FLS Toolkit for Writing Winning Grant Proposals
A toolkit developed by the Friends of Libraries Section
of the New York Library Association

Throughout this document, resources and handouts have links attached that take you directly
to the documents or webpages.

Audience, Scope, and Introduction

Proposed Audience
Library staff members, library civic leaders, and key volunteers in Friends of the Library
organizations who plan to write proposals to funders to secure money for library programs that
will benefit their library and community at large.

Scope of this Toolkit
This toolkit was developed to support the FLS three-hour pre-conference workshop, Writing
Winning Grant Proposals for Library Programming, presented on November 1, 2023, at
the NYLA Library Association Conference in Saratoga Springs, NY. The text and annotated
lists of compiled resources were written by Lisa C. Wemett, MSLS, FLS Coordinator for
Professional Development, and Erica Freudenberger, MLIS, Outreach, Engagement &
Marketing Consultant, Southern Adirondack Library System. Emphasis is placed on basic
grant writing skills and less-complex applications and projects that are scalable for small- and
mid-sized libraries. State and Federal grants or those from national foundations were
excluded from this presentation.

Introduction and Basic Directions
The world of grant writing is broad and often confusing. The goal of this toolkit is to provide
basic direction in how to describe the community you serve and want to serve better through
an influx of new funding. There are many books and online resources on this topic; this toolkit
only scratches the surface and does not intend to provide expansive instruction on how to
develop a full-blown grant proposal. Writing grant proposals is a learned skill and improves
with every attempt you make to engage with funders to encourage them to underwrite new
and exciting projects for your community. Keep writing, keep applying, and you will make it
rain!

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 Asset Based Community Development

Grant writing is part of a larger resource identification strategy. It is important to remember that all communities have rich resources. You will find this abundance in your community’s people, places and spaces, organizations, and institutions. Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) is an approach that comes from the Appreciative Inquiry philosophy which assumes we come from a place of strengths, not deficits.

One of the tools used in ABCD is Asset mapping, a way to assess and document the strengths of your organization and the community at large – all of the existing skills, talent, expertise, and creativity that your organization can tap into. This “Asset Map” worksheet will help you, your colleagues, library trustees, and Friends to identify resources available in your community. Discussing this topic with your Friends group will spark ideas on how to partner with individuals and groups that can bring a great deal to your organization.

 Developing an Institutional Profile

If you must re-invent the wheel every time you consider applying for a grant, the proposal is going to get farther and farther down your to-do list until you miss the deadline. Be proactive and create an institutional profile!

The institutional profile can be a standardized document in Word that can be copied and dropped into an application for a grant request when appropriate. The organizational background should include the purpose and mission of the applicant agency and population served. Highlight major programs and services. Some funders refer to a “project brief” or “executive summary,” requesting a short narrative overview of the proposed project/activity, a description of the elements of project/activity including target audience (your methodologies), a summary of the needs the funding would address, a brief timeframe of the project, its location, and anticipated outcomes.

Gather data elements to make the profile specific to your organization, providing a current snapshot. Strive to locate figures that provide a clear picture of the audience you serve and could serve better if the proposal is successful. Keep track of where you locate the data and update the profile regularly as the data elements change. You will find an Institutional Profile Data Worksheet and a sample of an institutional profile for a public library here.

Following are some useful links that provide data on public libraries that could help you develop your narrative and compare your library to others of similar size.
Public Library Services for Strong Communities Report 2023
The Public Libraries Association, a division of the American Library Association, administered this survey in fall 2022 to understand how libraries utilize their unique programs, services, partnerships, and facilities in support of community needs. This resource provides actionable data to understand how and in what circumstances libraries engage, through their own efforts and partnerships, to help foster resilient communities.

America’s Star Libraries: The LJ Index of Public Library Service 2022
This is the 15th year in which Library Journal has scored U.S. public libraries on the LJ Index of Public Library Service and awarded Star Library ratings. The 2022 scores and ratings are based on FY20 data from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) Public Library Survey (PLS), covering library visits, circulation, program attendance, and public internet computer use.

