renaissance products/services information—if you are looking for the best way to write about a Renaissance program, contact us to request ready-to-use copy (https://www.renaissance.com/resources/funding/contact-funding-team/).

- Renaissance solutions support ESSA (https://www.renaissance.com/resources/funding/essa/)—use this summary of the federal funding programs within ESSA to determine which funding sources you might use to purchase each Renaissance product.

- Guidance Documents—contact us to request guidance documents for preparing proposals for specific state or federal grant applications (https://www.renaissance.com/resources/funding/contact-funding-team/).

- Response to Intervention (RTI)—learn how Renaissance tools help educators address the key ideals of RTI (https://www.renaissance.com/resources/funding/ideapartb-ceis/).

At any step in your funding journey, turn to Renaissance for assistance, guidance, and resources. We are here to help.

Appendix

Reproducible forms

- Event Planning Guide
- Funding Prospect Worksheet
- Local Support Contact Form
- Item Donation Contact Form
- Proofreader Review
- Proposal Checklist

Samples

- Sample Need Statement
- Sample Foundation Proposal
- Sample Cover Letter
- Sample Corporate Request

Event Planning Guide

Steps to Complete	Notes	Completed
1) Purpose of Fundraiser		
2) Financial Goal		
3) Type of Event		
4) Committee Members		
5) Event Date and Time		
6) Event Location		
7) Admission Price		
8) Facility Information		
9) Special Permits		
10) Event Materials		
11) Donations		
12) Advertising, Publicity		
13) Volunteer Schedule		
14) Clean-Up		
15) Send "Thank You" Notes		
16) Net Proceeds		

Funding Prospect Worksheet

Contact Information	
Name of Organization	
Contact Person	
Website	
Mailing Address	
Email Address	
Phone	
Fax	
Officers/Trustees	
Is This a Good Match?	
Interest Areas	
Geographic Restrictions	
Total Assets	
Total Grants Paid	
Range of Grants	
Average Grant Amount	*(Divide total grants paid by number of grants listed)*
Typical Grant Amount	*(May be different from average if dollar range is very wide)*
Types of Support	*(Capital, operating, project)*
Application Information	
Guidelines or Forms	
Initial Approach	*(Phone call, letter of inquiry, proposal)*
Deadline(s)	
Board Meeting Date(s)	
Action Taken	
Date Proposal Submitted	
Date Proposal Acknowledged	
Additional Information	*(Requested, submitted)*
Grant Awarded/Declined	
Thank You Sent	

Local Support Contact Form

Organization		Contact	
Name		Name	
Type of Business		Title/Position	
Phone		Phone	
Mailing Address		Mobile Phone	
		Fax	
		Email	
Date of Initial Contact			
Notes			

Item Donation Contact Form

Organization		Contact	
Name		Name	
Type of Business		Title/Position	
Phone		Phone	
Mailing Address		Mobile Phone	
		Fax	
		Email	
Date of Initial Contact			
Notes			

Proofreader Review

Name of Reviewer _____

Date Read _____

Check for the following:

☐ Proposal follows funder's format (number of pages, correct headings, sequence of narrative)

☐ Language reflects that of funder (e.g., *statement of problem* or *statement of need*; *proposed program* or *proposed project*)

☐ All funder requirements (e.g., grant evaluation criteria) are addressed

☐ Correct spelling of names, correct titles

☐ No typographical errors

☐ No grammatical errors

☐ Correct punctuation

☐ Page numbers are in sequence

☐ Page numbers agree with table of contents

☐ No calculation errors in the budget

☐ Budget numbers agree with budget narrative

☐ Appendices or attachments appear in the sequence in which they are noted in the narrative

☐ All requested attachments are included (e.g., IRS determination letter, audit, list of school board members)

I have read the attached proposal and made corrections and/or identified items needing correction or clarification.

