Grant Development at
Manatee Community College

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A handbook prepared by the
MCC Resource Development Department
Greetings from the Director of Resource Development

At Manatee Community College great programs, events and achievements start with ideas, large and small, generated by individuals and groups from all sectors of the College community. These ideas are the seeds that germinate and grow into new initiatives that help to fulfill our mission and strategic planning objectives. While these ideas, and the plans that come from them, naturally evolve over time and are influenced by the current local, state and national climates, they all started with the goal to make things better here at MCC. It is vital that we continue to nurture these new ideas in order to grow them into effective plans for improvement.

For those ideas that might benefit from grant funding, this manual will take you through the step-by-step application process: from internal approval to submission of a competitive application.

The many steps in the grant development process may seem daunting at first. This manual, along with the assistance of the Resource Development staff and a group of colleagues on the grant writing team, can help convert the initial idea into a sound and workable plan — and eventually a concrete reality.

So take the plunge. Spin out those ideas. Feel free to come talk to us. We are eager to hear from you.

Remember: It all begins with an idea!

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Manatee Community College

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1. Introduction

1.1 The Role of Grants in Higher Education
Publicly-supported institutions of higher education must constantly compete with other interests for their fair share of state appropriations. Manatee Community College (MCC) is no exception. Each year our operating budget has to increase just to maintain the current level of staffing, programs and services. MCC also strives to develop and implement new programs and services, to enhance existing ones, to revise curricula, to equip laboratories and to upgrade technology across the institution. Combine these objectives with the goal of keeping higher education affordable and the College’s limited resources are inevitably squeezed.

Thus, many of these initiatives must be paid for through external funding sources, both public and private. In the private arena, The Foundation for Manatee Community College, Inc. has been very successful in addressing much of the need for scholarships, equipment and faculty support through its cultivation of community, individual, foundation and corporate donors.

In the arena of public funds, the Resource Development Department (RDD) facilitates grant applications to support targeted initiatives once they are approved by the proposer’s chain of command and the Resource Development Committee (RDC). The RDC, which is made up of the four vice presidents, the deans, the directors of career & technical education, corporate and community development, human resources and finance, meets monthly and addresses both potential grant projects and the effective administration of currently funded grants.

1.2 MCC’s Mission, Institutional Values and Strategic Priorities
When planning a grant it is of utmost importance that the proposed program will help to fulfill MCC’s Mission, support its Institutional Values and further its Strategic Priorities.

MCC Mission Statement
Manatee Community College provides an accessible, dynamic learning environment that facilitates the achievement of educational, professional, and personal goals by our students and members of our communities in an atmosphere that embraces excellence, diversity and innovation.

MCC’s Institutional Values
Learning Excellence Integrity Accountability Diversity
Community Innovation Opportunity Respect Success

MCC’s Strategic Priorities
Priority One: Student Learning and Development
Provide excellence in education and support services to promote student success and achievement.

Priority Two: Technology and Communication
Leverage technology to promote student success, faculty and staff development, and operational excellence.
Priority Three: Finances, Fundraising and Facilities
Maximize and manage fiscal and capital resources in a continuing effort to advance the institution.

Priority Four: Human Resources
Recruit, develop and retain an exemplary faculty and staff who will preserve and promote MCC’s reputation for educational excellence.

A series of activity-based objectives has been identified to support the achievement of each of these far-reaching priorities. The full strategic plan can be found on the MCC Web site at: http://www.mccfl.edu/pages/3290.asp. Each grant proposal must be tied to one or more of the objectives that support the College’s strategic priorities.

1.3 Grants Act as a Catalyst for Change
Grant funds support faculty and staff efforts to positively impact the achievement of MCC’s mission and strategic priorities while embracing its institutional values. Often these external dollars will act as a catalyst for change, bringing new, enhanced or expanded programs and services to the College. The subject of many grant projects may already be on the College’s “to do” list, but often the current budget may be insufficient for new initiatives. External funding supports rapid implementation of targeted initiatives by the infusion of funds exclusively for the purpose of achieving the desired outcomes.

A grant project can also supplement other activities included in the College’s operating budget, such as professional development and purchase of discipline-related equipment and materials. Well-designed programs also strengthen partnerships, both within the College and with other collaborators in the community.

