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Beyond the Grant Application Process: Bridging Educator Motivations with Grant Provider Expectations

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Senior Capstone 2010

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Abstract

Grants are available for K-12 educators who need funding for additional classroom equipment and materials. Teachers are not applying for available funding due to their limited time, lack of familiarity with the grant application process and low award incentives. Officers of School Technology Resources were interviewed to learn more about the granting company's motivations and interests. A variety of teachers were interviewed to find out why they did or did not apply for grants and what might entice them to apply. The interviews found conflicting expectations between the granting company and the educators. Teachers need grants with immediate, substantial and assured payoff, while the granting company seeks to increase their name recognition and further product research and development. A report was issued to School Technology Resources conveying the results of the investigation and including suggestions for maximizing the number applications their grant program.

Nature of the Problem

Funding for K-12 classroom equipment, materials, and technology has dropped significantly over the last two decades. The public is aware of the array of problems that need to be solved in education, and that all of the solutions require some type of funding (Zimet 1993). While schools receive funding from a variety of sources, there is a lack of funding to support projects and special programs, like music, computers, and art. Most educators and administrators are not aware of all the resources available that provide additional funding (Zimet 1993). The need for teachers to seek additional resources to supplement their classroom environment is rising. Grantsmanship at the K-12 level is a way for many teachers to purchase badly needed equipment as well as fund travel to workshops and conferences that provide teacher training (Monahan 1992). Seeking out smaller classroom grants from private companies, government agencies, and non-profits would benefit K-12 classrooms by providing materials, additional teaching resources and facilitating training.

Most teachers lack the motivation and knowledge to seek out and apply for grants, despite access to resources for locating and writing grants. A study conducted in 1992 amongst 108 elementary and secondary school teachers in southern New Jersey sheds some light on how teachers view applying for grants (Monahan 1992). The study found that most teachers viewed their primary role as educators, and not as researchers or scholars. The teachers did not regard applying for grants as factors that affect their professional growth and development. Furthermore, the study found that teachers reported a general lack of knowledge of grantsmanship, their teaching responsibilities, and lack of encouragement from their administration as the primary obstacles to their involvement in seeking and applying for grants (Monahan 1992). Cage and Turpin conducted a similar study examining the possible factors that contribute to K-12 teachers seeking and applying for grants among 89 Louisiana teachers (Cage & Turpin 1998). Cage and Turpin concluded that there is a significant positive correlation between the number of grants teachers successfully applied for and the level of funding received. Results also found that teachers writing their first grants and teachers with low previous funding success needed the most motivation in comparison to teachers who already had high funding success (Cage & Turpin 1998).

Teachers need motivation to pursue multiple grant opportunities to achieve a high success rate when applying for grants. There is little research on the tangible and intangible factors that motivate K-12 teachers to engage in grant seeking or grant writing activities. Only a limited amount of research has been conducted on some of the barriers that prevent teachers from pursuing grant opportunities (Monahan 1992). No resources exist that explore ways for teachers and administrators to motivate and encourage potential applicants to pursue grants. Instead, most of the published literature on grant development for elementary and secondary teachers focuses on the mechanics of how to successfully apply for grants (Monahan 1992). Research regarding K-12 teacher motivation is severely lacking which makes understanding current and pressing issues around teacher motivation to apply for grants impossible.

School Technology Resources (STR), a small company who offers their own technology and curriculum grant program to K-12 educators, observed a drop in applications to their grant program from 2009 to 2010. In 2009 the company received 300 applications, but even with additional advertisement and publicity for the grant program, STR only received a fraction of submissions for the 2010 program. The company cannot explain the drop in submissions and is disappointed in the outcome.

More research is needed to understand the underlying issues that effect teachers' motivations to apply for grants. Working with a grant provider like School Technology Resources will offer insight from the point of view of the grantor about their motivations to implement a grant program.
Teacher interviews will provide necessary information for constructing a set of solutions to help increase grant applications and get much needed funding into K-12 classrooms.

