

Writing a Successful PEP Grant

One of the most popular sessions at the 2002 AAHPERD Convention was a presentation by last year's PEP grant recipients. A packed room of PEP hopefuls listened intently as their colleagues shared grant-writing tips. The following article summarizes their suggestions.

How to Begin the Grant Writing Process

- Begin early! Rather than wait for the publication of PEP grant guidelines start a "Needs Assessment" in your district immediately and begin developing a proposal strategy.
- Surround yourself with others who are interested in program development and positive about change.
- Look for community partnerships. Task forces will assist and help to sustain the grant. Consider inviting the medical community.
- A key question to ask is "What do you want to see as a result of the grant?" and "How will you know when you have succeeded?" Have a vision. If your goal is to initiate change and move towards a "new" PE program it is important to explain how you plan to achieve this transition in your application.
- Involve a professional grant writer if available especially someone with experience writing *federal* grants. Enjoy the advantage of faster access to essential information. School districts who have professional grant writers typically have on file the type of information that federal grants require. Federal grant guidelines can be complex. Grant writers skilled in writing federal grants can quickly resolve questions.
- Be sure to involve teachers in all early discussions because they will be the agents of change.
- Keep in mind that successful grant writing involves a combination of skill and luck!

Choosing a Project Title

While a "catchy" project title may not be the decisive factor in any grant application it may help reviewers to remember your proposal ahead of others that they review. Here's a sample from last year's successful PEP grants:

- Project Inshape
- PE for Progress
- 21st Century PE
- Project Health Smart
- Fit for the Future
- Fitness Education: The Shape of things to Come

Developing a Budget

- Working closely with your district Business Office to ensure that proper rates, overheads etc., are included in your budget.
- Be sure to include funds in your grant to administer the grant. Although most teachers are concerned that funds are devoted to purchases that affect their students it is a mistake to ignore the need for someone to administer the grant.
- Carefully consider what you plan to do. What will be the cost and be sure the expenses in your proposed budget match what you are proposing to do. Look carefully at your proposal and highlight any items that appear in the proposal that are NOT reflected in the budget.
- Contact and talk to the vendors you propose to use. Because information will be needed in a timely fashion, it is important to work with companies you trust and can rely upon.

Establishing the Need for the Grant

- Use any unique data that your school district has been collecting in your grant application. For example, in 2001 one district had data that showed students of color and low income had significantly higher levels of obesity and health problems. Another district had data suggesting a positive correlation between physical activity, obesity, and increased behavioral problems. Does your state have any unique data? Wisconsin for example had its "Wisconsin Indicators for School Health." This data showed a state increase in obesity among children ages 2-5.
- Use the President's Challenge, Fitnessgram, Physical Best, or other fitness data that your district has probably accumulated. from years of physical fitness testing
- Use national research and statistics to support your application. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) is a good starting point for national data. The "School Health Index" and the "Youth Risk Behavior Survey" are especially useful. National data is helpful to supplement an absence of any local data.
- Look to professional literature (JOPERD, TEPE, etc.) for supporting evidence. Search web sites such as PE Central and PELINKS4U for news reports, articles, and other published data that supports the goals of your grant proposal.
- Be sure to include in your application a plan to collect pre- and post project data so that you can show the changes that occur as a result of your grant.

How to Incorporate State and National Standards

- Show in your proposal that you are aware of, and plan to work towards local (state) and national standards

- If appropriate explain how you are endeavoring to transform your curriculum from traditional activity offerings to those being promoted as part of the "new" physical education.
- One way to ease this transition is to consider building standardized instructional units with guidelines that all teachers will follow.
- Be sure to write the appropriate standards into your instructional units so that all teachers are reminded of your goals and the assessments you plan to implement.
- Consider involving other closely related disciplines such as health and nutrition, as well as opportunities for broader interdisciplinary cooperation.

Collecting Assessment Data

- Districts close to higher educational institutions should consider inviting faculty to assist with the data collection planned for the grant especially if there is a desire to publish the findings.
- A key is looking at where you are and where you want to be, then selecting the type of data you need to collect to illustrate this transition.
- Remember that long-term measures are probably necessary to see any changes in behaviors over the period of the grant.
- Consider collecting more than just fitness data. Evidence showing changes in behavior should be considered.