The Public Libraries Survey examines when, where, and how library services are changing to meet the needs of the public. These data provide information that policymakers and practitioners can use to make informed decisions about the support and strategic management of libraries. The data are collected from approximately 9,000 public libraries with approximately 17,000 individual public library outlets (main libraries, branches, and bookmobiles) in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and outlying territories. Data include information about library visits, circulation, size of collections, public service hours, staffing, electronic resources, operating revenues and expenditures and number of service outlets.

Be Prepared! Assemble Your “Grant Library”

Whether you are submitting your proposal on paper or via an online grants management system, grantors ask for a wide variety of supplemental materials to be attached to your proposal. Here is a checklist of documents you may need to develop your grant proposals. You'll want to assemble all these documents in PDF format to complete the application:

- Your organization’s purpose and mission statements
- An institutional profile
- Roster of the library’s Board of Trustees
- Roster of the Friends of the Library leadership team
- Determination Letter from the Internal Revenue Service, if the organization has received 501(c)(3) status
- An operating budget for the current fiscal year or a financial statement of the organization/library
- Letter from a consultant outlining their services and costs
- Job description for the position of grant administrator
- Curriculum vitae and résumés of grant administrators
- Letters of support from community partners
Writing Learning Objectives—How SMART Are They?

A grant proposal may require that you draft learning objectives, that is, statements that describe proposed change for your clients/audience or answers the question, “did the learning take place?” In an instructional setting, the objectives provide the basis for selecting appropriate materials and educational methods.

- **Specific**: Describe the performance goal for the learner. Anyone should be able to tell what you are going to do. Be concise, focused, and clearly articulate what you are trying to achieve. Avoid familiar language (e.g., you, yours). This is where you get into the who, where, when, why, and how.

- **Measurable**: An observer will be able to tell that the objective was accomplished using quantifiable data (e.g., The therapy dog program will increase attendance by reluctant readers at the children’s library by 5%). Communicate what data will be collected as part of the measurement process. How will you measure a change in behavior or attitude as a result of your work?

- **Attainable**: Can this objective be achieved within the time allotted? Is it a single piece of knowledge or skill? Do not use the word “and” or the objective becomes two objectives. If you are shooting for the moon, break down the large goal into smaller, achievable steps that demonstrate how you will be successful.

- **Relevant**: Applicable to the participants’ needs and job. Show how the identified goals tie into your organization’s mission statement and purpose and how your intended audience will benefit from the proposal.

- **Time-measured**: achievable within a specific timeframe. Set a deadline by which the stated goals will be realized. Establish milestones to track the success of your proposal.

Erica Freudenberger recommends this resource on SMART goals and objectives from Bossier Parish Community College. It provides a brief summation of how to write impactful goals and objectives (including the difference between the two), with a summary of the SMART approach.


A good takeaway here: “Figure out how you will measure change projected in each objective. If there is no way to measure an objective, it’s not measurable and should be rewritten.”
A logic model is a visual way to organize and communicate the relationships among the resources you have, the activities you plan, and the changes or results you hope to achieve with a project. A logic model template will help carefully plan your proposed initiative. What do you want to do? It illustrates your planned work and your intended results.

A logic model is a very effective planning tool. Thinking about a library program or grant project in logic model terms prompts the clarity and preciseness that are required to achieve success. It will help you anticipate the data and resources you will need. Once written out, the logic model conveys the “story” of your program.

Included here is a template of a logic model, an explanation of the terminology for the template, and an example of logic model for middle school poetry writing series.

See also the entries on **Outcome-Based Evaluation** in the “Directory of Website Resources Recommended by Erica Freudenberger” below.

**Public Library Association’s Project Outcome**
[https://www.ala.org/pla/data/performancemeasurement](https://www.ala.org/pla/data/performancemeasurement)

Measuring outcomes helps libraries answer the question, “What good did we do?” For the first time, public libraries, whether they are new to outcome measurement or advanced in data collection, have **free access** to standardized outcome surveys and data analysis tools they can use to effect change within their communities and beyond. The Project Outcome toolkit provides libraries with an easy-to-use survey management tool to collect their outcomes, custom reports and interactive data dashboards for analyzing the data, and various resources to help move libraries from implementing surveys to taking action using the results. Get started measuring outcomes at your library by creating an account at [projectoutcome.org](http://projectoutcome.org).

