

Grants 101

with [Sarah Wilson](#)

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Building blocks of your grant proposal: The problem statement

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Editor's Note:

***Author's note:** Across all grants — federal, state, corporate and even foundation — there are going to be some common sections within proposals. Through my next series of articles we are going to dissect these sections into simple language with prompting questions. It's never a bad idea to start on these sections even while waiting for your target grant to open. There will be worksheets available for you to request and work from at the end of each of these articles.*

The problem statement is the key element in every grant proposal. It is the first impression the reviewer will have of your project and funding request. The problem statement or statement of need must make a clear, concise and evidence-supported statement of the problem you are addressing and wanting to solve. It is also most likely the shortest written section in your grant application.

Because it's short and sweet, the statement of need must grab the reviewer's attention and keep it focused. The problem statement should instill a sense of urgency in the reader and compel the reviewer to want to help you solve your problem. You want the reviewer to feel like they have the power to help your department solve an important problem by funding your program.

Describe the Problem

First, think about the purpose for developing the proposal and how your department came to this conclusion. Why has it become an issue? What is the history of this problem and who is the problem affecting? Why is it your department's problem to solve?

How do you and your organization know this is a problem?

The problem is obvious to you and your community. Now prove it. How did your organization come to realize that this problem exists? A good way to document this is to conduct a needs assessment within your community to identify the problems. They may be aware of the very problem you are planning to address in your grant proposal and can be an excellent community partner in the development of the grant. Plus local, county and state government, local universities and colleges, local health systems, school districts and state extension offices may all be able help you with the data you need to support your claims.

Who is your target population?

Who is your target constituency and how will they benefit from the project? Describe the social and geographical context.

What is the economic and social impact of this problem?

Describe the cost to the target population and the community. Try to show causality of the relationship between the problem and the cost to the community.

What is your evidence that this problem is real?

[You are going to need evidence](#) to support this claim. You will need to cite your data and data sources. Utilize internal and external data to support that the problem is real and can be measured. The information gathered should be factual and directly related to the problem to be addressed by your grant proposal.

The finished product

So what should the finished product look like? Here is a sample:

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Domestic violence is a complex problem involving relationships, economic conditions, emotions and entangled social issues. The police department is tasked on a daily basis responding to domestic violence calls for service, investigating the cases for court filing and assisting with the court prosecution. Since domestic violence case filings are in most instances based on observable injuries, it is imperative that the injuries are properly documented. Photographs tell the story and unlike testimony, they cannot be forgotten, altered or changed over time. Domestic violence cases without photographs are difficult to file and are difficult to obtain court convictions with. Since convictions stop the cycle of violence, photographs are essential to prevent future crimes and injuries. This program will purchase and issue cameras to Patrol Officers so they can document domestic violence injuries while at the crime scene.

Short, sharp and direct. I want to read more and solve these problems, don't you?

If you would like a worksheet to help you create a problem statement or to conduct a needs assessment, email me at sarah.wilson@policegrantshelp.com