1.4 Student and Constituent Benefits
Grants serve to expand access to the College and to its services. They provide additional resources for students, faculty and the community. Some programs encourage the use of grant funds for student scholarships. Projects develop new or enhanced programs, courses and services. They develop mechanisms to assess and continuously improve the quality and delivery of academic and student services in order to increase student success, retention, persistence and program completion rates. Each grant application must show a connection with MCC’s mission statement and clearly describe the benefit to the College’s stakeholders: the students and the community.

1.5 Faculty Benefits
Through grant funding, new or improved programs and support services are developed to address students’ needs. These efforts should lead to more engaged students with fewer difficulties in grasping course content. Grant funding supports laboratory and curriculum development and improvement. Faculty members may also participate in the professional development opportunities afforded by a grant project, including participation in off-campus conferences and workshops. The project may also strengthen partnerships through interaction with colleagues from educational or business entities. The grant leadership and those involved in curriculum development or curriculum enhancement activities may also be eligible for reassigned time.
Faculty participation in the development or implementation of a grant may also be added to a professor’s continuing contract or promotion portfolio.

1.6 Tangible Benefits
Depending on the focus of the grant and the allowable expenditures, grants sometimes fund computer or laboratory equipment and educational supplies. Also, travel funds to conferences or training venues for key personnel may be a part of the grant. Grants only support these types of expenditures when they are an integral element required for accomplishing project objectives.

2. Before You Start Your Grant Proposal

This Grant Development Manual is intended as a reference and a training tool for staff and faculty. The Resource Development Department will provide support and technical assistance to supplement the information in the manual.

Remember: You will need signatures on the “Pre-Application Approval for Grants” form from your department chair or director, dean and vice president before your concept can be reviewed by the Resource Development Committee for approval to pursue funding. The Resource Development Department will assist you in completing this form, which is located on the RDD Web site: http://www.mccfl.edu/pages/1010.asp.

2.1 What is a Fundable Idea?
When you discover the connections between MCC’s mission, your professional interests and the purposes of various granting agencies, the potential projects that come to mind can quickly multiply.

   Innovation is a key factor when you develop your idea for a grant program. Most agencies are well aware that there isn't enough money to solve all the nation's problems--and that in many cases, it is not money, but ideas which are scarce. The grant-making process is fundamentally a way to reward and test creative approaches to solving a problem. This emphasis on innovation is the main reason why most funders will not support "operational" projects -- activities which may have basic merit, but don't break new ground.

   Because of various political and financial factors, a good idea is not always a fundable idea. Each funding source has its own funding priorities but there are some things that most funding sources look for in making grants.

2.2 What Do Funding Sources Look for in a Proposal?
First, most funders like projects that are practical and feasible. This means that projects must have a focus, a purpose, a beginning, middle and an end, and they will fulfill a mandate, demonstrate a technique, solve a problem or otherwise contribute knowledge and wisdom to enduring, fundamental questions.

   Second, funding sources are looking for evidence that they are working with competent people and institutions. They are just as likely to fund an impressive person as they are a good idea. In fact, there is a growing trend among funding sources to "network"--that is, to form partnerships with organizations so they can develop a longer-term partnership with individuals who have similar interests. Funding sources like to be approached by interesting, articulate
individuals with vision, whom they can interact with and help shape ideas, along with the project and (incidentally) the funded college.

A good (and fundable) idea must be defensible as such. Funding sources will quickly determine whether or not a grantee has some knowledge about the subject-matter that they wish to build a project around. Because they interact with many people from wide-ranging perspectives they tend to know the "big picture" and how a specific project could fit into and enhance that picture. Finally, funding sources almost always have priorities and will not consider even the best ideas that fall outside of their established priorities.

Government agencies and foundations publish their funding priorities along with their grant application guidelines regularly. It is extremely important that before even a preliminary conversation is initiated with the funding agency, the applicant must be familiar with those funding interests and priorities. This actually saves both the funding source and the grantee time through this self-selection and "filtering" process. The RDD is available to assist at any time to explore funding options and make initial contacts as appropriate.

