Summary, Conclusions, & Recommendations for Preparing
Grant Writers to Increase Grant Writing Effectiveness

Section 1: Summary

This paper is the last of a series of studies examining how to adequately prepare grant writers to write competitive grant proposals and secure external research funding, which is a significant challenge facing Henry Ford Health System (HFHS). The four preceding papers focused on strategic, organizational dynamic and human behavior, multicultural, and financial factors related to this issue. This and subsequent sections present a summary of major findings from the four prior papers, answers to the research questions below, and recommendations to address the issue. The research questions which were developed to analyze the major issue are:

1. What current resources and approaches exist at HFHS to ensure that grant writers understand the competitive grant environment and that they are prepared to write grant proposals that have the highest possible chance of being highly ranked and fully funded?

2. How effective are current resources and approaches and what gaps exist that could be improved to develop a more cohesive, culturally acceptable, and effective strategy for sustaining and increasing external research funding levels?

3. Could the creation of peer review panels for providing grant proposal feedback and/or the development of evaluation criteria such as novelty/uniqueness, innovation, potential benefits, technology transfer potential, writing effectiveness, and communication effectiveness help improve HFHS grant award effectiveness?

4. What actions can HFHS take to better identify and communicate relevant grant opportunities and funding sources through resources such as grants.gov or liaisons with
5. What other actions can HFHS take to ensure that it competitively applies for and receives external research funding?

The first paper in this series of studies focused on strategic planning issues associated with the major challenge. Several subject-area questions were developed, which examined what internal resources HFHS has to prepare grant writers to write competitive proposals and the effectiveness of those resources, what factors impact the methods of grant writer preparation available and the content required, what functional or technological gaps exist that affect the use of grant writer preparation resources and how HFHS’s organizational structure impacts their full utilization, what the functional level impact of creating grant peer review panels would be, the extent to which organizational level deficiencies related to grant writer preparation have affected business strategies, and strategies used by other research institutions to address this issue.

The literature review and analysis of HFHS organizational data found that HFHS’s current resources for providing adequate grant writer preparation resources are ineffective and many functional and organizational level changes are required. A strategic approach for identifying the needs to be addressed by new preparation resources, the most effective form of training, and how to incorporate new resources into the organization’s overall strategic plan was discussed. Some key changes needed to business practices and strategies include a more centralized organizational structure with stronger central research leadership; changes to grant writer training requirements, workloads, and centralization of resources; and methods to monitor grant writers’ participation in training and peer review programs, the time required for training and conducting peer reviews, and the quality and utility of review feedback. Major internal and
external factors which positively affect HFHS’s ability to provide effective grant writer preparation resources were identified, as well as factors that hinder this ability.

Organizational dynamics and human behavior issues were studied in the second paper. The research questions related to these topics analyzed how management and leadership style affect the use of grant writer training resources; how group and team dynamics influence grant writers’ effectiveness and use of available grant writer preparation resources; communication quality’s impact on grant writers’ understanding of the grant environment, relevant grant funding opportunities, and available grant writer preparation resources; the effect of power relationships and politics on conducting peer reviews of and providing feedback on grants; and the actions HFHS can take to address these issues to prepare grant writers to write successful grants.

The literature and HFHS data highlighted the effect of management and leadership style on grant writers’ use of preparation resources and the benefits of managers adopting a coaching role; however, many HFHS research staff do not feel that they have this managerial support. Team dynamics also influence grant writers’ effectiveness and their use of available preparation resources. Power relationships and politics can have negative effects on grant writers’ use of a grant peer review program. The final key finding of this paper was that effective communication of relevant grant funding opportunities and available preparation resources is critical to prepare grant writers to be successful; however, current resources at HFHS for distributing this information are inadequate and do not provide sufficient information to all grant writers.

The third paper examined administration, globalization, and multiculturalism aspects of preparing grant writers to be effective. The related questions evaluated how generational and cultural differences impact the method of training that is most effective and preferred; the effect of stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination on the grant peer review process; how gender issues
affect the grant writing process and the resources needed to prepare grant writers to write highly ranked grants; if HFHS’s organizational culture supports a cohesive and culturally acceptable strategy to prepare grant writers to write successful grants; and what actions HFHS can take to address the effect of these factors on preparing grant writers to improve their effectiveness.

The main findings of this paper were that generational and cultural differences can impact which employees are more likely to desire training, the method of training that is most effective and preferred, and the training content needed based on differing skills and experience. Also, the grant peer review process is vulnerable to adverse effects from stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination and minority grant writers could experience negative outcomes if their grants are reviewed by prejudiced peers. Gender issues, however, do not significantly affect the grant writing process or the resources needed to effectively prepare grant writers. Finally, an organizational culture that supports learning, characterized by an externally oriented culture that values flexibility and change, such as the culture at HFHS, is critical.

