Write a Grant? Me?

The school library media center is the heart of our schools, and the librarian is the heartbeat of the school's instructional program. School librarians are miracle workers: We pull rabbits from threadbare hats daily.

Funding in education is tight, and expectations are high. In the current climate, purse strings for school libraries continue to tighten, while expectations for materials, technology, and programs shoot skyward. Despite this crunch, we turn kids on to reading, teach them research skills, and inspire them to greatness, every day. And we do it all on a shoestring budget.

When addressing the problems of making ends meet while providing the services and materials we know belong in our media centers, where should we go and what should we do? How do we bridge the growing digital divide among our students? How do we buy the materials and equipment needed to provide our students with the research and technology skills they'll need in their futures? These questions plague us.

We make eloquent pleas for funding at the meetings of school-site council, boards of education, and staff and parent-teacher associations, but the thin school dollar can be stretched only so far. So many programs are vying for so few dollars that little is left for the media center. Even in ideal circumstances, where administrators, staff, students, and community support and celebrate the school library media center's programs, there are just not enough dollars to fund the library's needs from the regular budget.

The Grant Solution

You may be asking yourself, "Why would I want to write a grant?" Good question. One of the answers is the most obvious one: Getting a grant is a feasible way to make our limited budgets go much farther. This, in turn, becomes a tremendous educational benefit to your students. But another, less overt answer is the sense of fulfillment and personal triumph you experience after working hard on a proposal and getting a grant. Obtaining a grant can be a morale booster for you, your school, and your community.

Grant money can help a media specialist turn a sow's ear of a library program into a silken technology Mecca. Grant money can turn dreams into reality and help to conquer the digital divide.

Many of us have been tempted to try to obtain grant money, but getting started on the process of writing a grant may seem a formidable and scary task to some of us. When you use your resources, however, they provide help over the hurdles and a path through the barriers.

No matter where you are in your grant-writing career, novice or expert, there's information that can help you to get supplementary funding for your school library media center. As a school library media specialist, you have the necessary skills to write successful grants. Networking to learn about the successes and good ideas of your colleagues may inspire you to give grant writing a try.

My dreams for our school's media center have long exceeded my funding—since the 1970s, actually. So, years ago, I garnered my courage and wrote my first, feebie grant proposal. Along the way I made many mistakes, took several unplanned detours, and encountered many pitfalls. When other media specialists shared their experiences and tips with me, that made all the difference. As I made my own mistakes and learned from those made by others, however, I began to experience some success. Since then, I've been blessed to have received, or been on a team that received, many grants. That supplementary funding has been a bonus to our students, staff, patrons, and facilities.

Writing a Winning Grant

Stephen Wilbers, in his article, "Use the Internet for Help with Writing Grant Proposals," states, "Writing a successful grant proposal requires knowledge, commitment, determination, patience, teamwork, writing skills, creativity, and luck. Other than that it's a breeze." This is so true. Then again, just like the little engine who thought he could, when you get to the top of that grant-writing mountain and see the view from the heights, you'll feel as though you're on technology cloud nine.

Writing a winning grant proposal takes a large commitment of energy and time. Be prepared to spend these resources on a project. Being awarded a grant is the result of focused effort given steadily over a long period of time.

Once you've accepted this, however, you'll realize that it doesn't take the magic of Hogwarts to get a grant. It just takes hard work, perseverance, and confidence, which stems from your belief in and passion for a project. These qualities are no strangers to school librarians. School librarians are men and women of great talent and commitment who feel passionately about their libraries and are wonders at research and good at writing. No educators are better equipped to seek grant funding than school librarians.

The steps are many, but the journey is worth it. In order to achieve our goals, we must educate ourselves so that we understand the parts of the proposal and know how to find appropriate funding sources. We may also need practical writing and editing tips.

You, among all educators, are the ideal candidates to write winning grants. Hit the books. Find your resources. Collaborate and then put your cursor to screen. You can write a winning grant. Keep in mind that, in the end, nothing can make your heart sing and your confidence soar quite like a big, fat check for your school library and some much-needed technology for your students.

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