2.3 Review the Literature and Outline Your Idea
To be competitive, you need to develop your idea by doing some background work and collecting support materials for your project. Here are some specific factors to consider and questions you can ask yourself to evaluate the quality of your idea:

- **Significance**: Have I identified an important problem? Does the challenge extend beyond MCC?
- **Innovative**: Is my idea for addressing the problem new or creative? In what way?
- **Appropriate for MCC**: Does this idea fit within MCC’s Strategic Priorities?
- **Increase Knowledge**: Will my project increase knowledge in my field?
- **Background**: Am I familiar with background information about this topic? Can I demonstrate familiarity with this topic through a critical review of the existing literature? How have other institutions addressed the same or a similar problem?
- **Sustainability**: How would MCC continue to address the problem when the grant funding is gone?

To aid you in answering these questions you should:

- **Survey the literature**: Search funding databases, journals or the Internet on the topic to see what has been published on the topic and how others have dealt with the challenge
- **Contact Investigators**: Talk to investigators who have projects dealing with the topic
- **Prepare a brief concept paper**: Pre-Application Approval for Grants form
- **Discuss the topic with colleagues or mentors**

2.4 Get Others Involved
Teamwork is an important part of developing any grant proposal. Individuals can provide assistance in the form of brainstorming, identifying potential funding sources, making suggestions to include or delete certain concepts, developing evaluation strategies and providing legwork for obtaining letters of support from partners as well as editing the final proposal.

Your department chair, dean or vice president should be consulted about your interest in developing a grant proposal as early as possible in the process. They can help you evaluate and clarify your project idea, and make sure it is of interest and benefit to MCC.
The Director of Resource Development may also help you identify potential collaborators for your project. Other faculty and staff may have expertise you need in areas such as evaluation, technology, curriculum development and so on.

2.5 Identifying and Selecting Funding Sources

There are many resources available to help you identify potential funding sources for your project. On the Resource Development Web site, go to Grant Development and click on “Links to Grant Funding Sources.” Also, The Resource Development Department (RDD) will assist you in your search for funding sources and help you narrow down your options. In addition, any general questions you have about grants or grant policies and procedures can be directed to the RDD.

There are several issues to consider when choosing a potential funding source for a project. As a minimum, you should:

1. Verify that MCC is eligible to apply for funding. If not, move on to the next potential source.
2. Make sure that the purpose of the funding source’s program aligns with the proposed project as well as with MCC’s mission and strategic priorities. When these elements are aligned, it is easier to create a convincing and competitive proposal.
3. Check the due date of the application to see if there is sufficient time to prepare a competitive proposal before the submission deadline. Cyclical competitions (quarterly, annually, etc.) give the applicant the opportunity to submit a proposal in future rounds if necessary.
4. Review match requirements to calculate the potential fiscal commitment for the College.
5. Examine any spending restrictions on use of funds for equipment, indirect costs, project administration and other categories to make sure that the funds can be used for key elements of the proposed project.
6. If possible, find out the total budget of the grant competition, the average size of awards, the number of awards anticipated and the number of applications received in past competitions.
7. Make sure that you do not have to "squeeze" an idea into the guidelines of the grant program. This approach is often unsuccessful because it results in a proposal which the experienced reviewer perceives as pandering to the funding source--"chasing money" rather than improving society.

Special Note on Private Funding Sources: All applications to non-governmental funding sources must go through the Foundation for Manatee Community College, Inc. The foundation has its own pre-approval process for grant-writing efforts directed to private grant-makers. The RDD and foundation may collaborate in the development of grant proposals to non-governmental funding sources as determined on a case-by-case basis.

2.6 Preliminary Approval

Before you begin developing a formal proposal, you must fill out the “Pre-Application Approval for Grants” located on the RDD Web site and obtain signatures of approval from your department chair/director, academic dean and vice president. This will ensure that your project is aligned with the College’s mission and that it is supported by your division. Ultimate approval to develop a full proposal is held by the Resource Development Committee.
3. Proposal Development

3.1 Planning Your Project
Planning the grant project is probably the most important step in the entire process. If you don’t have a plan that is well thought out, then you cannot write a competitive proposal. Depending on the scope of your project, development of a competitive proposal may take anywhere from three to 12 months. To help you develop your plan, try answering these questions:

