



Tips for Writing a Successful FLAP Grant Proposal

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This white paper offers real-world experience, insights, and advice on how to write a Foreign Language Assistance Program (FLAP) grant. It is based upon the author's years of experience at the Pittsburgh Public Schools in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA, where Dr. Fall was a faculty member, administrator, and Curriculum Supervisor of World Languages. Since her retirement, Dr. Fall has become a consultant to schools, businesses and government agencies on world language pedagogy and curriculum development.



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Contents

Introduction	1
Project Goals and Activities	1
Key Personnel	3
Dissemination of Grant Products and Outcomes	3
FLAP Project Evaluation.....	4
Budget Considerations.....	5
Nitty-Gritty Considerations	5
Conclusion	6
About Dr. Thekla Fall	7
About OWL Testing Software	7

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Introduction

Over the years, federal Foreign Language Assistance Program (FLAP) grants have become highly competitive. Pittsburgh Public Schools' (PPS) world language program received approximately two million dollars in grant funding during the last 25 years--including four FLAP grants. While the FLAP Requests for Proposals (RFP) change from year to year, it is not too soon to start planning, since once the RFP appears there is relatively little time to write the proposal. At PPS, we were fortunate to have had a great deal of in-house expertise, so that writing the grant did not fall on the shoulders of just one person. Below are a few tips that may have contributed to the success of our proposals.

**2009 FLAP grants
may soon be
announced.**

**Will your project
be funded?**

Project Goals and Activities

PPS started the project planning process by backward mapping. We determined our desired outcomes (what specifically did we want/need for our students) and what quantitative and qualitative evidence would show that these outcomes had been attained.

We made sure that our FLAP project outcomes and activities aligned with district initiatives. This is extremely important to ensure continuous district support for the duration of the grant period and beyond which makes it easier to justify work schedules and duties over the course of the grant period (a new district supervisor may question the work being done and challenge its relevancy). The best scenario is one where grant activities would have to be done anyway and the grant funding enables the work to be carried out in a highly effective, comprehensive, up to date,



Tips for Writing a Successful FLAP Grant

and/or thorough manner. Furthermore, FLAP grants require assurances of “capacity building”, i.e., that project activities are integrated into the district and are therefore likely to continue beyond the time frame of the grant period. Capacity building is more likely to occur if the project activities become fully enmeshed in overall district-wide goals and initiatives.

At the same time, it is important to consider the funding priorities as set forth in the RFP. In recent years, the FLAP priority was for “critical languages”. If there is any uncertainty about whether or not some aspect of a project will fit funding priorities, it is critical to contact the U.S. Department of Education as directed in the RFP at the onset. We have found them to be very helpful whenever we called.

PPS set very clear project goals and measurable objectives with specific activities. We aligned these with the project evaluation and the research base that provided the foundation for the project. Even given the constraints of a page limit, we always inserted a multi-page chart with column headings that included: goals, objectives, activities, projected outcomes, and persons responsible in a three-year, item by item, timeline. The chart gave FLAP reviewers a very clear, concise overview of what was being proposed. Writing the chart was also very helpful for us because blanks in the chart made it easy to spot gaps in our thinking. It guided and focused our writing through many iterations of the proposal. We also found it to be an extremely useful guide once the funded project was underway. Please note that we were not always able to do everything exactly on schedule, but the chart kept us focused and on track. It provided a detailed overview for all the key players who helped carry out the projects.



Tips for Writing a Successful FLAP Grant

Key Personnel

We collaborated with key district colleagues (some department chairs and teacher leaders) as well as getting support from administrators, finance department, technology department, and grants department—as needed. We reasoned that FLAP reviewers would see an increased chance of project success with a broad base of institutional support. Also, we found that it is best to involve the key people right from the start and to delegate portions of the proposal writing whenever possible.

PPS also collaborated with local, nationally-known, world language experts at the college /university level. Their reputations gave credibility to the project and their interest attested to the significance of the PPS project. It is advisable to build a professional relationship with these individuals beforehand and make sure that they are “kindred spirits”. Their expertise was invaluable to the projects and helped us with many of the technical aspects (for example, test design, task development, staying true to the ACTFL Scale, rater training, staff development, test validation, etc.). While much was accomplished via email, it was necessary to meet periodically in person. If there is no one in the immediate area with the needed expertise, it would be wise to budget accordingly to bring experts to the district.