Signature _____

Date _____

Proposal Checklist

Before You Begin	Due Date	Completed
Learn your internal guidelines for seeking funding. • Who must approve it? _____ • How long does the approval process take? _____ • Who will sign documents? _____		
Develop a need statement to identify the reason you are seeking funds.		
Convene a grant-writing team.		
From your need statement, develop a goal statement, objectives, strategies, activities, and budget.		
Finding the Right Grant	**Due Date**	**Completed**
Research and identify possible grant sources.		
Use the Funding Prospect Worksheet to evaluate the sources.		
Make preliminary contact with funders to determine interest in your project and obtain application guidelines.		
Review the grant opportunities to determine: • Do we qualify? • What do they fund? • What is the due date? • Are application forms available? • Is a letter of inquiry or pre-registration required? • Where and how is the proposal submitted?		
Preparing to Write the Proposal	**Due Date**	**Completed**
Collect all supporting data to meet the grant criteria and other information you will need for your project.		
Familiarize yourself with how you will be required to submit your proposal. If you are working on a federal grant, obtain your eGrant password and registration now.		
Writing the Proposal	**Due Date**	**Completed**
Prepare each proposal section as instructed in the application.		

	Due	Completed
Write a compelling need statement. What will happen if the need is not met?		
Discuss your project goals, objectives, strategies, and activities in a way that demonstrates how they inter-relate.		
Describe your project management capacity and staff qualifications.		
Describe project accountability measures and evaluation procedures.		
Describe how you will sustain the project when the grant period ends.		
Assemble materials such as letters of support, organization charts, memoranda of understanding, etc.		
Make sure the Table of Contents agrees with your page numbering, especially if you have made last minute changes to the proposal.		
The Intangibles	Due	Completed
Is your project innovative? Does it represent a worthy idea for improving the educational experience? What difference will it make in the lives of students?		
Can your goal(s) be met by the methods, procedures, timelines, and resources you are planning?		
Is your evaluation plan free of potential bias due with reference to who will be conducting it?		
Are your costs reasonable for the proposed results?		
Finishing Touches	Due	Completed
Double check your budget numbers to make sure they are calculated correctly.		
Ask an objective third party (preferably someone unfamiliar with what you are proposing and why) to review your proposal and provide feedback.		
Make sure you have all the required signatures.		
Make the required number of copies.		
Upon award notification, send a thank-you note to the funder, acknowledging the award and assuring them you will fulfill your goals.		
Notify school and community of the award and begin planning a project orientation and kick-off event.		

Follow up with the funding source, whether or not your proposal is funded, to ask for input on its strengths and weaknesses.		

Sample Need Statement

Reading skills not only strengthen learning in all other subject areas, they expose children to a wealth of information and experiences—stimulating the imagination, fostering emotional growth, building verbal skills, and influencing thinking.

In second grade reading, the focus changes from decoding (sounding out) words to learning to read for meaning. Third grade is a pivotal point in a child's education—the time when students shift from learning to read and begin reading to learn. Third-grade reading level has been shown to be a significant predictor of eighth-grade reading level and ninth-grade course performance. A study by the Annie E. Casey Foundation found that third-graders who lack proficiency in reading are four times more likely to become high school dropouts.

Many of the 500 children at Planet Earth Elementary School are struggling with reading. Twenty-three percent of our 3rd graders did not pass the most recent state reading test. Our fifth graders fared worse: 44 percent failed the test. If their reading does not improve, they face a disappointing future.

Nearly 7 percent of our students are homeless; almost 85 percent live in households with family incomes at or below the poverty level. Books and other reading materials, as well as computers and other devices, are unaffordable and generally unavailable at home. Thus, it is targeted efforts in school that will build excitement toward reading, provide the reading practice that hones student's skills, and lead to college and career readiness—our goal for all students.

The proposed project is designed to increase second- and third-graders' reading skills through the implementation of (1) Star Reading, a computer-adaptive assessment that identifies the range of individual students' reading levels and the skills they are ready to learn, and (2) Accelerated Reader, a guided, independent reading practice and skills program tailored to each student's reading abilities which provides instantaneous feedback to students and enables teachers to monitor their progress and adapt instruction as needed.

Sample Foundation Proposal

Introduction

This proposal requests a grant of $25,000 from the Community Foundation to improve student proficiency in reading and math among our 6,725 students in order to rectify a poor graduation rate. The total cost of our proposed three-step project is $75,135 for cutting-edge assessment, reading and math practice, and progress-monitoring technology from Renaissance. We plan to particularly target students who are recent transfers into our school district and are performing below grade level, as well as all students who are struggling in reading or math.