1. Who are the primary beneficiaries (target population)?
2. What are the outcome objectives of the project?
3. What activities will be used to accomplish the objectives?
4. What internal and external partners will be involved and what will their roles be?
5. How will you measure whether the project has been a success (evaluation)?
6. How will the project continue after the grant funding is gone? (Some grants do not require continuation, but many do.)
7. How much will it cost to launch and run your project?
   a. What staff will you need and what should they be paid (including full-time, part-time, reassigned time, overloads, etc.)?
   b. What existing space, laboratories and equipment will be needed?
   c. What new equipment, supplies and materials should the project budget provide?
   d. Does the funding agency require a cash or in-kind match from the College? If so, how much and what kind of match is required (cash or in-kind)? What MCC budget will provide any cash match required?

3.2 Writing the Proposal
At MCC, most proposals are developed by a writing team, which includes subject-matter experts, project partners and Resource Development Department (RDD) staff. The RDD staff will guide the team through the proposal writing process. In addition to providing assistance in completing the Pre-Application Approval for Grants and researching potential funding sources, the RDD staff will:

- Troubleshoot the Request for Proposal (RFP)
- Help identify potential internal/external partners
- Coordinate the grant-writing team and guide the project planning and writing process
- Serve as liaison with funding agency personnel
- Assist with the development of effective grant budgets
- Gather appropriate data to support the proposal
- Provide technical assistance with proposal formatting, including charts, tables and diagrams
- Proofread and edit the draft proposal
- Obtain needed signatures and institutional support documentation
- Package and mail, or electronically submit the final proposal
- Prepare the District Board of Trustees Agenda Item for Board of Trustees approval to accept funds, if awarded
The final proposal format will depend on the guidelines provided by the funding agency. For example, most federal agencies give very specific instructions and forms on all of the sections to be included in your proposal. A private foundation, however, may provide very little direction on the arrangement and inclusion of various components of the proposal other than a page limitation. However, there are some basic elements you will find in most application requirements:

3.3 Proposal Abstract
The proposal abstract is usually only one page and includes a brief synopsis of the entire project. This is usually what the funder reads first. It can make or break your project. The abstract provides the funder with a concise project overview, highlighting the “who, what, why, where and when.” Some writers prefer to write this section first to help them develop the concept while others prefer to write it last when they are thoroughly familiar with the project.

3.4 Introduction
The introduction establishes the mission, expertise and credibility of your institution, highlighting its resources and capabilities. It includes a brief history and outlines the experience of the organization or department. This shows the funder that your organization has the required experience and resources available to complete the project.

3.5 Need or Problem Statement
What will an investment in your project solve? Is the same challenge experienced at other institutions? Why is the project necessary? Is it of consequence? Will it have any impact beyond MCC? The need or problem statement discusses the conditions that justify the existence of your project. Adding verifiable statistics to this section shows that you have done your homework and can prove that your project is really necessary. This portion can also include some background about the problem and include what you or others have done to address it. Be very specific and cite your sources. Avoid discussing problems that your proposal does not address. It is important to state the problem clearly, without hyperbole.

3.6 Goals and Objectives
What are you planning to accomplish? Are you initiating bottom-line, measurable change? Who will this project benefit? How does your project logically address the problem that you described in your need statement? How do you know this strategy is better than others? Goals are the general results of the project and objectives are the measurable outcomes your project aims to achieve. Remember that every objective must be SMART: specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound.

3.7 Project Design: Strategy and Specific Activities
What will you accomplish with your project and how? If the funding competition requires innovation, you must show how your project is unique, innovative and different from others that may be in existence. Include a timeline of specific activities and tasks if you have the space to do so. If not, at least tell the funder how long it will take you to accomplish what you plan to do. This is the HOW of your project--how you plan to accomplish what you set out to do and how long it will take.
3.8 Project Management
Most funders want to know the qualifications, roles and responsibilities of the project’s leadership. They may also ask for details on the location of the project within the College’s organizational chart. Well-described reporting lines, supervisory responsibilities, liaison activities and duties within the evaluation and continuous improvement structure will also lead to confidence in the project’s management structure.

