

Behind the Curtain: The Head Start

DRS Grant Review Process

One of the most difficult aspects of writing a recompetition grant proposal is deciding what should be included in the application narrative. To make a good determination it is also helpful to have a good understanding of the review process that will be implemented after the grant is submitted. This article outlines key steps in the grant review process and offers tips that can help you construct a winning proposal.

REVIEW

WHO WILL BE REVIEWING MY GRANT?

Across the country there are approximately 250 recompetition reviewers that were selected from 1,300 applicants by the Office of Head Start. The reviewers were selected through a large scale outreach campaign and have expertise in early childhood education, family support services, fiscal, and organizational development. In addition, reviewers have strong communication and critical thinking skills. Applicants were screened through a vetting process that included a comprehensive review of their application and resume, writing sample, reference check, and finally successful completion of OHS Grant Reviewer Training. Common occupational roles of grant reviewers include:

- Professors
- Former HS/EHS Program Directors
- Consultants
- Early Childhood Educators and Content Area Trainers
- Program Directors of community organizations serving families and children
- Staff working in HS/EHS programs across the U.S.

Carefully review the criteria for each question. Pay attention to words such as “must” and “required” and ensure you respond to each item included in the scoring criteria.

Arrange for a blind-review. Have someone unfamiliar with each HS content area read a draft of your application and identify areas that need clarification and revision.

Finish your application early! Make sure you have time to conduct a full review of your narrative, appendix and budget. Submit your grant at least 4 days early to allow time to resolve any difficulties with the grant system.

What Is the Review Process?

Applications are reviewed by a 4-person panel. Each application is read once by each reviewer for content and to gather initial information about the program and the proposed HS/EHS services. After the first review, applications are read a second time and the reviewer compares the project narrative to the criteria identified in the grant application instructions. During this process, the reviewer evaluates the following:

- How did the applicant answer the question? Does the application use evidence to back-up their statements and claims about the program?
- Is there additional information in the Appendix to support the information described in the grant narrative?

- Does the application content flow? Are there any contradictions in the narrative? For example, if the application proposes to serve dual language learners, does it also include a discussion of bilingual staff?

After the grant review, the application is read AGAIN and a score is assigned to each subsection of the grant and a summary of strengths and weaknesses associated with each answer is developed. Then, the review team participates in a conference call to review scores and discuss the application further. After the panel is concluded, the application is approved by the team leader, the Regional Office Sub-Area Manager, and the Regional Office Program Area Manager. Once the panel is concluded the application is submitted to the OHS for review.



Heartland Solutions offers a variety of options that are appropriate for all types of programs seeking Head Start grant funding. Visit our website at www.heartlandgrants.org or call Andrea Abbott at 530-526-9161 for additional recompetition resources and to learn about our services.