Project Description

Two senior officers of School Technology Resources (STR) will be interviewed to identify their motivation in conducting a grant program. A small group of teachers will then be interviewed to gather information regarding their knowledge, thoughts, expectations and hesitations surrounding applying for grant programs. Results from the teacher interviews will then be evaluated and analyzed in order to provide suggestions and possible solutions for STR to better implement their grant program in the future.

Deliverables

This project will result in a report for School Technology Resources (STR) that will include a summary of each teacher interview, an overall analysis of the findings from the teacher interviews, and a list of suggestions to help maximize the number of applications received for their grant program.

Timeline

- o   February
  Begin research
  Partner with STR
  2/23 Progress Appointment
- o   March
  3/15 Interview with the Marketing/PR VP of STR
  3/15 Receive Copy of Grant Application and Description from STR
  3/31 STR Grant Program Application Period Closes
- o   April
  4/1-4/15 Begin to Make Contact and Set Up Interviews with Teachers
  4/15-4/25 STR Grant Winners are Selected and Notified
  4/15 Create List of Interview Questions
  4/17 Teacher Interview
  4/24 Teacher Interview
  4/28 Teacher Interview
- o   May
  5/2 Grant Awards are Shipped Out to Winners
  5/7 Progress Meeting
  5/7 Interview/Check in with VP of STR
  5/14 Project Notebook Completed
  5/17 Submit Deliverables to STR

Project Significance

Successfully finding solutions to motivate teachers to apply for grants benefits students, schools, other teachers, and grantors. This project explores why teachers are not motivated to seek out and apply for grants available to them. No research exists that discusses the lack of motivation and there is little hope for a solution if we do not acknowledge the problem. No resources exist that explore ways for teachers and administrators to motivate and encourage potential applicants to pursue grants. Instead, most of the published literature on grant development for elementary and secondary teachers focuses on the mechanics of how to successfully apply for grants (Monahan 1992). Resources about how to successfully write a grant are abundant and easy for teachers to access, but a majority of teachers either have never applied for a grant or have only applied once.

Discovering a way to motivate K-12 teachers to apply for grants for classroom use will allow teachers to gain equipment and funding that they would otherwise not. Everything from funding for special projects to bettering classroom management can be aided through grants. With additional equipment and funding teachers can engage students more in classroom lessons and activities and students will have the chance to do projects they otherwise would not have. Successfully motivating one or two teachers to begin applying for grants could motivate all teachers on staff to apply for grants. Teachers who feel that they have adequate funding and equipment in their classroom will be able to teach more effectively, which leads to higher success rates in student performance. Higher student performance will help raise the reputation within the district and community.

This project will help one granting company School Technology Resources (STR) better implement their own grant program, and serve as instruction to other grantors hoping to improve their grant programs. Improved teacher motivation would benefit grantors by increasing the number of applicants, giving the grantor more positive public exposure and more data to use for research and development purposes. The grantor will gain a better perspective of teacher knowledge, frustrations, motivations, and expectations when searching for and applying for grants. With improved perspective grantors would be able to provide a grant program that would be more appealing to teachers. More appealing grant programs would hopefully increase teacher motivation to apply for grants. Linking grantor motivations with teacher motivations is an important factor in satisfying the wants of both sides. Understanding the perspective, motivations, and expectations of the grantor will help find proper solutions for improving teacher motivation to apply for grants. Helping grantors understand teacher motivations or lack there of in applying for grants, will allow the grantor to implement a more appealing grant program.

Assessment Guidelines

A follow up interview will be conducted with the same two School Technology Resources (STR) officers after the columniation of their 2011 grant program. Interview questions will address what changes were made to the grant program based on the report submitted, why those changes were chosen, and if officers believe those changes made a difference in the 2011 grant program.

Grant applicants for 2010 and 2011 will be tallied and the following data points will be tracked:
- State
- Grade level
- Subject taught
- Type of school – charter, magnet, public, private, specialized, outdoor or museum education
- Application scores of each submission

Information extracted form the analysis of the above data will indicate the success rate of the suggestions to STR and help to shape future suggestions to STR and other grantors.