A financial analysis of the grant writer preparation issue was discussed in the fourth paper. The research questions guiding this analysis examined the current costs of existing grant writer preparation resources, how providing internal training compares financially to contracting for on-site training courses or funding grant writers’ participation in off-site training, what direct and indirect costs are associated with implementing a grant peer review program, how return on investment (ROI) is measured for grant writer preparation resources, and how HFHS can improve the financial ROI of grant writer preparation resources.

The examination of related literature and HFHS data revealed that HFHS currently devotes little funds to grant writer preparation resources, which results in significant opportunity costs. In selecting the method for providing training to remedy this issue, the option with the
lowest total cost is either hiring an external firm to provide on-site training or funding grant writers’ participation in training programs at other institutions, depending on the number of grant writers requiring training. The total cost for instituting a peer review program is also dependent on the number of users, but an analysis of direct and indirect costs can provide the program’s cost per grant, which can be used to estimate the program’s total cost. The final key finding was that HFHS does not presently have a method for calculating the ROI of grant writer preparation resources; however, this is essential for HFHS to be able to evaluate the value of such resources.

Section 2: Conclusions

This section uses the information developed in the core course research papers to answer the MSA 698 major research questions. Each question is presented below, followed by a discussion of the facts from the previous papers which provide an answer to the question.

The first research question was: what current resources and approaches exist at HFHS to ensure that grant writers understand the competitive grant environment and that they are prepared to write grant proposals that have the highest possible chance of being highly ranked and fully funded? The MSA 603 paper identified some general resources that can encourage effective grant writer preparation, such as an existing infrastructure that supports training and a diverse group of grant writers with unique knowledge and experience. As the MSA 602 paper indicated, though, the mentored grant program is the only formal program currently available.

Question two asked: how effective are current resources and approaches and what gaps exist that could be improved to develop a more cohesive, culturally acceptable, and effective strategy for sustaining and increasing external research funding levels? The MSA 602 facts revealed that current resources are ineffective and result in high opportunity costs. Some gaps identified in the MSA 603 paper are insufficient time devoted to grant writing and preparation
and decentralized preparation resources. Additional gaps include low managerial support, as shown by the MSA 601 facts, and discrimination and prejudice, identified in the MSA 604 paper.

The third research question posed: could the creation of peer review panels for providing grant feedback and/or the development of evaluation criteria such as novelty/uniqueness, innovation, potential benefits, technology transfer potential, writing effectiveness, and communication effectiveness help improve HFHS grant award effectiveness? Literature reviewed for each of the previous papers indicated that experienced peers’ review and feedback can improve grant quality. The presence of many successfully-funded grant writers at HFHS was identified in the MSA 603 paper as a strength that can help improve the effectiveness of new grant writers, as long as the process is not influenced by prejudices, power, and political factors.

The fourth research question was: what actions can HFHS take to better identify and communicate relevant grant opportunities and funding sources through resources such as grants.gov or liaisons with institutions such as the National Institutes of Health, Centers for Disease Prevention and Control, and other similar grant-making entities? The MSA 601 paper identified current communication challenges and discussed methods to improve communication, including development of a more user-friendly Research Administration (RA) website on which to post new grant opportunities and an automatic distribution list for the weekly RA newsletter.

The final research question stated: What other actions can HFHS take to ensure that it competitively applies for and receives external research funding? Providing adequate training and devoted time for grant writing activities and implementing a grant peer review process are the primary actions examined in the previous papers to ensure that HFHS can competitively apply for research funding. Specific recommendations for actions needed to provide sufficient resources to grant writers to be successful are presented in the following section.
Section 3: Recommendations

The preceding core course analyses produced a number of recommendations specific to the topics of each course. Additional over-arching recommendations were also developed. This section presents each of these recommendations.

Strategic Recommendations. Strategic implications of the MSA 698 major issue were addressed in the MSA 603 Strategic Planning for the Administrator Paper #1. Related literature, external and internal forces, implications for business- and corporate-level strategy, and implications for structure and control systems were studied. Based on this analysis, specific recommendations were formulated and are presented below.

The first recommendation was to centralize grant writer preparation resources. An analysis of the resources currently available to all grant writers in the system and those available in each department to only that department’s grant writers should be conducted. A plan should then be developed to determine which resources can be redistributed and what additional resources are needed to implement new grant writer training seminars and a peer review process. The training and peer review process should be equally available to all grant writing personnel.

