

Questions Frequently Asked by Longwood Foundation Staff When Evaluating a Grant Proposal

In any given grant cycle, there are usually about 70 requests. There are typically \$2.5 of request for every \$1 we have to grant. So, unfortunately, our grant decisions are a competitive process. We are seeking and prefer requests with ambitious outcomes, a thoughtful and rigorous plan, and the capacity to deliver it (financial, leadership, organizational, and more). The track record of the organization and its leadership are important factors in our decision-making process.

The ideas and inquiries below are the questions which frequently come up when we are discussing a grant request with an applicant. They do not necessarily encompass all of our questions, but represent some important ones. Please do not attempt to answer each one explicitly in your request. Consider these to be thought starters, not a check list you need to address one by one. Be prepared to answer as many of the questions as you can when we meet with you to seek more information.

Organization Niche

- What's the passion behind your organization? Tell us the story behind the nonprofit. As its leader(s), what drew you to it and keeps you pushing for progress on its behalf?
- What other organizations are also working in this space? What makes your organization unique or distinguishes you from them? Have you considered or are you currently collaborating with them?

Measures of Success (Outcomes)

- What are you trying to accomplish over the next few years with the support of the proposed grant? How will you measure the success? What impact will the achievement of these outcomes have on the lives of those served?
 - We are expecting you to identify your own measures of success as an organization.
 - Which measures can you quantify? What's your three-year history on these metrics? How do others in your sector perform on them? From that, illustrate how ambitious the proposed accomplishments will be when complete.
 - Metrics typically fall into three groups – volume, quality, and cost. Ideally, you have one or two in each group, but that's not a requirement.
 - The highest quality metrics are objective and from sources beyond your organization. Good examples would be an increase in the number of clients who pay for the nonprofit's services or a 3rd party managed survey of the quality of the nonprofit's services compared to their local competitors.
 - The more ambitious and credible the goals, the more likely Longwood is to fund the effort.
 - If your organization is a previous grantee, be prepared to discuss performance against past goals and any lessons learned.

Implementation Plan

- How thoughtful and rigorous is your plan?
 - Illustrate the linkage between your action plans and the ambitions you described above.
 - Have other nonprofits around the country or world already proven the proposed results of the program you are proposing? If so, how will you ensure fidelity to their process? If you are changing their process, what impact will the changes have on your results?
 - This is a good place to explain your theory of change as it should underpin the answer to this question.
 - How does the proposed grant enable the action plans described?
 - What are the risks to the success of the project? How do you plan to mitigate them?

Implementation Capacity

- What is your capacity to deliver the plan?
 - Leadership and Governance
 - i. How much experience does your leadership have in the sector?
 - ii. Is there a strategic plan? Has your Board been actively engaged in the planning process?
 - iii. Do members of the Board have meaningful experience in the sector?
 - iv. Is there a succession plan should the Executive Director leave the organization? What is it? Has the current Board already been through a successful leadership succession challenge before?
 - Organizational
 - i. Is there sufficient talent in the organization to execute the proposed program with excellence and deliver the proposed results?
 - Financial
 - i. Assuming that Longwood does not fund the entire request (the Trustees often prefer to fund no more than half of a program to ensure that others in the community see value in it as well), how likely are you to secure funding from the other sources you have identified? Have some of them already committed funds?
 - ii. Sometimes when you make a capital investment, new operational costs are created. How will you fund these? For instance, if you buy an incremental van to transport clients, how will you pay for the driver and maintenance?
 - iii. If the request is an operating one, how will you fund it once Longwood's grant runs out? You should assume that Longwood will not fund this effort a second time. If you present a five-year plan, you may, for illustrative purposes, make the assumption that Longwood could fund one more time (two years in the future), but such a planning assumption and/or the current decision to fund does not commit Longwood to making that subsequent grant.
 - iv. Is there an existing, meaningful, reliable, and on-going source of funds for your operations such as earned revenue, an endowment, or the government?