The Successful School System is located in the southwest corner of our state, about twelve miles from Maple City, the largest community in the region. We enroll students in seven different schools, including two primary, two elementary, a middle and high school, and a ninth-grade academy. The most distinctive features of the school system are its uncompromising commitment to excellence and its caring and dedicated faculty.

Nearly two-thirds of the student population is white, about 20 percent are African-American, and the remainder are Asian, Hispanic, and/or Native American. Almost half of our students are low-income, qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch, and five percent are considered homeless under the federal definition. Daily school attendance is high, with average attendance being over 96 percent.

Parent volunteers, PTA members, and community members provide countless hours of service enriching the district's curriculum and school experiences. Parents' input is encouraged and valued. The district has active school site councils and a Parent Advisory Committee which meets regularly to assess school needs, develop budgets, and implement strategies to enhance the learning environment and educational program for the children.

Need Statement

In spite of all its success and its enduring commitment to excellence, the Successful School System faces some serious challenges. One of the most urgent is the high school graduation rate. At the end of last school year, the graduation rate was only 66 percent. Looking back over three school years, our dropout rates for the high school grades (as well as grades 6–8) have been consistently higher than those for the state as a whole.

There are two probable reasons for this disappointing result. The first is the large number of transfer students at sixth grade and above who enter our schools working below grade level. The second is the lack of a systematic and system-wide program of assessment, intervention, and monitoring, due to a lack of financial resources.

Of the 216 students who failed to graduate, just over half were transfers to the district at the middle or high school level. These students were behind academically when they entered our school system and were unable to gain the academic skills necessary to graduate.

Families and students continue to move into our district at an unprecedented rate. During last year's school term, 648 students sixth grade or higher transferred into the system. Since these students often lag several grade levels in reading and/or math skills, it is crucial that we develop efficient and effective ways to identify the learning gaps of all students and plan for their remediation in a timely manner.

In the process of creating the district's Five-Year Strategic Plan last spring, we identified a number of *internal weaknesses* including graduation rates, budget cuts, crowded schools, limited financial resources, and the achievement gap. Among the *external challenges* noted were an influx of low-income and minority students, increasing population, parents without jobs, and a lack of funding for mandated programs.

Due to the need for a research-based program of assessment, intervention, and progress-monitoring that addresses <u>all</u> our learners—at all ages and skill levels—the Successful School System proposes to acquire and implement computer-adaptive testing and reading and math practice technology.

Project Description

The overall goal of this project is to improve student proficiency in reading and math in order to increase the percentage of students who graduate from high school. The measurable performance objectives we have identified for this project are:

1. Increase the average scaled score of all students in reading and math by 5 percentage points each year.
2. Increase the number of K–8 students promoted to the next grade by 10 percent by the end of next school year.
3. Increase the high school graduation rate by 10 percent by next year and 20 percent by the following year.

This project has four critical components: 1) instruction aligned to state performance standards, 2) frequent assessment of student progress, 3) individualizing instruction based on data from assessments, and 4) professional development that is job-embedded and focused on understanding and using assessment data.

We plan to use computer-adaptive testing (CAT) as the central assessment tool. While our current assessments index overall growth, they do not demonstrate mastery of specific skills. They may tell a teacher that a student is struggling in reading, but do not pinpoint the needed skills to target in intervention. CAT adjusts the items administered during an assessment based on student responses and the difficulty of the items. The student's responses result in an indication of skills attained and skills lacking across specific literacy and math domains.

Successful School System proposes to use cloud-based technology from Renaissance in this project for assessment, progress monitoring, and practice management. Key tools will be the Star 360 trio of computer-adaptive assessment programs: Star Reading, Star Early Literacy and Star Math.

- **Star Reading** helps educators evaluate student improvement, differentiate instruction, identify struggling readers, track growth over time, and assist students in selecting appropriate books for reading practice.
- **Star Early Literacy** is a diagnostic assessment to determine early literacy progress for emerging readers from pre-K to third grade. The program assesses 32 different skill sets in eight domains including Phonics and Word Recognition, Vocabulary Acquisition and Use, Fluency, etc.
- **Star Math** measures student mastery of grade-specific math skills. Taking about 15 minutes to administer, it is one of the fastest ways to do screening and benchmarking, progress monitoring, and student placement.
- We will also employ two other Renaissance programs, **Accelerated Reader**, the nation's leading reading management program, and **MathFacts in a Flash**. Accelerated Reader provides a reading

practice component combined with a daily progress monitoring tool and assesses student reading with four types of quizzes: comprehension, vocabulary practice, literacy skills and textbook quizzes. Students will use MathFacts in a Flash to gain automaticity in addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, squares, and other mental computational skills. The program combines practice, mastery assessment, and progress monitoring of fundamental math skills toward evidence-based benchmarks.

