Community Research Institute

*Empowering communities with quality research and data*

# Nonprofits and Data:
# A How-To Series

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## Using Data to Support Grant Applications and Other Funding Opportunities

Johnson Center
at Grand Valley State University

## ABOUT THE COMMUNITY RESEARCH INSTITUTE

The Community Research Institute (CRI) provides innovative applied research to West Michigan communities. It empowers communities with quality research and data, it generates information that will improve their decision-making process, it forecasts trends for effective problem solving, it measures results and reports outcomes of investments in community change.

CRI gathers, analyzes, interprets and shares national and local data through partnerships with nonprofit and neighborhood groups, and assists local and regional nonprofit leaders with decision making, grant writing, and program evaluation. This is research that makes a difference through a distinctly valuable blend of university rigor and community relevance.

Research for this guide was provided by Nicole Notario-Risk and Korrie Ottenwess.

For additional information visit our website at www.cridata.org or contact us directly by calling (616)331-7585.

Nonprofits and Data: A How-To Series is available to download at no cost at www.cridata.org/publications.

Grand Valley State University
www.gvsu.edu

# 1 Using data to support grant applications and other funding opportunities

## INTRODUCTION

This How-To Series is designed to demonstrate six ways in which data can be used to enhance the work of nonprofit organizations and community groups. These include using data to:

1. **Support Grant Applications and Other Funding Opportunities**
2. Monitor Trends & Identify Emerging Problems
3. Disseminate Information to Engage Community and Policymakers
4. Evaluate Progress in Meeting Goals
5. Establish Priorities and Plan Programs
6. Characterize Disparities Across Sub Populations/Communities

The information contained within each guide has been developed by combining our community knowledge with that of a variety of grant writing and data experts. More specifically, within each series installment, you will find an introduction to the topic, guidelines for using data to achieve the specified outcome, good practices and pitfalls with corresponding examples, and resources to find data.

## WHY IS DATA IMPORTANT FOR GRANT APPLICATIONS?

Every good grant proposal contains a needs statement. A needs statement describes the critical conditions that are affecting certain people or things in a specific place at a specific time.[2] Its purpose is to let funders know what need in the community your organization is planning to address. "It is the heart of your entire case for support.[2]"

Presenting a compelling needs statement is a critical part of the grant proposal. You connect to a potential funder when they are convinced you both want to solve the same problem.[3] If the funder does not understand or agree that there is a need for your project then they will lose interest in the rest of your proposal.[2] It is often a convincing needs statement that motivates a funder to help.

Data in the form of raw numbers, percentages, and ratios give strength to a needs statement. Specifically, data can be used to answer critical needs statement questions such as:

- Who is in need?
- Where are they?
- When is the need evident?
- What is the need?
- Why does this need occur?
- What are the consequences of meeting the need?
- How is the need linked to your organization?

## Part 1 - Gathering Data

There are numerous ways to gather data to support a needs statement. Below are three basic approaches to get you started. By having a variety of methods of acquiring supportive data for a needs statement, you will increase your ability to tailor your proposal.[1]

| | |
|---|---|
| **Public Databases** | Data can be gathered from public sources such as the U.S. Census Bureau or from city, county, state or federal government offices. You will find that many government agencies or departments have large amounts of data available for public use, including health, housing, or demographic data. Data from these sources is useful for illustrating problem areas, showing change over time, and increasing the understanding of a complex problem. To get started, browse government agency websites or place an exploratory phone call to the department that is most closely related to the field your program addresses. Examples include: Michigan Department of Community Health, the Center for Disease Control, Michigan Department of Education, and the Department of Environmental Quality. |
| **Studies** | Another approach to finding data is to explore published studies on your subject. You can look for information in academic journals which can be accessed through most libraries. Alternately, consult a local expert at a university. Literature reviews are commonly used to document the gap between what is and what ought to be. |
| **Surveys** | If you cannot find the data that you need to support your case in existing databases or in published studies, you may want to consider conducting a survey. A survey can be as simple as a short paper and pencil feedback form or as complex as an in-depth one-on-one interview. Surveys can be effective even if you are using a small sample group or volunteers to administer the survey. To begin, CRI recommends that you check out a book on developing and administering surveys. |