The second recommendation was to incorporate dedicated time into grant writers’ work schedules for training, grant development, and participation in peer review. New grant writers’ current level of grant writing knowledge and experience should be evaluated and these personnel should have time scheduled into their regular work hours to accommodate necessary training. Experienced grant writers should have time for reviewing new grants scheduled into their workload. All grant writers should have dedicated time for writing proposals.

Organizational Dynamics & Human Behavior Recommendations. Several organizational dynamics and human behavior issues related to grant writer preparation were
identified and analyzed in the second paper. The role of managers and leaders in training effective grant writers, the dynamics of grant writing teams, the role of power and politics in peer review, communication challenges among research staff, and related literature were examined. The following recommendations were developed based on the analysis of these issues.

The first recommendation was to provide training to managers and other leaders that addresses the leadership challenges identified in this paper. This training should prepare leaders to assume a coaching role, develop a good relationship with their employees, provide support for employees to attend training sessions, foster an environment in which employees are comfortable addressing each other and their leaders directly about their grants, and develop effective methods of communicating important information.

The second recommendation was to develop more effective and efficient methods of communicating pertinent information related to grant writing. Eliciting user feedback could help the RA department design a more user-friendly website that would provide the information needed by grant writers. Additionally, the implementation of an automatic distribution list for the weekly newsletter could allow new grant writers to add themselves to the list, improving access to this information resource.

**Administration, Globalization, & Multiculturalism Recommendations.** Several administration, globalization, and multiculturalism issues related to the major issue were identified and analyzed in Paper #3. The issues identified included the effect of generational and cultural differences on grant writer training; the impact of stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination on the peer review process; gender issues in the grant writing process; and the role of organizational culture in preparing effective grant writers. Based on the analysis of related literature and HFHS issues, the recommendations discussed below were formulated.
The first recommendation was to provide a range of training methods for differing preferences. A variety of online, in-person, one-on-one, and group sessions can provide all employees with a training opportunity that will be most effective for each individual. Training developers should work with grant writers to identify common preferences and requisite content.

The second recommendation was to ensure that the organizational culture supports learning and innovation. HFHS should provide training, peer review, and collaboration resources that are appropriate for employees of all cultures, generations, and genders and are consistent across every department. Employees should be made to feel comfortable working together and expressing their needs and concerns about issues that could hinder the grant writing process.

**Financial Analysis, Planning & Control Recommendations.** As with most administrative issues, resolving HFHS’s grant writer preparation issue has associated financial implications, which were addressed in detail in the MSA 602 Financial Analysis, Planning and Control Paper #4. The current costs of grant writer preparation resources, costs of different approaches for providing grant writer training, budget implications of implementing a grant peer review program, and the evaluation of ROI of grant writer preparation resources were examined. Based on this analysis, several recommendations were formulated and are discussed below.

The first recommendation was to outsource grant writer training and select the method of training based on the number of employees requiring training. In general, receiving training at another institution would have lower costs and should be used for a smaller number of participants and on-site training would have lower costs for a larger number of participants. The actual costs of contracting a training firm, conference fees, and associated travel and the number of participants should be carefully evaluated and the total cost of each option calculated.
The second recommendation was to increase the RA department’s budget in proportion to the level of use of the peer review program. Additional personnel may need to be hired to accommodate the increased workload of conducting administrative reviews, coordinating the primary reviewers, and corresponding with grant writers.

The third recommendation was to develop a standard method of determining the financial ROI of grant writer preparation resources so that changes in ROI can be quantitatively compared between years and different preparation resources. This would allow HFHS to analyze the relative effectiveness of these resources and make strategic decisions about which resources should continue to be provided.

**Crosscutting Recommendations.** The preceding sections presented recommendations aligned with core course-focused aspects of the grant writer preparation issue. Each recommendation above provides an opportunity to address specific aspects of this major challenge. Additional recommendations were identified through an examination of the issue from a global perspective and are presented below for senior leadership consideration.

When planning the grant writer training, senior leadership should remember that adequate writing techniques are not the only skills that grant writers need to be successful. Topics such as how to find relevant funding opportunities, how to use funding sources’ online submission programs, and how to collaborate effectively should also be included in the training.

To minimize organizational resistance and ensure smooth implementation of the above recommendations, senior leadership should engage grant writers early in the process of developing new preparation resources. Input from the grant writers on their needs, preferences, and expectations is crucial to ensure that the new resources appropriately address the issues affecting grant writers’ effectiveness, are valuable, and will truly be utilized by grant writers.