The data analysis will provide tangible facts regarding the number of grant applications received. Category analysis will demonstrate trends in applicants and allow STR to better target teacher audiences for future grant programs and show which groups of teachers apply for grants more often than others. This will also allow me to target demographics with the highest need for increased grant application motivation.

Follow up interviews with each teacher will track any changes from their previous interviews. This will allow for me to see if any of the teachers have sought out grants or have looked into ways to apply for grants for whatever reason. It is my hope that the interview I conducted inspired them to consider grants as a viable funding solution and motivated them to applying for grants. Additionally, I would share results of this project and ask specific questions about their ideas on how to better connect teachers and grantors.

Results Summary

Several immediate issues were identified after conducting interviews with teachers and officers of STR. None of the three teachers interviewed had ever applied for a grant. The teachers reported that lack of familiarity with the grant application process, lack of time to find the correct grant, lack of time to complete the application process, and judging the grant reward often to be insubstantial as the reasons they were not motivated to apply for grants. All three teachers stated that they had little familiarity with the grant process despite having access to grant application education resources. All of the teachers interviewed have taken an entire class on the grant application process, attended a lecture or seminar, or had immediate access to peers who have successfully applied to multiple grants in the past.

Lack of time was the greatest deterrent to grant application motivation. Teachers interviewed reported often working twelve-hour days and the idea of taking additional time to apply for grants was unappealing. Teachers also reported frustration when searching for a grant to fit their specific need. Grant location resources are available to the teachers, but these resources are ineffective at locating grants to meet specific needs. Furthermore, teachers perceived a lack of assured pay off in receiving a grant and judged taking the time to apply as not worthwhile.

Interviews with the officers of STR revealed that they perceive their grant program as an effective tool in gaining name recognition in the education sector and furthering product research and development. The officers had no explanation as to why there was such a drop in applicants despite increased marketing and press release for the 2010 grant program. The number of applicants for the 2010 program was significantly lower than the previous year, 300 applications were received in 2009 and only 60 were received for this year's grant program. STR officers expressed disappoint in the quality of the majority of the grant applications submitted for the 2010 program. STR rates applications based on a rubric. Applications for 2010 did score as high as applications from the previous year had.

In order to apply for STR's Realise Science Technology Grant 2010, teachers must submit an application form and write a maximum of three pages answering a set of five questions. The five questions covered everything from how the teacher intended to use the product in the classroom to which grade level the teacher intended to focus on when using the product. A rubric outlined nine areas a teachers needed to touch on in the application write up in order to receive a high score on the grant submission. The application directions prohibit teachers from using certain lesson plan ideas because those concepts had already been thoroughly researched by STR.

The motivations and expectations of teachers and grantor companies like STR conflict. Teachers benefit from grants by gaining additional funding or equipment for their classroom that enhance student learning. In return STR and other grantors are able to acquire materials, like lesson plans, to use for research and product development. They also increase name recognition among potential customers. Implementing a grant

program is often a great marketing tool for grantors. These benefits do not overlap with each other causing a rift between teachers and grantors.

Possible solutions to bridging the gap between teacher motivations and grantor expectations are to de-rigidify the grant application process, provide incentives, promote the use of non-profit intermediaries, provide a more efficient and effective way to directly connect teachers with the right grantors, and create teacher resource allies within school or grantor companies. Working with grant companies to make their evaluation process more transparent would allow teachers to see the expectations the grantor has for the application entries. The intended outcome being an increase in teacher confidence when applying for a grant. It would also provide grantors with higher-grade applications that could benefit research and development more effectively.