## Part 2 – Incorporating Data into Grant Proposals

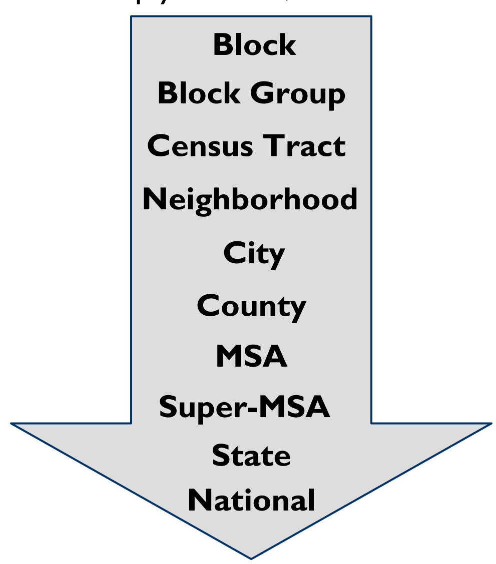
When you begin to use data to answer the 'who, what, when, where and why' questions found in a needs statement, there are a few guidelines that should be followed. Below are some tips gathered from reputable sources in the grant writing industry.

**Avoid using assumptions or undocumented assertions. Documented, factual statistics will bring fewer questions to your proposal.** "There are few things more embarrassing than to have the funder tell you that your information is out of date or incorrect.[4]"

**Use clear statistics that support your argument.** It is important to remain logical and professional in your needs statement. Overstating the problem or using overly emotional appeals is not suggested.[4]

**Make sure data collection is well documented.** It adds credibility to your statement when you include a reputable source of information. In addition, if the reader questions your claim, they can go directly to the source to confirm.

**Emphasize the geographic area you are designated to serve.** Information that is too generic or broad will not help to clarify the need to the reader.[4] If you have a survey or local report that backs up your case, it could be helpful to include it. This shows local investment and interest in the problem, especially if the study was done by another organization in the community.[3] In addition, a broad range of data about a community is commonly available for large areas such as cities and counties. Demographic data is available for smaller areas such as neighborhoods and blocks.



**Give a clear sense of the urgency of your request.** It can be helpful to show the reader why the funding is important now or what the consequences are if the need is not met.[2]

**In any problem statement, include more than one data point.** Data is most likely to have an impact if it is comparative. It is important that the reader is able to relate it to something. You might consider comparing data over different time periods (ex: 1990 to 2000), comparing it to the state or national average, or comparing it to communities that are similar in size or population.

**Include relevant history surrounding the problem.** If there is a significant chain of events that has created the problem, then a description of these events will provide background that significantly contributes to the proposal reviewer's knowledge.[3]

**Add a human touch to your needs statement.** Adding stories or case studies to data can create an effective mix. This type of data can be acquired by holding public meetings to get testimony on the problem, using quotes from people who know about the problem or are experts in the field, or using examples of clients in a need population. Human stories can provide a realistic picture of what the clients are up against and their need for services.

**Don't forget to give the reader hope.** The picture you paint should not be so grim that the situation appears hopeless. That could cause the reader to wonder whether an investment in a solution would be worthwhile. For example, when writing a proposal to fund mammograms for low-income women, provide mortality statistics relating to cancer AND statistics that prove how effective early detection can be in surviving breast cancer.[4]

## PITFALLS AND GOOD PRACTICES

Using data accurately to support a grant proposal can be tricky. Included below are several pitfalls to avoid as well as related good practices to keep in mind when writing your needs statement. These tips were developed from concepts provided by the Greater New Orleans Community Data Center. After each set of pitfalls and practices, an example is provided to illustrate its potential use.

### PROVIDE DATA FOR THE MOST SPECIFIC LOCATION POSSIBLE

| Possible Pitfall | Good Practice |
| --- | --- |
| Data that represents geographic areas larger than the area you are targeting. | Data that represents the specific neighborhood(s) or communities where you are working. |

**For example...**

"In Michigan Public Schools, graduation rates increased 3.4% from 1998 to 2002."

We can make this statement stronger by including data from the specific school districts we intend to work with:

"Graduation rates increased 2.4% in Kentmeyer Public School District and 21.5% in Grand Banks Public Schools between 1998 and 2002."