3.9 Evaluation
This section describes how you plan to measure the success of the project. It should be directly linked to the project's objectives and the activities that will achieve those objectives. (This is why it is important to create measurable objectives.) Describe the evaluation method you will be using, how often it will be done and how the results will be utilized to strengthen the project. It is a good idea to measure the progress of the project before its end, thereby allowing time for revision and corrective measures. (This is often called a "Formative" evaluation, as opposed to a "Summative" evaluation that describes the final outcomes.) Determine how the evaluation information will be gathered and how the data will be analyzed. Be sure to gather data on things that have meaning—don't simply count heads or enumerate events. Also, describe how the results of the evaluation will be shared with others. For example, if you intend to share the results internally, with the funding agency and/or with a broader audience, describe your dissemination plan.

3.10 Sustainability: Importance and Institutional Commitment
This section briefly summarizes the need for the project, its relationship to the funding source and how the underlying need or problem is being addressed. You may want to mention future activities and support, or how MCC plans to continue the activities after the project's grant funding has ended.

3.11 Dissemination
How do you plan to share information about your project with other institutions? How do you propose to affect change on a larger basis, regionally, nationally or even internationally? Funders are usually looking for a model plan that can be replicated by others. You might include a plan for dissemination, such as hosting workshops, writing articles or designing a Web site to share the information.

3.12 Budget
How do you plan to pay for the activities that you are proposing? Will the funder be footing the entire bill or do you have other sources that will be contributing to the activities? Sometimes the funder may require a "match" from the College, meaning that the College will commit to support the project with its own resources, cash or "in-kind" services. If the "match" comes from another organization, a letter of commitment from them is usually required. Your budget should add up, be realistic, be adequate to cover the activities that you are planning to provide, and by all means, match the activities that you have listed in your narrative. A budget narrative simply explains the budget in more detail as it relates to the implementation of your program.
Special Note on Budget Issues: There are often special limitations on allowable expenditures laid out by requests for proposals. MCC also has very structured processes for establishing appropriate wage and salary ranges for existing positions, applying fringe benefits and establishing the wage or salary ranges on new positions that a project might fund. It is important to address budgetary and personnel issues from the beginning of the grant-development process and utilize the guidance of the RDD, finance department and human resources throughout the process. In the end, all three groups will need to approve the proposed budget for the project.

3.13 Appendices
Be sure that your attachments are relevant to your project and do not send any more supplemental information than the funder requests. These may include letters of support or commitment, existing information about your program, assurances from the College (legal documents that the funder will provide for you), and any other information that is relevant to your project. Usually, it's a good idea to include a table of contents with your proposal and list the appendices so the funder will know what you have included and where everything is.

3.14 Some General Tips for Writing Good Proposals:

- Help the reviewer find the information he or she needs by carefully organizing your proposal. For example, use the titles, headings and subheadings that are listed in the Request for Proposals (RFP) in the order that they are listed. Be consistent in the use of fonts and formatting. Whenever possible, use tables and graphics to summarize information.
- Ask a colleague who is familiar with your topic to read your proposal for content.
- Check for errors in logic, spelling and grammar.
- Compare your final proposal to the program guidelines. Did you include all of the requested information? Have you addressed the review and selection criteria?
- Pay close attention to the rules given in the program guidelines.
- Do not use acronyms without spelling them out in the first reference. Just because it is a commonly used term on your campus does not mean the reviewer will know it.
- And, most of all, remember that you are telling a story. The reviewer who is rating your proposal has read many others and may be quite bored by the time yours is read. Help the reviewer visualize the problem and then the solution you propose.

3.15 Human Subjects and the Institutional Review Board
If you are going to be using human subjects in your project (conducting a survey or gathering information about individuals involved in your project that may be published), then you should also check with the Resource Development Department to discuss requirements and conditions for project review by the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

3.16 Final Internal Approval and Submission
Once you have completed your proposal, the RDD staff will help you with the final editing and the submission process. The proposal should be reviewed and approved by the appropriate dean and vice president before being submitted. Some submissions are done electronically and others require hard copies that are mailed. Make sure that you are available to work with the RDD staff
the week before a grant deadline. There are always last-minute changes or additions requiring consultations between the grant writers and the RDD.