Providing incentives to all teachers who apply for a grant could increase teacher motivations and provide more applicant entries for the grantor. There are some issues with implementing an incentive program within a grant program. Grantors would have to be careful to set specific requirements for teachers to receive the incentive, otherwise the potential of grantors receiving poor quality applications would increase. Grantors would have to consider capping the number of applicants to ensure they could supply and afford the incentive implemented. Even if grantors are unable to use some applications for research and development, grantors providing application based incentives would gain additional name recognition. Non-profit intermediaries work to bring donors and teachers together. A non-profit intermediary usually works within a specific community, district, or school. A non-profit intermediary will set up its own grant programs and then seek out donors from the community to fund those grants. Teachers that the intermediary targets are then made aware of the available grants they can apply for. The intermediary will then normally choose the grant winners through their own process, but the community donors can have input. Grantors can set up their own specific grant program through an intermediary. This can make it easy for a grantor to target a specific group or region. Intermediaries do not necessarily offer teachers assistance in applying for grants, but it can be easier for a teacher to receive a grant through an intermediary non-profit.

The teachers interviewed all listed finding the correct grant as a source of frustration. Simply searching for a grant online can be a daunting and time consuming task. Linking teachers with the right grantors would alleviate the frustration. One such solution is a non-profit organization called DonorsChoose.org. DonorsChoose.org allows a teacher to make a post about a specific product they wish to have in their classroom or a project that they need funding for. A grantor or individual donors can search through the teacher posts and then select one or more teachers to donate to. Teachers then send student work or thank notes to the donor(s). DonorsChoose.org has had over 1,800 donors that have helped fund over 500 teacher projects. This is a great and simple way for teachers to get equipment or funding for a project they need in their classroom in a relatively quick and stress free way. This does not benefit grantors like STR. Most of the donors are individuals, but DonorsChoose.org does promote companies who offer grants.

Lastly, teachers and grantors would benefit greatly from resource allies. If teachers could

access someone within in their school or district that could act as resource ally the grant application process would be a more enjoyable experience. This teacher ally could aide in helping teachers find the right grant for their project or need, help them with the application process, and even help them follow through with the post requirements of the grantor if they receive the grant. Funding a position like this is not plausible for most schools or districts. Grantors should allocate someone or create a position within in the company to act as an ally or grant ambassador for teachers applying to their grant program. This person would be available to teachers interested in applying to the grant program to answer questions, clarify requirements, and ensure that the teacher follows through with completing the post requirements after receiving the grant.

The solutions suggested above that mitigate the disparity between teacher motivations and grantor expectations have yet to be tested. Working with STR to track the success of future grant programs, if they implement any of the proposed suggestions, would provide answers to what the most effective solutions in connecting teachers with grantors. The best possible solution is to connect teachers and grantors through non-profit intermediaries or through resource allies. Organizations like DonorsChoose.org are on the right track in providing better solutions in the K-12 grant sector. Grantors need to take a closer look at their own expectations and benefits from providing a grant programs and think about the perspectives of the teachers they are targeting.

Researching this project was quite difficult. I did not expect to struggle to find research regarding K-12 teacher motivation in applying for grants. The little research I was able to find was not even current to the last decade. More surveys, interviews, and research need to be done before any solution can be successfully implemented in motivating K-12 teachers to apply for grants.

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Turpin, T., & Cage, B. (1998). *Factors Influencing Grant Writing of K-12 Teachers*. Retrieved from ERIC database.

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Appendix A
Report Generated for School Technology Resources

Identifying the Cause of Applicant Decrease for the 2010 Realize Science Technology Grant

Created By: Meghan McFadyen

Problem

School Technology Resources's 2010 grant program, Realize Science Technology Grant, experienced a significant drop in applicant numbers in comparison to the previous year.

Objective

Identify the possible causes of the drop in grant applicants for the 2010 Realize Science Technology Grant and offer solutions to improve applicant numbers in the future.

Methods

- Conduct interviews with K-12 teachers regarding their knowledge of the grant application process and what would motivate them to apply for a grant.
- Interview STR officers to better understand the grant program procedure and motivations to offer a grant program.

Results

Several immediate issues were identified after conducting the teacher interviews *(See Appendix A)*. None of the three teachers interviewed had ever applied for a grant. The teachers reported that lack of familiarity with the grant application process, lack of time to find the correct grant, lack of time to complete the application process, and judging the grant reward often to be insubstantial as the reasons they were not motivated to apply for grants. All three teachers stated that they had little familiarity with the grant process despite having access to grant application education resources. All of the teachers interviewed have taken an entire class on the grant application process, attended a lecture or seminar, or had immediate access to peers who have successfully applied to multiple grants in the past.

