Continuing Education Module

Grant Writing for Childbirth Educators: Lessons Learned From the Resource Center for Young Parents-To-Be

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ABSTRACT

Obtaining funding to support community-based childbirth education programs can be a challenge for childbirth educators who may have little grant-writing experience. This article was written by two nurse educators/nurse-midwives who have been involved for over 10 years with a grant-funded parenting and childbirth education program for pregnant teens. It reviews the background of the Resource Center for Young Parents-To-Be, suggests grant-funding sources, and explains the building of partnerships in the community. The basic steps involved in the grant-writing process are presented as well as the importance of follow-up evaluations and reports. Grant-writing skills and the ability to forge partnerships with other community organizations can be important tools for childbirth educators and health-care professionals.

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Childbirth educators teach and work in a variety of settings, including hospital-based education departments; public-funded health departments; private physician-, midwife-, and doula-based practices; and independent childbirth education practices often held in the educators' own homes. In all these settings, educators have the opportunity to write and secure grant funding to assist in the purchasing of necessary education supplies and equipment to support their education programs. The grant-writing process can be daunting to childbirth educators and health-care professionals who

are not familiar with some of the basic fundamentals of developing and writing grants. However, few recent articles in either the childbirth education or allied health professional literature address this topic. Many community organizations and corporations have funds available to support community-based childbirth education programs. In this article, we briefly review the history of the Resource Center for Young Parents-To-Be—a successful, grant-funded, community-based childbirth and parenting education program that has been in operation for over 10 years (A. B. Broussard & B. S. Broussard,

TABLE 1

Topic Outline for Learning Stations at the Resource Center for Young Parents-To-Be

- Caring for yourself and your baby before birth
- Labor expectations
- Nurturing your newborn
- Handling, bathing, and diapering
- Safety for babies and young children
- Guiding children in positive ways
- Feeding babies from birth to 1 year old

2009)—and introduce the basic steps involved in the grant-writing process.

HISTORY OF THE RESOURCE CENTER FOR YOUNG PARENTS-TO-BE

In the fall of 1997, a \$5,000 grant from the Louisiana Children's Trust Fund was used to initiate parenting classes for low-income pregnant women at our local parish (county) health unit (Broussard, 2001; A. B. Broussard & B. S. Broussard, 2009). The goal of this project was to decrease the high rates of child abuse in the parish by providing education and support to pregnant women receiving their prenatal care at the health unit. The classes, initially taught in a traditional class format, were conducted by nursing students enrolled in a baccalaureate maternal-child nursing course under the supervision of their maternity nursing instructor, who was also a Lamaze Certified Childbirth Educator.

After three consecutive semesters, feedback from participants and nursing students as well as from instructor observations led to a transformation of the classes into a resource center format. The Resource Center for Young Parents-To-Be provided learning stations for each of the six different topic areas on parenting and for the topic of childbirth, addressing one topic area for each day that the center was scheduled to provide services (Table 1). An additional clinical site for the resource center, a school program for pregnant teens, was added a year

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later, and the public health unit site was phased out a year after that. The resource center has operated continuously since the spring of 2001, with a focus solely on pregnant teenagers. Within small groups, the pregnant teenagers are guided by nursing students who facilitate the teenagers' childbirth and parenting education at the learning stations of their choice.

Since the initiation of this teaching project, a total of \$36,798 in grant funding from various sources has been obtained to support the project. Funds were needed for films, fliers, games, charts, easels, models, and other teaching supplies as well as for a hand-held fetal Doppler, gestation wheels, baby-shower gifts, and storage and transportation supplies. Without this funding, the program would have been unable to sustain the richness and diversity of teaching materials, replenish necessary supplies, and provide the high quality instruction received by the program's participating pregnant teens.

STEPS IN THE GRANT-WRITING PROCESS

Writing a grant begins with identifying a need in the community and ends with the submission of a thoughtfully prepared and complete grant proposal (Table 2). Each step in the grant-writing process is examined in more detail in the following paragraphs.