3.17 If Your Project is Not Funded
Average funding rates for most grant projects range from 10 percent to 30 percent. Basically, grant proposals get rejected more often than not. However, be aware that funding rates for resubmitted proposals can be significantly higher—even as much as 50 percent. Consequently, if you have been rejected on your first submission, you may want to consider revising and resubmitting the proposal for the next deadline.

The first thing you should coordinate with the RDD staff is a request for the reviewers’ comments from the funding agency. Take a close look at them and evaluate what problems can be easily fixed and which may require more effort. Here are some typical problems:

- **Insufficient detail and lack of clarity** -- Do the reviewers understand your project plans and objectives? Maybe the writing is not clear.
- **Concerns about feasibility, resources and qualifications** -- Maybe the scope of your project is too ambitious, or perhaps adding a more experienced collaborator will enhance the project team.
- **Project is vague, uninteresting, or unimportant** -- These are serious concerns and you may want to consider either a major rewrite or possibly taking a new direction altogether.

3.18 To Improve Your Chances of Being Funded Next Time:
- **Conduct further preliminary studies and activities.**
- **Keep up with the current literature** -- What are the new developments in your areas of interest?
- **Talk to the sponsors about your ideas** and find out if there is a receptive audience for them. The National Science Foundation urges all potential applicants to: “Ask Early, Ask Often!”
- **Volunteer to be a proposal reviewer** -- Get first-hand experience with the process. (Be sure to notify the RDD staff if you would like to do this to avoid any conflict of interest issues.)
- **Explore other funding opportunities and experiences.** Consider applying for summer residencies or fellowships. Volunteer to serve as a consultant or subcontractor on a colleague’s project.
- **Explore other activities that can improve your future funding chances.**

3.19 If Your Project is Funded
If your project is funded, meet with the RDD staff and the finance manager, who is the finance office liaison for grant-funded projects. Become familiar with the Grants Management Manual on the RDD Web site [http://www.mccfl.edu/pages/1010.asp](http://www.mccfl.edu/pages/1010.asp). This guide provides basic information on the proper implementation of your grant project, including budgeting, human resources, documentation and many other areas.
4. Grants at MCC - Frequently Asked Questions

Q I don’t know if I would ever want to go for a grant, and yet I have a lot of ideas. What should I do?

A Keep that thought. Write it down. Discuss it with your department chair or supervisor. Call the Resource Development Department and set up an appointment to discuss your idea. Even if you don’t think you will do anything with the idea right away, don’t let go of it.

Take a look at what other colleges are doing in areas that interest you. Seeing the kind of funding that other colleges receive is also a good way to pinpoint funding sources that might work for your project.

If you find information or articles that pertain to your topic, start a file and archive the material. If you find abstracts or proposals about projects similar to yours at other colleges, collect that information so that you can access it easily or consult with the project director in the future. When it comes time to start writing the grant, those articles and data will be invaluable.

Also, if you let the RDD know about your idea, they can be on the lookout for funding sources that match your project idea.

Q I just found out about a grant that I would like to go for, but the deadline is next week. What do I do?

A First, some proposals need many months to be developed. There are several institutional procedures that must be followed so that the College is prepared to accept grant funding, if awarded.

If you have just missed the deadline for a grant, or if the due date is too close to complete a proposal in time, chances are that the competition will be open again next year. Go ahead and work on your project or proposal with your writing team and the Resource Development Department and submit your proposal in the next competitive round. Very often, the funding agencies do not give much notice from the time that the official Request for Proposal is issued and the due date (can be anywhere from six months to four weeks).

Q How can I learn more about grant-development?

A Check the Faculty Professional Development calendar for workshops in the grant development series. The four-part series includes everything from soup to nuts: generating a program concept paper, finding funding sources and developing each part of the proposal.

In addition, there are a number of Web sites that provide access to online proposal development courses (some require payment of a fee):
Basic Elements of Grant-Writing
http://www.cpb.org/grants/grantwriting.html

Effective Communication Skills for Writing Grants
http://www.indiana.edu/~gradgrnt/pubs/effective_comm.html

Funding Trends and Analysis (Foundation Center)
http://foundationcenter.org/

Proposal Writing Tips
http://www.jmu.edu/sponsprog/writingtips.html

Common Errors in Research Proposals
http://www.indiana.edu/~gradgrnt/pubs/errors.html