**FOR ADDITIONAL PUBLIC SCHOOL DATA...
VISIT WWW.CRIDATA.ORG OR
WWW.SCHOOLMATTERS.COM**

## GATHER THE MOST RECENT DATA AVAILABLE

| Possible Pitfall | Good Practice |
|---|---|
| Data that is outdated and old. | The most recent available data from the chosen data source. |

**Putting it to use…**

It is important to search out the most current data on your proposal topic. For instance, Census 2000 data is much more appropriate than 1990 Census data. Many data sources update their available information every year or two.

## ADD PERSPECTIVE BY PROVIDING RAW NUMERS AND PERCENTAGES

| Possible Pitfall | Good Practice |
|---|---|
| Raw numbers that describe the problem in your area. | Raw numbers AND percentages that show the proportion of the total population in your area that is affected by the problem. |

**For example…**

"In 2000, 14,628 children lived in female headed households in Grand Rapids."

By converting the raw number into a percentage, it provides funders some perspective on the reality of the issue or problem your organization may be addressing.

"In 2000, 14,628 children lived in female headed households in Grand Rapids. This number represents 31% of all children under the age of 18."

**FOR ADDITIONAL DATA ON WEST MICHIGAN'S CHILDREN AND FAMILIES VISIT…**

**WWW.CRIDATA.ORG OR WWW.MILHS.ORG**

## CAREFULLY SELECT THE DATA THAT BEST TELLS YOUR STORY

| Possible Pitfall | Good Practice |
| --- | --- |
| All the data you've ever found that relates somewhat to the problem. | Data carefully selected and narrowed down from the entire list of all the data you found and presented in a targeted, compelling, concise problem statement. |

**Putting it to use...**

When an overwhelming amount of data is included in a proposal or needs statement, it is known as a "data dump[5]." While it is important to search widely for relevant data, it is also important to tailor the data you include in order to create a crystal clear picture for funders.

## INCLUDE DATA THAT IS RELEVANT TO YOUR ISSUE

| Possible Pitfall | Good Practice |
| --- | --- |
| Data that is not immediately relevant to the problem | Data that scientific research has demonstrated is related to the problem you are addressing |

**Putting it to use...**

If you are writing a proposal to provide pre school educational development services, it might not be relevant to discuss high school drop out rates in your needs statement.

If you are writing a proposal to provide prenatal care, you might want to include data on pregnancy related deaths.

## SEARCH OUT REPUTABLE SOURCES

| Possible Pitfall | Good Practice |
|---|---|
| Data from newspapers, magazines, and TV news programs – sources that are not in the business of distributing reliable data. | Data from reputable sources such as government agencies, nonprofit associations, and academic or peer-reviewed journals. |

### Putting it to use…

Although it may be tempting to use a snippet from a newspaper or television program at times when it seems to fit perfectly with your proposal, it is important to remember that newspapers are in the business of selling newspapers and television programs are in need of ratings. They may at times be accurate, but funders may not view those sources as reliable.

### For example…

"According to the Peter Jennings on World News Tonight, smoking is the number one cause of death in the United States "

Instead of citing Peter Jennings as a reference, add credibility to your data by using a reliable and recognized source such as the Michigan Department of Community Health (MDCH).

"Data from the MDCH showed tobacco use was the leading cause of death in 2000, killing 435,000 people, or 18.1 percent of everyone who died."

**FOR ADDITIONAL HEALTH DATA VISIT WWW.CRIDATA.ORG OR WWW.MICHIGAN.GOV/MDCH**

## TRY TO DESCRIBE THE PROBLEM, NOT YOUR SERVICES

| Possible Pitfall | Good Practice |
|---|---|
| Exclusively including data about the number of people you serve, the number of people who are on your waiting list, and/or the number of activities you conduct each year. | Data from external sources that point to the size of the problem in the community where you are proposing to work. |

### Putting it to use...

Waiting lists are often presented as evidence of "need" for a given service in a given place. However, waiting lists do not capture:

- Whether or not there is another provider with excess capacity within the same area
- The full extent of the problem in your community

Funders want to know that you have explored referring these clients to another agency and have established that there is no alternative source of services for a given client, not just that your agency is unable to provide the services. In cases such as this, external data can provide an estimate of how many people in total (not just those on the waiting list) are affected by the problem.