Establishing the Need

Grants are often awarded to programs that target specific needs in the community. Childbirth educators interested in obtaining grant funds should identify a population in need of services in the community and develop a program to meet this need (Hodgson, 1989). The goals and objectives of the program should be documented prior to proceeding any further with the grant-writing process. For example, the Resource Center for Young Parents-To-Be identified the pregnant teen population

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TABLE 2

Steps in the Grant-Writing Process

- Establishing the need
- Identifying the funding source
- Identifying potential partnerships
- Developing the timeline
- Writing the proposal
- Establishing the budget
- Evaluating the outcomes

as a group in need of prenatal education services; the goal was to decrease the rates of child abuse and neglect in this population. The center's targeted group of pregnant teenagers often does not attend regularly scheduled prenatal education classes (DeVito, 2007), so the center developed a series of classes implemented in the teens' school setting to allow them to attend in a location and at a time convenient to them. Other potential groups in the childbirth educator's community could be recent immigrants or specific ethnic or religious minority groups who may have language and cultural barriers to obtaining childbirth education classes.

Identifying the Funding Source

The next step in writing a grant is to identify and target a funding source (Table 3). It is important to identify the funding source before writing the grant so that the grant can be tailored to fit the agency's priority funding areas and grant application outline. Several types of funding agencies have been outlined in the nursing literature and could also be utilized by childbirth educators. Possible funding sources in the United States include five types of agencies: (a) federal agencies; (b) state and local government agencies and departments; (c) private national and international foundations and agencies; (d) state or local private foundations; and (e) university or hospital funds (Hodgson, 1989; Richards, 1990). The Resource Center for Young Parents-to-Be receives the majority of its grant funding through the latter three types of funding sources. In the United States, federal agencies, such as the National Institutes of Health, and some state and local government agencies typically grant large amounts of research-based

funds and require extensive and detailed grant applications.

National store corporations in the United States, such as Walmart or Target, have foundations that sponsor community grants. Application forms are available at the corporations' stores or online at their foundation Web sites. Their grant applications are often only one or two pages in length and usually have a funding limit of approximately \$1,000 to \$5,000. These U.S. national store chains fund giving programs and community grants that support health and wellness (Walmart) and the prevention of family violence, including funding for parenting classes (Target). The childbirth educator should research other national or international corporations with main offices or branches in their community because these organizations often have funds available to support local programs. The Resource Center for Young Parents-To-Be has received funding in the past from the Gannett Foundation and the Stuller Family Foundation, both of which have offices in the community and have online grant application forms available.

The March of Dimes, a U.S. national nonprofit organization, has a long history of promoting health and wellness and preventing illness in newborns. Community grants are available through the March of Dimes local chapters. Each chapter outlines priority funding areas, community grant guidelines, eligibility, and deadlines. The March of Dimes local chapter community grants are not released to individuals; rather, chapter grants are awarded to not-for-profit organizations with a 501(c) tax-exempt classification, to for-profit organizations, or to government agencies. The Louisiana chapter sponsors two grants, annually, in the range of \$10,000 to \$25,000. Locate your specific chapter from the main March of Dimes Web site (Table 3); then, follow the chapter's grant link for information specific to your geographical area.

Many states have developed trust funds to help prevent child abuse and neglect. The Resource Center for Young Parents-To-Be began initially with a grant from the Louisiana Children's Trust Fund. Funding priorities for this organization continue to focus on prenatal and perinatal education for all parents as well as on parenting education for pregnant teens. The average amount of grant funding that the Louisiana Children's Trust Fund awards to applicants ranges from \$5,000 to \$15,000, and only public agencies or nonprofit organizations are eligible.

TABLE 3
Examples of Internet Resources for Grant Funding

Gannett Foundation
• http://www.gannettfoundation.org/applications.htm
Louisiana Children's Trust Fund
• http://lctf.org/grantappcenter.php
March of Dimes
• http://www.marchofdimes.com/chapter_view_all.asp
Stuller Family Foundation
• http://www.stullerfoundation.org/applications
Target Store Grants
• http://sites.target.com/site/en/company/page.jsp?contentId=WCMPO4-031872
Walmart Store and Sam's Club Giving Program
• http://walmartstores.com/CommunityGiving/8916.aspx

Another possible funding source is not-for-profit, hospital-based foundations in the community. Faith-based, not-for-profit hospitals often have foundations that have grant funding available for community programs. Grant application information is typically available on the hospital's Web site. Once again, funding priorities should be reviewed and eligibility determined before proceeding with the grant application.

Educational institutions also may have some grant funds available. If the childbirth instructor is associated with an educational institution, information on possible community-based grants could be obtained through the institution's research office or associated Web site link. A community-based childbirth educator could partner with a faculty member at a local educational institution and participate in a cooperative grant application and program implementation project.

