

POOR And NEEDY DIVISION  
Application Tips for *Operating* Programs

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

1. What is your organization's mission?

**Tips:** We see “mission” as what you are trying to accomplish. It describes the overall purpose of your organization. Your mission answers the question, “Why does the organization exist?” The best mission statements are short and clear. We are especially interested in how your mission gives you concentration and focus — discouraging you from taking on programs that are not related to your mission. If your organization is very large, for example a university, please provide the mission for the overall organization as well as the mission for the most relevant subgroup — that is, the department, division, or school.

*Example: Helping Services, Inc. has as its mission the nonjudgmental support of alcoholic and drug-addicted homeless men who are committed to getting off the street, getting sober, and establishing positive and productive lives. The House of Hope was founded in 2001 as the third program of Helping Services, Inc.*

2. What have you achieved in the past three years to advance your mission?

**Tips:** Please know we are much more interested in how many people have improved their lives than how many people have been served. We do not equate growth or volume with achievement. Focus on the tangible human gains you have created for those you serve. We are less interested in how many new programs you have started and more interested in what success the participants in those programs have achieved. Please emphasize any measurable achievements that are relevant to this grant program.

*Example: Over the last three years, we have continued to be successful in getting alcoholic and drug-addicted homeless men off the street and into a stable situation. House of Hope has:*

- *Increased our graduation rate of moving men from initial sobriety to permanent housing from 20% to 33%.*
- *Worked with a local ecumenical church group to open a short-term, 30-day detox unit that doubles the capacity in the area.*
- *Been successful in securing HUD 811 funding for an 18-unit assisted living facility for clients who are permanently disabled.*
- *Developed a strong volunteer program in association with local civic groups that has cut our weekend operating costs by 35%.*

## YOUR PARTICIPANTS

3. **What issue are you addressing? How many individuals or groups within your focus area are affected by it?**

**Tips:** Just state the issue in clear terms as it is experienced by people who are affected by it. Focus on the set of local people who are affected by the issue. It is not necessary to speak to national impacts. We want to understand the ongoing issue as it relates to people — not just a static condition of need. When it comes to a number, we do not want you to have to conduct original research. Just rely on existing data or even on estimates by those most in a position to know.

***Example:** A recent county survey by the Center to Prevent Homelessness found that there were approximately 400 people who were homeless and either staying in short-term shelters or living on the streets. Of these, at least 75% suffer from some form of chemical addiction. Many more addicted persons are at risk of homelessness because of the strain it puts on the individual's health, finances, and family relationships. The effect on the county and its residents is tremendous with increases in crime, health care costs, and multiple and repeated uses of the social service and related nonprofit systems.*

4. **Describe the participants who will be included in your program. How many are financially needy? Are the participants different in any way from the full population you described in question three?**

**Tips:** We view it as a sign of strength that an organization has identified the people who are most likely to benefit from a particular approach. In the nonprofit world, it is rare that one program is always the best for everyone.

Any grants made by the Trust must benefit the financially needy. While other individuals may benefit from the program, grant amounts are awarded in reasonable proportion to the number of financially needy individuals who will benefit. For example, if 40% of the people you serve are financially needy, the Trust will not fund more than 40% of the program.

It is critical that you estimate the number of financially needy individuals who are likely to benefit from your program. Common definitions of “financially needy” that are generally accepted by the Trust include: those living at or below 200% of the federal poverty level, those who are eligible for Medicaid, those who are uninsured, and those who qualify for the free/reduced school lunch program.

We are looking for a specific picture of the people you will be serving. They may be facing multiple barriers to improving their quality of life. They may be different from the full population based on their age, race/ethnicity, income, education level, or neighborhood where they live.

***Example:** We are specifically targeting 150 addicted men who were homeless and addicted but are now sober and residing in our 18-month transitional apartment complexes — Hope House I and II. By homeless, we mean having lived the majority of the last 30 days on the street or in a short-term shelter. We find that we are best at serving this group of men and referring other homeless individuals and families to appropriate agencies. All of our residents are low-income. Although it changes from time to time, over 65% of our residents are white and between ages 35-55 with high school educations. Many are veterans, and many were formerly employed in manufacturing.*

## YOUR IMPACT

### 5. What impact are you committed to achieving? How many of the participants will achieve that impact?

**Tips:** This is a very important question to the Trust. We are looking to achieve impact with our grant funds. We are successful when our grantees are successful. Consider what success means for you.

Please clearly state your desired impact but come back and revisit this question before you finalize your application. The impact that you have stated should make sense relative to the entire program and should be realistic given the participants and the nature of the services provided. Please put the number who will achieve the impact in the context of the total number you will serve.

The impact is what they get from what you offer. The fact that people have completed a program, read your materials, participated in counseling, or attended a workshop is not an impact. This distinction is critical. Please focus on changes in behaviors and conditions for people — not on their activities in your program or their level of satisfaction. We are looking for impact (what changes for your participants), not process (what you do for your participants).

In most cases, a program succeeds because people change their behavior — for example, stop using drugs or exercise regularly. We encourage you to focus on behaviors rather than attitudes such as self-esteem. The value of a change in attitude is what the participant can now achieve because of it. We also consider changes in behavior to be a stronger impact than changes in knowledge. Just because someone knows that exercise is healthy does not mean that he/she will start exercising.