Lack of time was the greatest deterrent to grant application motivation. Teachers interviewed reported often working twelve-hour days and the idea of taking additional time to apply for grants was unappealing. Teachers also reported frustration when searching for a grant to fit their specific need. Grant location resources are available to the teachers, but these resources are ineffective at locating grants to meet specific needs. Teachers perceived a lack of assured pay off in receiving a grant and judged taking the time to apply as not worthwhile.

Possible Causes of Drop in Applicants

- Loss of target audience
- Low motivation from previous applicants to re-apply
- Lack of time to apply

STAR test prep often occurs in the time frame the grant application was available
Spring Breaks

- No teacher incentive to apply
- Application process too rigid
- Application rubric was not clear enough

Solutions

- Create an ally for teachers within in the company.

Express to potential applicants that there is someone available that will help guide them through the application process.

The ally can also ensure that applicants are producing worthwhile submissions that can benefit research and development.

Offer examples of excellent, satisfactory, and unsatisfactory applications.

- Change the application period.

The teachers interviewed expressed that they would be more apt to apply for grants during the summer when they are not actively teaching.

Consider running a winter and summer grant program.

- Take advantage of non-profit intermediaries.

School Districts like San Juan Unified in Sacramento, Ca have non-profit organizations that work between grantors and schools within a specific community or district to offer grants to teachers.

Potential way to market by sponsoring a grant through an intermediary.

Intermediaries have direct access to teachers within the district.

- Look into organizations like DonorsChoose.org.

DonorsChoose.org is alternative source for teachers to seek out funding for their classrooms, examining this alternative would provide understanding of alternative to traditional grant program.

- Offer an incentive to all applicants.

After lack of time, teachers stated that they need more of an assured pay off when applying for grants.

- Follow up with past applicants with a simple survey.

Ask if they would apply for future grant programs at STR.

Why or why not?

- Track demographics of past applicants.

This would offer insight into the groups that are

Most active, slowing, and least active

Conclusion

The Realize Science Technology Grant has the potential to gain higher applicant numbers in future grant programs if steps are taken to find a viable set of solutions. Understanding what causes lack of motivation in teachers to apply for grants is important in finding solutions that will work to improve grant applicant numbers and the quality of the grant submissions. STR will benefit from increased name recognition if future grant programs are able to target teacher motivations effectively. Improved quality of grant submissions will provide better information that can be used in research and development.

Understanding teacher motivations and how they are linked to the expectations of STR's grant program will take trail and error to figure out. Tracking the data of previous and future grant applicants will allow STR to gauge whether or not the suggested solutions improved applicant numbers and quality. A chart is provided in appendix B that can be implemented to track such data.

Appendix A:

Interview Summaries

School: Preuss Charter School, 6-12 grades
District: San Diego Unified
Teacher: Melissa Hoffman
Grade Level: 6-8 Grade
Years of Experience: 1.5
Date: April 24, 2010

Ms. Hoffman works at charter school that only accepts low-income students that will be first generation college students. Recently, her school was named a blue ribbon school. Hoffman had never applied for a grant before, although she was aware several other teachers at her school had successfully applied for grants multiple times. Hoffman had received only three hours of instruction on how to apply for grants during her teaching training and disregarded it as unimportant. She also expressed that she had no knowledge around the grant application process and had not considered asking fellow teachers who had applied for grants for help. Hoffman felt that she had a severe lack of time to apply for grants during the school year, but expressed interest in applying for grants during the summer when she had more available time. Instead of seeking additional funding, Hoffman uses the resources she has available and is also lucky enough to often get reimbursed for the supplies she does buy out her own pocket. Hoffman stated that she would seek out technology grants for her class and school if she had time to look for grants.