Dissemination of Grant Products and Outcomes

RFPs have always had a requirement for dissemination to other school districts and the profession. PPS made sure that project outcomes would have significance beyond PPS. That is, we networked with outside world language educators to determine what would benefit other



Tips for Writing a Successful FLAP Grant

districts as well. In addition to making presentations at local, state, and national conferences, we paired with a nearby school district and shared staff development and instructional/assessment materials developed through the grant. In addition, PPS maintains a FLAP Dissemination section on the PPS world language website to distribute information and materials. See <http://www.pps.k12.pa.us> (Departments, World Languages, FLAP Dissemination).

FLAP Project Evaluation

Over the years, FLAP RFPs have had an increased emphasis on quantitative as well as qualitative data. Obtaining quantitative data can be problematic, since few districts engage in large scale world language testing. Districts may need to look to outside world language testing resources. PPS had long ago determined that increases in oral proficiency would be a major grant outcome. The last FLAP RFPs, however, also had a specific requirement for pre and post achievement testing. PPS was able to accomplish both types of testing by using FLAP funding to purchase a customized test software program (OWL Testing Software). The software is a user-friendly, web-based program that enables PPS staff to annually input PPS tests, administer/rate/score thousands of district-wide tests, and generate needed reports. Thus, the software makes it possible to provide significant quantitative data. It also helps PPS to fulfill the capacity building requirement since the software is completely authorable and flexible, ensuring its use after the end of the grant period.*



Tips for Writing a Successful FLAP Grant

Budget Considerations

Over the years, we learned the wisdom of budgeting for additional expertise. Project Directors are not expected to know everything and do everything. PPS budgeted for additional staff and outside consultants. For example, PPS allocated grant funds for a full-time World Language Coach position to carry out grant activities related to staff development, technology support, data collection, and project evaluation. It is very important to have sufficient staff with the necessary expertise to carry out grant activities.

In addition, PPS is using current FLAP funds to contract an outside evaluator (a firm that specializes in data analysis) to do the number crunching. That is, the company analyzes PPS world language speaking proficiency data, pre and post achievement test data, and student demographic data along specific parameters such as oral proficiency ratings, achievement gains, race, gender, socio-economic levels, and attendance to determine program strengths and weaknesses. The company wrote part of the evaluation portion of the FLAP proposal and they will write the quantitative portion of the project evaluation at the end of the grant period.

Nitty-Gritty Considerations

We found it best to copy the RFP right into the written proposals to be sure that we addressed each item, point by point. It was usually necessary to drastically abbreviate each RFP item heading (due to space considerations), but it is necessary to include all of them so that reviewers know exactly which item is being addressed and to make sure that we fully addressed



Tips for Writing a Successful FLAP Grant

each item (in considered relation to its point value and overall page limitations). We were also very careful to follow all directions related to font size, page limits, spacing, approvals, assurances, etc.

Conclusion

As mentioned earlier, once the RFP comes out, time is very short. There are many things that can be done ahead of time such as determining the overall project focus and goals, obtaining tentative internal support, and lining up possible outside consultants. See <http://www.languagepolicy.org/> for updates on the status of 2008 FLAP grants and to find a copy of former RFPs to get a general idea of what was involved--but remember that the 2009 RFP most likely will have some differences. Once the 2009 RFP is posted, check through it to see what can be delegated, for example: district assurances and approvals, the finance department to help set a realistic budget that accounts for inflation over the 3 year period, bios and commitments from key project leaders and consultants, etc.

One final tip—while writing the grant proposal may seem daunting; carrying it out can be overwhelming. Make sure the project is significant and beneficial for students, feasible, and that you have the necessary staff and the passion to carry it through.

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* Please see *Foreign Language Annals*. (Fall, 2007 pages 377-406) for a more complete description of recent PPS FLAP projects and assessment data.



Tips for Writing a Successful FLAP Grant

About Dr. Thekla Fall

Dr. Thekla Fall has 37 years combined professional experience as an educator and administrator in the School District of Pittsburgh, with expertise in foreign language and ESL pedagogy and assessment, staff development, city-wide program development and evaluation, curriculum writing, classroom supervision, budget management, grant writing and management, elementary education, and the teaching of German. She was Curriculum Supervisor, World Languages, when she retired in 2006 and is now a consultant to schools, businesses, and government agencies in the field of language pedagogy. She can be reached by email at thekla.fall@gmail.com.

About OWL Testing Software

OWL Testing Software is the leading solutions provider of language test building software to academia, business, and government markets. Built as a web-based solution for test creation, administration, and management, OWL Testing Software is unique in its ability to create tests for all four communication skills – oral, aural, reading and writing. OWL is available as licensed software and as a hosted solution to meet the needs of the largest and smallest schools, businesses, and government agencies concerned with enhancing the language learning process and outcomes. Please visit www.owlts.com or call 412-436-0559 for more information.