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<th>A Very Brief Glossary of Terms</th>
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- **Potential funders** = **grantors** = grant makers = granting agency
- **Proposal** > you write. a.k.a., **applying for grants** = **drafting proposals** = grant writing
- **Grant** > they award you

**Capacity building**: funding that is awarded to help an organization with infrastructure needs separate from ongoing administrative and operating expenses (e.g., staffing, supplies). The goals would be to improve management and partnerships, public relations and marketing initiatives, strengthen fundraising and sustainable revenue generation, allow for program growth and new program development, and ultimately, achieve operating efficiencies.

**CV** = curriculum vitae; a résumé

**Sustainability**: How will you be able to continue the work outlined in the grant once the funding ends?
Below is an annotated list of grant makers and contact information, along with brief write-ups about their programs.

**Poets & Writers**
[www.pw.org](http://www.pw.org)

P&W’s Readings and Workshops mini-grants program pays writers of poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction (i.e., memoirs, personal essays) who give readings or conduct writing workshops in varied community settings or virtually for NYS organizations. Nonprofit status is not required. See separate resource on program guidelines, eligibility, funding priorities, timeline, etc., plus links to toolkits for applicants and grantees.

**New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA)**
[https://arts.ny.gov/nysca-regrants-and-partnerships](https://arts.ny.gov/nysca-regrants-and-partnerships)

Community Arts Grants are intended to provide support for arts and cultural projects to community-based organizations and artists, to enhance the cultural climate across all regions of the state. Through the **Statewide Community Regrant program**, funding is administered locally by county partners (regional arts councils). The link above is a directory of all the NYS county partnerships, with hotlinks to their websites.

**Humanities New York (HNY)**

Reading and Discussion Grants fund programs (up to $2,000) and provide an opportunity for communities across NYS to deeply consider a topic or issue of interest to them. Participants read a series of thematically linked texts over the course of four, five, or six sessions, coming together with others to discuss what they have read in a conversation facilitated by a trained local scholar.

Any tax-exempt organization in NYS can host this program; documentation is required. There are two deadlines a year. Apply by mid-December to host a program in the Spring or in June for the Fall. HNY provides training via webinar and occasional in-person workshops to enable a successful conversation. Host sites must select a facilitator to guide discussions, who receives a stipend from HNY for each session. Applicants must furnish the facilitator’s résumé or curriculum vitae. Funds may also cover supplies, refreshments, marketing, and other expenses. Requested funds should be matched on a 1:1 basis, either in cash or in-kind donations. HNY will provide up to 15 copies of each text for organizations to borrow upon request. To host a Reading & Discussion program, browse the themes listed on their website. Direct questions to their Programs Assistant.

**Public Programs Office, American Library Association**
[https://www.ala.org/aboutala/offices/ppo](https://www.ala.org/aboutala/offices/ppo)

The ALA Public Programs Office (PPO) offers grants specifically for programming, supporting communities, digital equity, and other relevant topics. In the past several years, PPO has designated millions to support small and rural libraries. The PPO office is friendly and helpful and supports those applying for grants for the first time. Reach out to request a review of your application (before the deadline). Its weekly newsletter, *The Programming Librarian*, is an excellent source for additional grant opportunities. See the article by Karen Lindell, “9 Places
You Can Apply to for Program Funds,” published on Programming Librarian, March 2023 ([https://programminglibrarian.org](https://programminglibrarian.org)).