Professional Development

A key component of this project—and a major budget item—will be the provision of professional development services to those responsible for implementing the project. The training will focus on understanding and using assessment data, differentiating instruction, and working together in collaborative teams for ongoing instructional improvement.

The training, to be provided by Renaissance, will be job-embedded and designed to deliver strategic support throughout the school year. There will be a general orientation for up to 30 staff during onsite seminars and planning sessions; more intensive training will be provided for core staff, such as the reading and math specialists at each school. Two staff members from each school will participate in these more intensive sessions, the *Champions' Academy*. Over the course of project implementation, the champions will develop the deeper knowledge and skills needed to serve as experts and trainers at their schools.

Some of the topics and skills to be covered during these in-depth sessions include: an overview of Star 360 and Accelerated Reader as they relate to state standards, monitoring student progress using growth models to determine reasonable growth expectations, and tracking student performance relative to proficiency on state assessments and mastery of state standards.

Benefits and Outcomes

As the Community Foundation is well aware, a strong education system is an indispensable element for a strong and thriving local community. Successful School System has created such a system, but we currently face a challenge that must be overcome in order to sustain the quality of life in the region and insure a stable and bright future for our students. It is imperative that we reverse a downward trend and improve the graduation rate in our schools. Our community cannot prosper unless our youth and young adults are prepared to succeed in the workplace and/or higher education. A community of drop-outs is a community sliding towards decline and decay.

This proposed project will produce a number of benefits for the region, which we believe also support the goals and priorities of the Community Foundation. It will:

- Impact student performance in a positive way and encourage our students to become self-directed learners.
- Provide teachers with tools and training to efficiently assess the needs of students and take timely action to accelerate academic growth.
- Empower parents to become more engaged in the education process.
- Integrate appropriate technology into the school curriculum for assessment and learning purposes.

The specific outcomes we expect to achieve include:

- Teachers will learn how to interpret data, set research-based goals, use data to inform instruction and understand the dynamics of student growth.

- Students will spend more time in engaged reading and math practice and teachers will spend less time on assessment and more time on instruction and practice.
- Parents will use Renaissance Home Connect and Star Parent Reports to monitor their children's reading and math practice and reinforce academic accomplishments.
- Student proficiency in reading and math will increase along with student confidence and motivation, thereby raising high school graduation rates.

The results of our project will be measured by these methods:

- Reading and math performance scores for grades 1–8 on the state high-stakes tests.
- End of course tests results for grades 9–12.
- Star 360 assessments, which provide national norm scores in regard to grade equivalent and percentile rank, and also offer Student State Performance Reports and Student Growth Percentile (SGP) reports to indicate how students, classes, and the school district are doing and what needs to happen in order to reach proficiency on state tests.
- Star Reading and Star Math assessments have received strong reviews from the National Center on Intensive Intervention and high ratings for screening tools evaluated by the National Center on Response to Intervention.

Project Budget

Star 360	$
Ninth Grade Campus (number of students × unit cost)	$
Beginners Primary (number of students × unit cost)	$
Children's Primary (number of students × unit cost)	$
Excellent Elementary (number of students × unit cost)	$
Successful Elementary (number of students × unit cost)	$
Successful Middle School (number of students × unit cost)	$
Successful High School (number of students × unit cost)	$
Star Professional Development	$
Leadership Summit *Project Manager onsite (number of days × daily rate)* *Goal setting and strategic planning; foundational training on Star 360*	$
Star 360 Champions' Academy (Part 1) *Consultant onsite day (number of days × daily rate)*	$
Star 360 Champions' Academy (Part 2) *Consultant onsite day (number of days × daily rate*	$
Implementation and Data Coaching	$