***Example:** We will work with 150 residents at House of Hope I and II over the four-year request. Currently, about 33% of the men graduate from the program. When they graduate, the average wage is \$6.50/hour. One desired impact is to increase the graduation rate from 33% to 40%.*

*Currently, only about 25% of our graduates secure a job paying \$9.25/hour by the end of their 18-month stay with us. Another desired impact of this new program is to help at least 50% of graduates secure jobs making at least \$9.25/hour.*

**6. How many of the participants would be likely to achieve the anticipated impact if your program did not exist?**

**Tips:** The success of your program is not only about achieving the desired impact. It is actually the difference between your impact and what would have happened without you. At least some individuals would presumably achieve success without the program. For example, a program for unemployed adults gets 70 people out of 100 in the program to achieve getting a new job. If the evidence suggests that 30% of people like those served in the program would get a new job on their own, the value of the program is 40 people getting a new job, not 70.

We are not asking you to do original research. Just rely on whatever information exists at the most specific level you can get it. Past rates of achievement in a school or neighborhood are better than a city or county. Rates for a city are better than rates for the state or the nation. If no information exists, use the most educated guess you can find. Often people like guidance counselors or case managers can look at a description of your participants and tell you with reasonable accuracy about how many are likely to experience a certain outcome.

This question does not apply only to programs seeking impact on an individual level. For example, if your program is working on systems-level change, then your approach to this question might be somewhat different. In the previous question, you have told us what will happen to the system if your efforts are successful. For this question, now you can tell us what would most likely happen without the efforts that you propose in your application.

***Example:** While less than the “living wage” that is discussed nationally, it has been our experience that a client can “make it” when he gets over \$9.00/hour with support from standard community systems like food pantries. He cannot “make it” at minimum wage.*

*Currently, about 50 of the 150 men in our program would be expected to graduate — 13 (25%) of them with jobs paying at least \$9.25/hour. If we achieve our expected impact, then the number of men graduating should increase to 60 — that is, 10 additional men successfully completing the program. Of those 60 graduates, 30 (50%) would secure jobs paying at least \$9.25/hour. This change represents 17 additional men who will both graduate from the program and have a job that can sustain their new drug-free life.*

## YOUR PROGRAM

### 7. Describe the work for which you seek funds. What approach will you use to achieve the anticipated impact?

**Tips:** Most programs are not a random set of activities. They are a coherent strategy designed to achieve a result. Please do not offer us a detailed work plan. Rather, tell us a few core elements of your particular way of addressing an issue and why you think it is the best way to engage participants and help them reach the desired impact.

**Example:** *Our approach has three key elements: (1) A site-based employment coach who will work with residents in the evenings and on weekends to support their job seeking, job keeping, and sobriety efforts; (2) A linkage with our two local hospitals, which have agreed to take five clients each quarter and put them into their entry-level career ladder program; and (3) A customized program with the local community college that will bring their courses to the apartment complexes via satellite broadcast for just the cost of the hi-speed line.*

*This approach brings together and expands a number of things we have tried on a limited basis in the past. We have tried volunteer job coaches but have never had someone based at the apartment complexes. We have tried to place residents at the hospitals but felt that they needed more support. We have had tuition waivers from the community college, but many men did not attend the classes on their own. We believe this comprehensive approach will address multiple barriers and be more successful in helping our residents obtain higher paying jobs.*

### 8. Is your approach backed by evidence of success? If so, what is it?

**Tips:** In most cases, your approach will have been used before — either by yourself or others. If your approach has any kind of evidence of past success, tell us what it is. In some cases, the approach may

even rise to the label of “research-based” or “evidence-based.” The strongest kind of research and evidence shows that the approach achieves results. For innovative programs, we realize that there may not be existing evidence of success for this approach.

***Example:** These new elements are all present in the national Homeless Residential Services Program of the Year from South Bay called “Living and Contributing.” That program focuses on veterans in a larger urban area, but the program seems easily transferable. Staff of the South Bay Center have served as our mentors in developing our new program.*

## TRACKING TO SUCCESS

### 9. How will you know when your impact has been achieved? What information or evidence will you use to verify success and/or make course corrections in your program?

**Tips:** Foundations often ask you for an evaluation plan. We are much more concerned that you look at assessment as an integral part of what you do to track and verify success. Verification is about determining whether or not you achieved your stated impact. Think of it this way: how will you know when to celebrate success?

Please describe the software or other tools you are using and how it generates information for improving the program, not just reporting on it. We are interested in the information received by both front-line workers and program directors. We are also interested in how you use the data to change and improve the program. To generate information, you may be able to use existing measuring instruments and observations and reports by others, as well as self-reported behaviors.

***Example:** We will be verifying the impact of the program using a number of ongoing methods. These will include:*

- *Bi-weekly reviews of salary information, job seeking, and job retention.*
- *A program that tracks graduation rates by demographic, addiction, and other variables (already implemented).*
- *Monthly and/or quarterly meetings with the hospital and community college representatives to respond to their interests and concerns.*

## 10. What do you most want to learn from this program?

**Tips:** High performing organizations make learning intentional in everything they do. In most programs, you are making one or more key assumptions. For example, if we offer the program in the evenings, more people will attend. It is your expectation that an activity prompts a certain consequence, but it may well be far from a certainty. In that case, your learning might be to test an assumption.

This question is unique to your organization. Why is it important to do this program? What do YOU want to learn? From every grant program, you can potentially learn something that can be shared within your organization or with others. Remember that a key test of whether you have learned something is whether or not you are doing something differently. If you have really learned something, then you will likely change some behavior as a result.

**Example:** *We want to learn how to better distinguish what makes the difference for our men in seeking and keeping better jobs. Is it the opportunity to get the job? Is it having the skills to get the job or the skills necessary to perform well enough to be retained and advance? Will getting a better job keep people in the program?*