### National Retailers that are Grant Makers

#### Dollar General Literacy Foundation
www.dgliteracy.org/grant-programs/
The Foundation provides grant funding to support literacy and education initiatives serving individuals of all ages. A nonprofit organization or library can apply for funding if they are within a 15-mile radius of a Dollar General store. (Fun fact from *AARP The Magazine*, September 2023: 75% of Americans live within five miles of a Dollar General Store!) Types of grants include adult literacy and family literacy (maximum award: $10K); summer reading (for creation or expansion of summer reading programs, especially targeting below grade level readers and assisting readers with learning disabilities; maximum award: $3,000); youth literacy grant (maximum award: $4,000). They provide a list of the current year’s grantees on their webpage; at least nine public libraries in NYS received summer reading funding in 2023. Organizations first need to register and then may apply. See the extensive FAQs portion of the page for guidance.

#### Walmart and Sam’s Club
https://walmart.org/how-we-give/local-community-grants

**Local Community Grants** are awarded through an open process, with applications accepted on a quarterly basis. (Applications are accepted any time and reviewed prior to the next funding cycle.) Within a one-year period, organizations may submit a maximum of 25 applications. Organizations must have current nonprofit status with the IRS, be a government entity (e.g., municipal library), school, college, church, etc. that benefits the community at large.

Organizations must be CyberGrants FrontDoor verified prior to applying. There are eight areas of funding for which organizations may apply, including “Quality of Life,” projects that would improve access to recreation, arts, or cultural experiences for low-income individuals and families in the local service area. Funding is provided directly from Walmart and Sam’s Club facilities where the local organization is based. Grants range from a minimum of $250 to a maximum of $5,000. See details about the selection process, Grant FAQs, and the verifying process on the webpage.

### Additional Funding Sources

#### Community Grants
Some of the following groups in your community may provide grants: local library foundations, family foundations, Friends of the Library groups, historical and literary societies, civic and community service organizations (e.g., Rotary, Lions), and regional community foundations.

#### National Storytelling Network Grants
www.storynet.org/awards/
Members of the organization may apply for funding (up to $1,000) to develop new projects. Support is available for individual work, for collaborative projects, community-based storytelling programs, or for scholarly research.

**Directory of Website Resources Recommended by Erica Freudenberger**

**Candid.** [https://candid.org/](https://candid.org/) – Free resources online, self-paced learning, and webinars to help prospective grant writers learn the ropes. e.g., Introduction to Writing a Grant Proposal. Search on “proposal” in the search bar labeled “Search Training.” [https://learning.candid.org/training-search/?_format=on-demand&_type=self-paced-learning&_sort=date_desc](https://learning.candid.org/training-search/?_format=on-demand&_type=self-paced-learning&_sort=date_desc)

**Elements of a Grant Proposal:** [http://www.hotwinds.com/Grant_Prop.html](http://www.hotwinds.com/Grant_Prop.html) – Provides a detailed framework to develop components of any grant proposal: cover letter, summary statement, qualifications of the applicant agency, needs assessment, program goals and objectives, activities, evaluation, and budget. See checklist for a letter of inquiry to a funder.

**GrantAdvisor:** [https://grantadvisor.org/](https://grantadvisor.org/) Created by nonprofit professionals who rely on grant funding, this is a great resource for researching potential funders. Grant applicants review funders, sharing information about the process, what it’s like to work with a funder, and any roadblocks encountered. Includes a function to search for funders by state or zip code.

**The Basic Guide to Outcome-Based Evaluation for Nonprofits** by Carter McNamara [https://management.org/evaluation/outcomes-evaluation-guide.htm](https://management.org/evaluation/outcomes-evaluation-guide.htm) This tool borrows from a document created by the United Way to help organizations craft proposals that include outcome-based evaluation (OBE) identifying the ways a proposal will impact, benefit, or change a targeted population. It simplifies the process for nonprofit organizations that don’t have time to read a complex book about the subject but explains and lays out a path to create meaningful OBE.

**Outcome Based Evaluation Basics** [https://www.imls.gov/grants/outcome-based-evaluation/basics](https://www.imls.gov/grants/outcome-based-evaluation/basics) Most funders, including The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), require that organizations receiving grants be able to document measurable success. This is a useful overview of what outcome-based evaluation looks like in our profession. Examples are provided of various ways to evaluate the impact of your proposal.