Renaissance Coach works with one staff member from each school for one year (number of schools × cost per school)	
Data Gathering and Reporting *Project Manager reports to Successful School System leadership: 36 hours × hourly rate*	$
Leadership Team Year Review *Project Manager meets onsite with principals and leadership team: number of meetings × hourly or daily rate*	$
Accelerated Reader	**$**
Beginners Primary (number of students × unit cost)	$
Children's Primary (number of students × unit cost)	$
Excellent Elementary (number of students × unit cost)	$
Successful Elementary (number of students × unit cost)	$
Successful Middle School (number of students × unit cost)	$
Accelerated Reader Professional Development	**$**
Establishing a Reading Practice Program with Accelerated Reader (number of participants or hours × unit cost)	$
Getting the Most Out of Your Accelerated Reader Program (number of participants or hours × unit cost)	$
PROJECT TOTAL	**$**

Additional Funding

In addition to the $25,000 we are requesting from the Community Foundation, we have submitted requests for $20,000, $10,000, and $3,824 from the Goodbucks Foundation, the Generous Trust, and the Fund for Struggling Students respectively. We will keep you informed as to our funding progress and submit requests to other sources as needed.

Sample Cover Letter

Dear (name of foundation's board chair or appropriate program officer):

Our Town Middle School, which serves 315 mostly low-income students in grades 6–8, is submitting this grant proposal for $8,240 to support our Mastering Math project to improve our students' mathematics computation and fluency skills.

At Our Town School, approximately half of the students scored below proficient in math on the state's high-stakes assessment. We plan to improve those scores and increase math skills for *all* our students through the purchase of Star Math, a computer-adaptive assessment, and Accelerated Math, a research-proven resource which uses Star Assessments of each student's current math ability to select appropriate practice activities which strengthen the children's conceptual and computational skills—essential elements of success in school and later life.

We believe that Mastering Math aligns with the Hasalot Foundation's commitment to education and that there is no greater investment you can make than in the future of these youngsters who are eager to succeed and enthusiastic about learning, but who need help to make progress in this subject which is so vital to college and career readiness. We would be pleased to recognize the Foundation's support in any way you deem appropriate.

If you would like more information or have questions, please do not hesitate to be in touch. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Name of Principal or School District Administrator

Sample Corporate Request

Dear (name of contact):

I am writing to ask (name of company) to consider a contribution of $5,100 for a cloud-based reading program to assist our students who are struggling with reading.

(Name of school) has grown to over 900 students in the past several years, due largely to the influx of families in which the parents are employed in the agricultural processing industry. Sixty-three percent of our students are Hispanic; 87% of our students are from low-income families.

As I am sure you realize, all academic learning starts with reading, and reading practice is vital to school success. The reading levels of our students are generally low. Over one-third of our third through fifth graders score "below average" or "well below average" on one nationally normed reading measure; over one-third also fail to pass the state reading test. Over half of the kindergarten children require intensive reading intervention to meet benchmarks at that level.

For families in which parents have low levels of educational attainment and thus lack the confidence to help their children with reading, in which computers are unaffordable, and in which academic success is often perceived as an unreachable goal, changing students' learning trajectories is critical.

Our staff is committed to providing high-quality educational opportunities for all our students. We have identified a research-proven reading resource—Accelerated Reader, one of the most widely used reading software programs in the world—that enables each student to experience a customized reading program. With Accelerated Reader, a program of Renaissance, teachers help students select books for reading practice which are difficult enough to be challenging but not so difficult as to cause frustration. The program's quizzes enable teachers to monitor their students' reading progress and adjust instruction as needed.

Accelerated Reader has many features which not only improve student reading achievement but also help teachers diagnose difficulties and plan instruction, immediately generate reliable data on each student, and provide parent reports in both English and Spanish.

Our request for $5,100 includes the software, access to nearly 200,000 quizzes, Accelerated Reader widgets that we can customize to our school website, Renaissance Home Connect to promote parent involvement, Renaissance Place Dashboard to provide real-time Accelerated Reader results, data hosting, and live chat support. Once we are started and have significant results to share, we expect to support the annual license renewal with school district funds.

It is essential that children develop the reading ability that will enable them to master content in math, science, social studies, and other subject areas as they progress through school. Students who do not read well will not have the skills to meet the demands of college and careers in a global economy. We hope (name of company) agrees that helping (name of school) create successful readers is one of the best investments in the future you can make.

I would be happy to provide any additional information or arrange a visit for you to our school. And, of course, we would be pleased to acknowledge the company's support.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Name of principal