

Writing a Grant Needs Assessment

The Needs Assessment is one of the most critical parts of a grant proposal; it specifies the educational needs that the grant project addresses and indicates how the needs were identified. Relevant data, such as standardized test scores or survey results, is used to substantiate the educational needs of the targeted population, which should include students, teachers, and parents.

Step One: Gather the Data

Before any writing can begin, you will need to gather all of the relevant data for the targeted population. Examples of the types of data to gather might include, but not be limited to:

- Demographic Data
- Student Performance Levels
- Parental Involvement Needs
- Professional Development Needs
- Socioeconomic Data
- Instructional Needs
- Technology Needs

Step Two: Review the Data

Have several people, such as classroom teachers, curriculum specialists, technology leaders, and special education teachers, review the data. Look at the student performance data as a whole set, but then disaggregate the data into subsets by demographic focus groups.

Step Three: Determine Needs based upon the Data

Based upon the disaggregated data, determine the specific needs for students, teachers, and parents. The educational goals, objectives, activities, and performance targets will be based upon these specific needs.

Step Four: Write the Needs Assessment

Using the data gathered in Step One and the needs established in Step Three, develop a clear and detailed statement that specifies needs for academic achievement, technology, professional development, and parental involvement.

Sample Grant Needs Assessment

The Sample School District (SSD) attendance area spans 479 square miles serving the educational needs of students from five counties in Central Texas. According to State Data Files, Sample SD is ranked fourth in the state among the fastest growing school districts with student populations of 10,000 or more students. The district has experienced a 64% increase in student enrollment in the past five years. Projected growth for SSD schools is expected to continue to increase at a rate of over 1,000 students annually. Currently, percentages of Economically Disadvantaged and Limited English Proficient students have increased dramatically; 12 of the district's 14 elementary school campuses now have more than 40% of students classified as Economically Disadvantaged. This rapid changing demographic profile and accelerated growth across the vast geographic area of the Sample Community has contributed to a significant increase of at-risk students.

Although district-wide, Sample SD students perform at the Acceptable level on the <year> <State Assessment>, disaggregated data reveals a wide disparity among limited and non-limited English proficient students and between elementary campuses. On the Spring <year> <State Assessment> the average Learning Index (LI) in reading for Grade 3 was 86 for non-limited English proficient students, but only 64 for Limited English Proficient (LEP) students. Overall, 94% of general education students met the minimum expectations for <State Assessment> Reading, but only 67% of Economically Disadvantaged and 53% of Special Education students met the minimum expectations. Additionally, SSD identification percentages of Special Education students have increased to over 11% compared to the state average of approximately 8%. Improvement in the overall instructional design of classes, as well as literacy development opportunities for struggling and at-risk students is critical to combat these growing problems of inequity among Sample students.

As a result of these demographic and instructional needs, the district has joined with several community partners to create <Name of Project>. This project will aggressively address learning gaps between diverse primary and elementary student groups. All fourteen SSD elementary campuses have committed to participate in the planning and implementation of Project <Name>; an effective, research-based initiative to improve the literacy skills of students in Grades K-5, including sustained professional development that focuses on effective instructional strategies and methodologies.

Sample Grant Needs Assessment

Sample Middle School (SMS), once the district's high school campus, educates more than 788 students from a geographic area of 276 square miles. The demographic profile for SMS is:

- **67% Economically Disadvantaged**
- **57% At-Risk**
- **17% Special Education**

Many of these students are deficient in the literacy skills necessary to become successful readers. In fact, the <Year> <State Assessment> Reading scores for all students at SMS dropped 17%, while scores for At-Risk learners plummeted 26%. Economically Disadvantaged students scored 33% lower on <State Assessment> than the previous year. Special Education students scored more than 50% lower than general education students; only 27% met the minimum expectations in Reading. Overall, the general education population scored in the 78 percentile on <State Assessment> Reading, but the Special Education population continues to score significantly below their peers. On the <State Assessment> Social Studies test, 67% of all students met minimum expectations, on the <State Assessment> Science test, 85% of all students met minimum expectations. For special learners, <State Assessment> Social Studies scores indicated that 54% met minimum expectations; on the <State Assessment> Science test, 62% of special learners met minimum expectations.

Identification, intervention, and parental involvement are critical needs for the diverse learners at Sample MS. Implementation of a systematic process for teaching reading and consistent classroom methodologies for meeting and assessing student needs will ensure that every student will make significant gains with increased skills to become proficient readers.

To meet this goal, the Site-Based committee has decided to aggressively address the learning gaps through diverse interventions. Incorporating additional reading programs within a balanced reading program will equip middle school teachers with a powerful, research-based, proven intervention program. Professional development will focus on reading research, assessment, effective diagnostic practices, intervention, and the writing process. In addition, a strong school-to-home link will ensure “parents as partners” in this collaborative reading intervention program. The <Name of Project> will address the following critical areas of need:

1. Increase student opportunities to hear, read, and comprehend information from a wide variety of multimedia materials
2. Understand and manipulate spoken and written language
3. Develop phonological awareness of both spoken and written language
4. Develop, apply, and practice decoding strategies and fluent reading
5. Develop vocabulary and comprehension strategies
6. Expand students’ opportunities to write and relate their writing to spelling and reading

Based on data from an informal needs assessment survey, as well as, discussions with teachers, administrators, district content specialists, and parents, the program must also:

1. Provide direct, systematic instruction
2. Have a strong school-to-parent connection
3. Have a dynamic, robust teacher support system
4. Be user friendly and technology-based in order to provide motivation and individualization of instruction
5. Provide high-quality literature

As the demographic and state assessment data show, geographic, economic, and educational barriers establish a need for a comprehensive reading intervention program in which teachers, parents, and community members can collaborate. A lack of local libraries and media centers within the Sample MS community severely limits opportunities for students and families to develop life-long reading habits and literacy skills. In addition, the high number of identified students demonstrating a lack of fundamental reading skills necessary for academic and personal success mandate that SMS active seek interventions to provide additional direct instruction, as well as, innovative teaching practices to meet individual student needs.

Sample Grant Needs Assessment

Sample Elementary School (SES), a K-5 campus, serves 678 students from the rural communities of <name of city(ies)>. The substantial growth and recent floods of October <year> have resulted in a significant increase of Economically Disadvantaged and At-Risk students at SES, nearly 72% for both categories. Many of these students are deficient in basic reading and writing skills necessary to become successful learners.

Although SES general education students perform well on the <State Assessment> Reading tests, 25% of special student populations do not meet the minimum expectations on the <State Assessment> Writing tests. Additionally, only 20% of the student population masters all objectives on the <State Assessment> Writing tests. An examination of the specific Reading objectives reveals that summarization is an area of extreme difficulty for special student populations. Written composition, sentence construction, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation usage are the lowest areas of performance on the <State Assessment> Writing objectives.

Project <Name> will develop the reading, writing, and technological skills that students of the 21st century will need to be successful learners. The current writing technology in use is more than twelve years old; so SES will implement a multimedia, leveled reading and writing program that will help Kindergarten students read and Grade 1-2 students read and write in preparation for the <State Assessment> Reading and Writing tests in Grades 3-5.

Currently, one-half of SES students access the Writing Lab weekly, but Kindergarten and First Grade students have not yet benefited from new technology that has been made available for grades three through five. Early exposure to a wide variety of literature creates young writers and readers. Project <Name> will provide the educational activities and technology to foster positive experiences in reading and writing, while building the specific Reading and Writing skills required for the <State Assessment>.