**Grants Evaluation Checklist:** [https://www.archives.gov/nhprc/apply/evaluation-checklist.html](https://www.archives.gov/nhprc/apply/evaluation-checklist.html) This checklist from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission of the National Archives asks pointed questions that funders use to evaluate proposals. Answers will help you focus your application on the agency’s capacity to receive a grant, the proposal, the project’s plan of work, budget, and other points.

**Purdue University’s Online Writing Lab (OWL) Introduction to Grant Writing:** [https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/subject_specific_writing/professional_technical_writing/grant_writing/index.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/subject_specific_writing/professional_technical_writing/grant_writing/index.html)
Purdue’s OWL offers this introduction plus online reference materials for writers of all skill levels for cover letters, résumés, curricula vitae, and other writing tasks that are pertinent to grant writing. It has a wealth of practical and applicable information, as well as tips for clarity.

**Additional Resources from the Friends of Libraries Section of the New York Library Association**

**Website:** [www.nyla.org/friends](http://www.nyla.org/friends)
Check here for current program offerings at the NYLA Annual Conference and archived FLS-sponsored presentations and handouts. Locate information on joining FLS, the Section’s current officers, election information, job descriptions, procedural documents, and applications for awards. Under “Publications” see the archives of the current and past FLS newsletters, “Friends News and Notes,” with itemized content lists for every issue. This annotation just scratches the surface of the myriad resources you will find here to help your group!

**Join us! Membership in FLS**
Library civic leaders involved in their local Friends of the Library group are encouraged to join the members of the Friends of Library Section (FLS) of the New York Library Association (NYLA). Membership information is available online at [www.nyla.org/join](http://www.nyla.org/join).

**Training: Workshops, Webinars, and Conferences**
FLS has offered the services of a cadre of trainers since 2015. The trainers are FLS leaders with backgrounds in volunteer services and Friends of the Library organizations. See the FLS webpage for the document “Considering hosting an FLS Workshop at your location?” for further details.

Educational sessions which include webinars and in-person sessions at the NYLA Annual Conference provide panel discussions and presentations by experts on a wide variety of topics that help Friends leaders in their professional development. See [www.nyla.org/conference](http://www.nyla.org/conference) for details on the current year’s conference sessions.

NYLA members can watch previous FLS webinars in the NYLA webinar archive at any time, **free of charge**, by logging into the NYLA Online Membership Center with their assigned username and password (received with membership confirmations/receipts). You can also head to [www.nyla.org/friends](http://www.nyla.org/friends) > Events > FLS Webinars. **Handouts are also posted.** Most webinars run about one hour. If you do not have time to watch the full recording, you can review the slides.

**Discussion Listserv and Networking Opportunities**
FLS members may choose to participate in the FLS listserv to pose questions to their peers and to publicize upcoming events sponsored by their Friends group.

FLS offers networking opportunities throughout the year. In-person meet-ups and virtual gatherings entitled “FLS Connections!” provide opportunities to discuss issues with Friends
colleagues in an informal atmosphere. On the FLS webpage, select Events and then “FLS Connections! Previous Minutes and Resources.”

**Online Publication**
Direct link to White Paper (35 pages; PDF):
This paper explores the needs of Friends organizations that assist small and rural libraries and provides recommendations to sustain these volunteer groups. The report is the result of a 2021 survey of libraries in New York and outlines the services offered by NYLA’s Friends of Libraries Section (FLS) in response to the challenges identified in the study.

See also this segment of the FLS webpage, “Resources for Friends Groups Supporting Small and Rural Libraries.” The resource page is the culmination of an FLS project undertaken over two years to learn more about volunteers who support under-resourced libraries and how FLS could better meet the needs of its members.

Other toolkits in the **FLS/NYLA Friends Toolbox:**
- Toolkit for Friends Councils (in development 7/2023)
- Toolkit to Start a Friends of the Library Group (published 9/2023)

For more information or assistance, contact FLS/NYLA anytime at FLS.NYLA@yahoo.com.