There are some cases in which it is good to include the number and demographics of clients your serve. For instance, if you are writing a proposal to provide additional services to your clients, funders might want to see waiting list data and client satisfaction data to assess how successful your new services will be.

### For example...

"In 2002, Helping Hands provided childcare services to 30 families in the Main Street Neighborhood. 5 remained on the waiting list."

We can enhance this statement by adding neighborhood level data: "The Main Street Neighborhood lies in census tracts 15 and 16, where 67% of children under the age of 12 live in households where both parents are in the workforce. Helping Hands is currently the only licensed childcare provider serving those census tracts."

**FOR ADDITIONAL DATA ON NEIGHBORHOODS WITHIN GRAND RAPIDS & MUSKEGON VISIT WWW.CRIDATA.ORG**

## USE COMPARISON DATA TO PROVIDE PERCEPTION

| Possible Pitfall | Good Practice |
|---|---|
| Only numbers that represent the geographic area where you work without any comparison data | Comparison data from the national level and other geographic levels of interest to the funder. |

### Putting it to use...

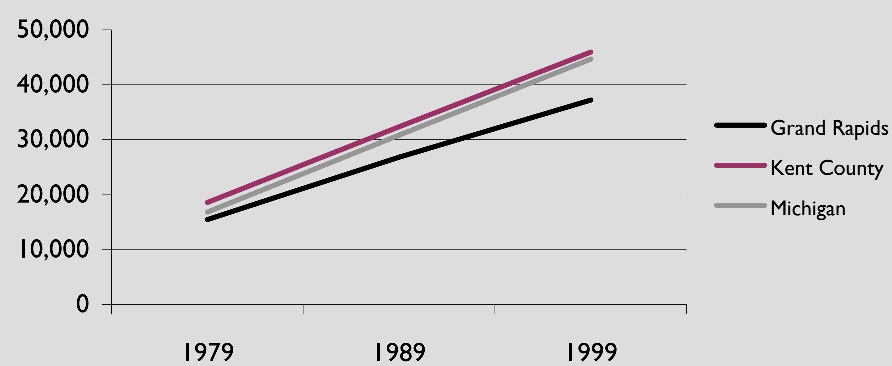
If you are writing a program to serve Kent County, one approach for including comparison data is to include data from neighboring counties such as Muskegon and Ottawa.  Another approach is to include data for other Michigan counties that contain large cities such as Kalamazoo County or Washtenaw County.  A third approach is to include data showing state and national averages.

### For example...

In 1999, the median income in the city of Grand Rapids was $37,224.

We can enhance this statement by adding a graph to show how Grand Rapids compares to surrounding areas and the state.

**Median Household Income**
**Michigan, Kent County & Grand Rapids 1980-1999**




**FOR MORE DEMOGRAPHIC DATA**
**VISIT WWW.CRIDATA.ORG OR WWW.CENSUS.GOV**

## WHERE TO BEGIN FINDING DATA

The Community Research Institute (CRI) is working to develop a data sharehouse for the Greater Grand Rapids community. The concept or purpose of a data sharehouse is to develop a single integrated system that can support one-stop data shopping.

To begin exploring community data, visit our website at www.cridata.org. There you will find county, city, and neighborhood level data. Examples include:

- Demographic information on topics such as, population counts, poverty rates, race, housing and education from the 1990 and 2000 U.S. Census
- Crime, housing, and voting data from the City of Grand Rapids
- Data on regional trends including topics such as: Healthy Youth, Healthy Seniors, Education, Civic Engagement, and Community & Economic Development, Arts & Culture, Poverty, and Philanthropy.
- Various reports on topics that include: the status of women in the workplace, barriers to success for entry level healthcare workers, tobacco and smoking cessation programs, violence in Kent County, employee training needs and practices, communities of support for the aging population, a the working poor.

**It should be noted that CRI has more data than we can fit on our website. If after reviewing our website, you haven't found what you're looking for contact Gustavo Rotondaro, GIS/Information Specialist for CRI, for additional data.**

**For more information on using data to support grant proposals please contact, Korrie Ottenwess, Research Manager for the Community Research Institute at:**

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**Web:** **www.cridata.org**

## REFERENCES

[1]Bauer, David G. The "How To" Grant Manual: Successful Grantseeking Techniques for Obtaining Public and Private Grants. Fourth Edition. 1999. Pg 12-15

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