Identifying Potential Partnerships

Childbirth educators could potentially work in partnership with other organizations in the community to assist in their proposed education programs. Collaborative arrangements with other community or educational organizations could broaden the sources of potential grant funds since many of these foundations may not release funding to private individuals. For example, a childbirth educator who would like to provide prenatal education classes to at-risk teens may want to establish a partnership with a faith-based church organization that has 501(c) not-for-profit status and teach classes in the church facility. Other resources for childbirth educators are local colleges and universities that employ faculty who are required to participate in community service activities as well as grant writing, research, and publication. This partnership could benefit all parties involved as it would once again expand the possibility of obtaining grant funding through the educational facility's institutional status (for-profit, nonprofit, or public agency), provide grant-writing assistance for the childbirth educator from experienced faculty, assist faculty to participate in grant-writing opportunities necessary for tenure and promotion, and, most important, provide a service to clients in the community. In addition to these benefits, establishing partnerships can increase the likelihood of obtaining a grant because most funding organizations look for cooperation between several service providers when awarding grants (Kemp, 1991).

Developing the Timeline

It is important for grant writers to develop a timeline during the grant-writing process to ensure that the grant will be submitted in a timely manner before the grant deadline. No grants will be accepted past the deadline stated by the grant-funding organization. It is especially important to have a clear timeline developed when working in partnership with another community agency. If the grant-writing application is being shared between agencies, specific deadlines and goals should be established early on in the grant-writing process in order to meet the final deadline for submission. Developing clear deadlines is especially necessary when in partnership with an educational institution because many of these organizations need to have external proposals signed by administrators before being forwarded to their research office for final approval. This process could take an additional week or more, depending on the institution. Consider having the grant reviewed for possible errors or omissions by a third party before final submission, and allow enough time for the review and revisions as well. Budgeting your time for a few hours each week can prevent having to rush through the proposal the final days before the agency's deadline (Dahlen, 2001).

A timeline may also be required in the grant proposal. Specific dates for purchasing supplies and for organizing and implementing the proposed program and program evaluation may be included in this timeline. Some funding organizations require the submission of periodic evaluation and financial reports during the program implementation process.

Writing the Proposal

After identifying a funding source and establishing a potential partnership, the next step is to write the grant application or proposal. It is important to follow the funding source's requirements and directions very specifically (Kemp, 1991). Grant reviewers often assign points to each area of the grant application. If any areas of the application are not completed thoroughly, points will be lost and the overall score for the grant application will be lower, thus making funding less likely. If attached documents are requested, make arrangements to obtain them early in the grant-writing process. Documentation of 501(c) status and a letter of cooperation between organizations are often requested by funding organizations. Successful grants focus on

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outcomes that will benefit people in the community, so the grant writers should remain focused on their program's beneficial outcomes throughout the grant proposal (Kemp, 1991). Some organizations specify the number of pages that will be accepted and specific material that can be included in the appendix (Frels, 1993). It is important to follow these directions and not to try to include too much information.

Some organizations sponsor grant-writing workshops to assist individuals in the grant-writing process. The Louisiana Children's Trust Fund offered a grant-writing workshop that was attended by one of the grant writers for the Resource Center for Young Parents-To-Be. In addition to the center obtaining helpful information specific to the grant-writing process for its grant application to the Louisiana Children's Trust Fund, additional points were given to the grants submitted by attendees of the workshop. Another helpful source of information and support during the writing of the grant proposal could be the grant administrator associated with the grant-funding organization. Contacting the grant administrator by phone or e-mail to assist with any questions that arise during the grant-writing experience can increase the chances of successfully obtaining grant funding.

Establishing the Budget

Most grant applications require a detailed line-item budget (Glick & King, 1994). Review the grant application for any possible items that the grant-funding organization may not fund. Some organizations will not cover personnel salaries, travel, computer, or electronic equipment expenses. Do not include any item in the budget that the organization will not fund, unless it is categorized under costs covered by the organization implementing the program. A table with categories such as personnel, equipment, and supplies can be created with specific items listed in each of the categories and cost estimates. If equipment is requested, consider including maintenance and supplies, such as ink cartridges for a printer. Many grants have a timeline of 1 year. Determine the estimated number of clients to be served in the grant-

funding timeframe, and then estimate the number of teaching supplies and equipment needed to serve this population during the specified time period. Web sites and childbirth education catalogs should be consulted for current costs of childbirth educational materials and supplies needed. When itemizing specific educational items to be purchased, it is important to obtain and include a quote for the shipping costs, which can be an unforeseen expense. Finally, double check that the calculations add up correctly and are within the funding range granted by the funding source. After obtaining grant funding, it is important to keep detailed records and receipts listing how grant funds were actually spent.

