

IDENTIFYING AND WRITING ABOUT THE NEED FOR THE PROJECT

Most funders require that applicants develop a needs assessment that presents a compelling case for the project or approach outlined in the proposal. The needs assessment (also called "Need for the Project," "Problem Statement," etc.) is often among the first sections of the proposal narrative.

The Needs Assessment is the most critical part of your proposal narrative—it is the foundation that your entire proposal will be built upon and forms the foundation of your entire plan. Your needs assessment generally focuses on the challenges, barriers, obstacles, or negative conditions that your constituents—target population—face. In your "Need" section, make sure to address the following:

- Problem to be addressed
- Population to be served
- Extent or magnitude of the problem

IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM

a) Examples of Problems / Issues:

- Recent immigrants can't access job opportunities or residential opportunities for families
- Homeless individuals can't access job opportunities
- Students can't read at grade level
- Unemployment rate is 5 times higher than the state average
- Infant mortality rate is 3 times the county average

In defining the problem statement, the goal is to link what you want to do or get with a larger problem or issue. Consider this example: A non-profit organization serving run-away youths does not have computer access available for their clients. What are the results of not having computers available to their constituency? Results could include the following: (1) clients are less likely to contact their families—many clients are hesitant to use the phone to contact their families, but would be willing to make contact via email; (2) clients are denied access to on-line information about employment and education opportunities; (3) clients aren't exposed to computers and don't have the opportunity to learn to use computers; etc.

b) Delimiting a Specific Population—examples of specificity

- Recent immigrants settling in the Chattanooga Metropolitan Statistical Area
- Homeless clients of the Chattanooga Community Kitchen
- Urban core neighborhoods of Chattanooga, TN
- The XYZ housing development located in Dalton, GA

Make sure that both YOU and the FUNDER are clear on the population that faces the problem / issue and the population to be served.

DETERMINING THE CAUSE

Once you have identified the problem you are going to address, it is time to determine the factors that are causing or contributing to the severity of the problem. How do you determine the cause or causes of the problem?

- Common Sense / Educated Opinion (brainstorm what you think the causes / underlying issues are and then do research to determine whether your ideas are confirmed with statistics and other research)
- Statistics (the internet, census data, surveys that you conduct, the State Department of Education—school / County report cards)
- Anecdotal Information (parents, teachers, and other school personnel; may want to consider doing a more official survey)
- Other Research (reports, case studies, program evaluations, etc.)

Do some research. Look at statistics, anecdotal information, or other forms of research to determine the cause of the problem or to link what you want to do or get with the problem/issue.

It is a good idea to start a file folder with your research for future reference.

EXAMPLE OF PROBLEM / CAUSE ASSESSMENT

PROBLEM	CAUSE
70% OF K-3 STUDENTS IN XYZ NEIGHBORHOOD CAN NOT READ AT GRADE LEVEL	65% OF ADULTS ARE FUNCTIONALLY ILLITERATE
	80% OF KINDERGARTENERS ENTER SCHOOL W/OUT BASIC PRE-LITERACY SKILLS
	50% OF K-3 TEACHERS HAVE NOT BEEN TRAINED TO IMPLEMENT THE NEW LITERACY PROGRAM THAT THE SCHOOL HAS ADOPTED
	0 K-3 TEACHERS HAVE CLASSROOM LIBRARIES

Once you know what the causes underlying the problem are, you can determine which of those causes your organization can reasonably hope to change or improve. You may not be able to address each cause in every grant, but by identifying all of the causes, you can develop a more comprehensive plan for funding. For example, you might not be able to establish classroom libraries within the schools, but maybe you could secure grant funds to provide family literacy activities or professional development opportunities for teachers.

PROBLEM / NEED STATEMENT

- Your needs assessment should be clearly related to the problem that your plan will address. (e.g., if your project is going to address the need for technology skills, do not dwell on the high crime rate in the community—even though it may be a detrimental condition that the target population may face, your project isn't going to address this issue).
- Your needs assessment should outline a problem or problems that are aligned with the university's mission and goals—you should identify a problem that is within the scope of UTC to address. (e.g., a non-profit focused on literacy wouldn't say that they were going to address the issue of poor health care for the elderly—it is not within the scope of that organization's mission)
- Your needs assessment should be **CLEARLY DOCUMENTED**. Use statistics, anecdotes, etc. from reliable sources and cite those sources in the text. Don't assume that readers will automatically see that there is a need. It is up to you to convince them.
- Your needs assessment should delimit a problem or issue that you can realistically address within the award amount and funding duration set by the funder.
- Your needs assessment should focus on the needs of the target population—not the needs of UTC.

PROBLEM / NEED STATEMENTS: COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

- **CHASING THE TAIL**

A common mistake is that people justify their need with circular logic—e.g., We need a community technology center because we do not currently have a community technology center. OR We need money to increase parent involvement because we do not have enough parental involvement.

- **KITCHEN SINK**

A common mistake is that people think they should include every need that their constituents face in the need section. You should only outline those issues that contribute to the problem or that you can realistically address.

E.g., if you were writing a proposal to provide family literacy services, you **WOULD** include information on the literacy levels of adults b/c that contributes to the need for the project and because it is something that you are going to address through the project. However, you **WOULD NOT** want to include information on how many people in the target population lack health insurance or how very few families in the target population own their own home. These things may indeed be seriously detrimental issues that your constituents face, but they are not within the scope of the project or your organization.

- **ASSUMPTIONS**

Avoid making assumptions about what your funders already know or already agree with.