Helpful Resources

- Successful PEP recipients reported that the networking they have experienced through attending workshops and professional development events helped to prepare them for the grant. Make use of your colleagues within and outside your district and state.
- AAHPERD offers valuable resources such as National Standards, Developmentally Appropriate PE Guidelines, and Physical Activity Guidelines. Use them!
- Research the information available through the CDC for health/activity data.
- Have your grant reviewed by an experienced federal grant writer especially if you did not have an experience grant writer assist in developing the proposal.

Barriers to Overcome

- Understanding the language of the proposal. This is where someone experienced in federal grant writing can prove invaluable
- Need to attend to how the proposal will fit into your school district's priorities. A supportive school district is essential.
- Time is a constant challenge especially if you already have a full time job. Grant writing demands a high level of commitment.

- Lack of resources to support your requests. This is where faculty expertise can be of assistance if you have a higher educational institution nearby.

What Would Teachers Do Differently Next Time?

- Start as early as possible rather than wait until grants are announced. You will not have as much time as you anticipate for writing the grant.
- Endeavor to put together a strong, representative grant writing team because this will help to move the grant forward.
- Ask yourself who in your community has grant writing experience
- Be sure to allocate time (and the associated budgetary costs) in your plan for teachers to meet, plan, and discuss the progress of the project once it begins.
- Be sure to consider all of the people whose skills or knowledge will be needed. It is easy to overlook people who will be involved in budgeting and administering the grant. Involve the major players earlier!
- If you specifically name the items and vendors you want it may be possible to avoid time-delaying bidding processes.
- Be sure to include in your proposal the equipment needed for data gathering and analysis, for example, laptop computers, PDAs, and also allocate funds to support travel.
- When you think you have a good proposal invite others to read it and ask them to highlight anything that needs clarifying or items that you may have left out that have budgetary implications.
- Having or developing skills in grant writing is helpful.
- Luck is part of the process but never doubt that you can be successful!
- Remember that grant reviewers are not necessarily experienced physical education teachers. It is important to write specifically to the grant criteria.

Plan to Use Your PEP Grant to Support Future Grants

- Build in the capacity to continue your grant if opportunities exist.
- Remember that this PEP grant may serve to spin off additional grants because participants will begin to think differently and see other opportunities
- Monitor that the data you planned to take is being appropriately recorded and systematically tracked.

Characteristics of the 2001 PEP Grant Recipients

Summarized below are some of the characteristics of last year's successful applications. Be sure to remember that the ideas presented are from many different proposals!

- "Project Inshape" presented the premise that quality PE would improve academic performance.
 - The "PE for Progress" proposal established a unique urban and rural partnership. Its primary goal was simply to increase the time spent in PE by emphasizing that fitness was an individual rather than group responsibility.
 - A program in Massachusetts was designed to combat childhood obesity. It proposed to increase professional development opportunities for PE teachers and train paraprofessionals to implement physical activity opportunities into the school day. A community outreach program was also included.
 - Many schools used this grant to increase limited supplies of equipment and especially technology. Typically, these requests were accompanied by plans to transform the curriculum and offer different activities.
 - In the Washington DC environment where 93% of the school population consisted of African American and Hispanic students, a desire was expressed to create a database of student fitness scores.
 - Several districts used the grant to introduce opportunities for increased authentic assessment and student portfolios. Assessment was a critical component of all grant proposals.
 - In the "21st Century PE" grant each school proposed to create a PEP team that included a teacher, parent, counselor, and community member. A 1/2-time project coordinator was included.
 - One school brought in a team from "Project Adventure" and focused on meeting the needs of inner city children.
 - In the "Fit for the Future" proposal efforts were made to coordinate a health and fitness program between elementary, middle, and high schools. Purchasing heart rate monitors and pedometers was an important part of the grant
 - One proposal, written entirely by three physical education teachers, focused on transforming the district curriculum from a focus on team and individual sports to fitness and lifetime activities.
 - A California district proposed aligning their curriculum with the state standards. To do so they offered workshops that teachers would be paid to attend and in return receive the equipment needed to change their curriculum.
 - Columbus public schools worked cooperatively with Ohio State University faculty to introduce a curriculum focused on Tactical Games, Sports Education, teaching Responsibility, Inclusion, and the use of new technology.
-

This information is provided courtesy of PELINKS4U

<http://www.pelinks4u.org>

Posted with permission from Stephen Jefferies at pelinks4u.org