Evaluating the Outcomes

The grant proposal should include a method of evaluation that reflects the outcomes of the stated objectives of the program being implemented. This information can then be shared with the grant-funding organization when submitting reports and possibly be utilized for the development of further programs or the revision of the existing program. Information shared by clients must be anonymous, and any pictures taken during program implementation should not include faces of participants or other identifying information unless written consent has been obtained. The Resource Center for Young Parents-To-Be utilizes a one-page evaluation form that the teens complete after each teaching session. The teens completed five open-ended completion statements to indicate what they liked best about the lesson, what they liked least, how the center could be improved, what they learned that was new to them, and what they will do differently after attending the class. The teens' information is used to revise the lesson plans to best meet the needs of this population group.

Agencies vary concerning the frequency of submitted reports. Some require quarterly or biannual evaluation and financial reports, while others may have no requirements. Even if the agency that granted the funding does not require a report, it is still a good practice to submit a progress or final report. The report assures the organization that the funds have been spent according to the proposed budget, the program has actually been implemented, and objectives and outcomes have been met. It also demonstrates professionalism and may open doors for future grant-funding opportunities.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CHILDBIRTH EDUCATORS AND HEALTH-CARE PROVIDERS

Childbirth educators and perinatal health-care providers can identify populations at risk for health problems or poor health outcomes and design outreach programs to meet the learning needs and other health needs of these groups. Examples of populations at risk and others who may not typically access existing health education programs and health services include teenagers, members of low socioeconomic groups (especially those who have difficulties with transportation), physically disadvantaged individuals (e.g., hearing and sight-impaired), members of minority groups, and recent immigrants who do not speak English. Improving the quality of life for these individuals via grant-funded health programs can be regarded as community service that may also enhance the professional credibility and visibility of childbirth educators in the community.

Childbirth educators can partner with others in the community, especially when applying for grants that are available only to not-for-profit or public agencies. Academic faculty in nursing and other disciplines may not only have experience with grant writing but also have particular skills or resources that are needed for the success of the health program; for example, facility in the language of the target population, insights into and understanding of special populations such as the hearing-impaired, expertise in provision of health care (e.g., nurse-midwives), and undergraduate and graduate students who need experience in teaching and working with these populations.

Other individuals with whom childbirth educators can partner include doulas, breastfeeding consultants, and perinatal health nurses who work in obstetricians' offices as well as in hospital and birth-center settings. Groups such as Junior League and other organizations that provide community service, childbirth advocacy organizations, faith-based church groups, and breastfeeding mothers' groups may also be open to partnerships of this kind.

Individuals seeking grant funds for education and other types of health programs should consider the needs of the target population in regard to access. Appropriate times and locations convenient for the target group will improve attendance at programs. Locations such as health-care units, physicians' offices, schools, shopping malls, churches, daycare agencies, fast-food restaurant party rooms,

public playgrounds, and clinics that provide free health care could be considered for the convenience of the potential participants. When potential participants have transportation problems, provision for transportation may need to be included in the grant application.

Including a member of the target group in planning and grant-writing processes is one strategy that can help to ensure success. This person could advise the grant writers and program designers about appropriate times, locations, and optimum teaching approaches and materials as well as strategies to attract participants. For example, would supplying lunch or having other types of rewards for participation increase attendance at education and other health programs? How might pregnant women on Medicaid, waiting for prenatal care appointments in a physician's office or clinic, respond to "learning stations" provided in the waiting room?

If the target population is from a culture different from that of the grant writers, it is particularly important to have knowledge of the culture in order to provide culturally appropriate and sensitive care (Doyle & Faucher, 2002). Grant writers must become familiar with the cultural groups within which they want to provide services, and identifying an *informant* (Spradley, 1979) from the group who can act as an advisor can be very helpful in learning the culture in order to design appropriate programs for the group.

CONCLUSION

Obtaining grant funding to support community-based health education and other programs can challenge and enhance the childbirth educator's professional practice. Pursuing collaborations with partners in the community to participate in the grant-writing process will forge new relationships with other like-minded individuals. Collaborative partnerships can also lead to valuable community services and outreach to at-risk populations who might otherwise not have access to the benefits of these programs. Becoming familiar with the steps of the grant-writing process, contacting local funding agencies, and reaching out to community partners for program collaboration and grant-writing assistance are important skills to develop.

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