School: Declined to State
District: Oak Grove School District (San Jose, CA)
Teacher: Natalie Wilson
Grade Level: 4th Grade
Years of Experience: 8
Date: April 17, 2010

Ms. Wilson currently teaches fourth graders at a Title 1 elementary school in San Jose, Ca. The majority of the student body is low-income and English Language Learners (ELL). Wilson has never applied for a grant, but knows of fellow teachers who have. While a child development major at CSU, Sacramento, Wilson did take a class about funding alternatives in working with youth. The class was badly structured and boring, so unfortunately Wilson said she did not remember anything from it. Wilson has a severe lack of time to apply for grants. The reason that deters Wilson the most from applying to grants is the lack of incentive grantors provide to teachers and the lack of grants available for basic classroom needs. Wilson spends $2000 a year supplying her classroom with basic materials. Wilson was frustrated with the ratio of time she would potentially spend applying for a grant in comparison to the pay off she would receive. She did not want to spend time applying for something that would not provide some sort of return. Wilson felt a disconnect between teachers and grantors is also an issue in lack of teacher motivation. Wilson also expressed that she might consider applying for a grant during the summer when she is not actively teaching.

School: Blossom Hill Elementary
District: Los Gatos Unified School District
Teacher: Julie Higgins
Grade Level: 1st Grade
Years of Experience: 11
Date: April 28, 2010

Ms. Higgins teachers first grade at Blossom Hill Elementary, previously she taught at Franklin McKinley Elementary in Santa Cruz, Ca. Higgins stated that before teaching at Blossom Hill Elementary School she had always considered using a service like DonorsChoose.org or applying for a grant, but had never gotten around to it. Now that Higgins works at Blossom Hill her incentive to apply for grants is very low due to high parent donations and a non-profit intermediary that works directly with the Los Gatos Unified School District to provide extra funding. If there were something Higgins needed for her classroom, it would not be difficult for her to acquire it. However, Higgins did say that she does not know much about the grant application process and if she were to ever apply for a grant she would use some of her peers as a resource. Higgins expressed that organizations like DonorsChoose.org were necessary to help teachers, but that most teachers lacked the knowledge about such organizations. Higgins said that having a classroom that was full of everything she needed to teach her students to the best of her ability was something that a lot of teachers do not get to experience. Motivating teachers to find grants was something that she thought was important, but that she understood the frustrations teachers had around the grant process.

Applicant Statistics Charts

<u>Overall Number Tracking Chart</u>

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Number of Total Applicants					
Number of Winners					
Average App Score					
Highest App Score					
Grade Level Most Stated					
Grade Level Least Stated					
Subject Area Use Most Stated					
Subject Area Use Least Stated					
State with Most Applicants					
State with Lowest Applicants					
Follow Up from all Winners Received?					

<u>Yearly Grant Program Data Break Down</u>

Applicant	State	Grade Level	Intended Subject Area Use	Type of School	Applicant Score

Appendix B

Assessment Tools

Example Set of Follow Up Interview Questions for STR Officers

1. Did you find the report issued to you useful?
2. Did you gain knowledge that could be helpful in future grant programs?
3. Were any changes made to the grant program for the 2011 year?
4. What changes were made to grant program?
5. Were the changes successful?
6. How have you tracked any changes in applicants?
7. Have you expectations in regards to applicant submissions changed? If yes, how?

Example Set of Follow Up Interview Questions for Teachers

1. Have you looked for or applied for a grant in the last year?
2. Would you apply to the STR grant program?
3. Have you talked to your peers about this project? If so, what were their reactions?
4. Do you still find grant funding and teacher motivation an important issue?

Applicant Statistics Charts (created to track data of STR grant program applicants)

<u>Overall Number Tracking Chart</u>

	2009	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**
Number of Total Applicants					
Number of Winners					
Average App Score					
Highest App Score					
Grade Level Most Stated					
Grade Level Least Stated					
Subject Area Use Most Stated					
Subject Area Use Least Stated					
State with Most Applicants					
State with Lowest Applicants					
Follow Up from all Winners Received?					

Yearly Grant Program Data Break Down

Applicant	State	Grade Level	Intended Subject Area Use	Type of School	Applicant Score