Make Your Grant Application Stand Out! Strategies for Stronger Proposals

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Elements of a Good Grant

1. Fundable Organization
2. Clear Identification of the Problem
3. Program Design in Response to the Problem
4. Method of Evaluation to Understand Impact
5. Clear Budget

Be Fundable

- Governance
  - Active, engaged board
  - Clear roles and responsibilities
  - Appropriate policies and oversight
- People
  - Qualified staff
  - Clear job descriptions
  - Appropriate supervision
  - Capacity to manage the proposed work
- Finance
  - Reliable accounting system
  - Budgeting and forecasting
  - Internal controls
  - Financial reporting
- Operations
  - Documented policies and procedures
  - Data collection and reporting systems
  - Secure records
  - Consistent processes
- Compliance
  - Required registrations
  - Insurance
  - Contracts and agreements
  - Regulatory requirements

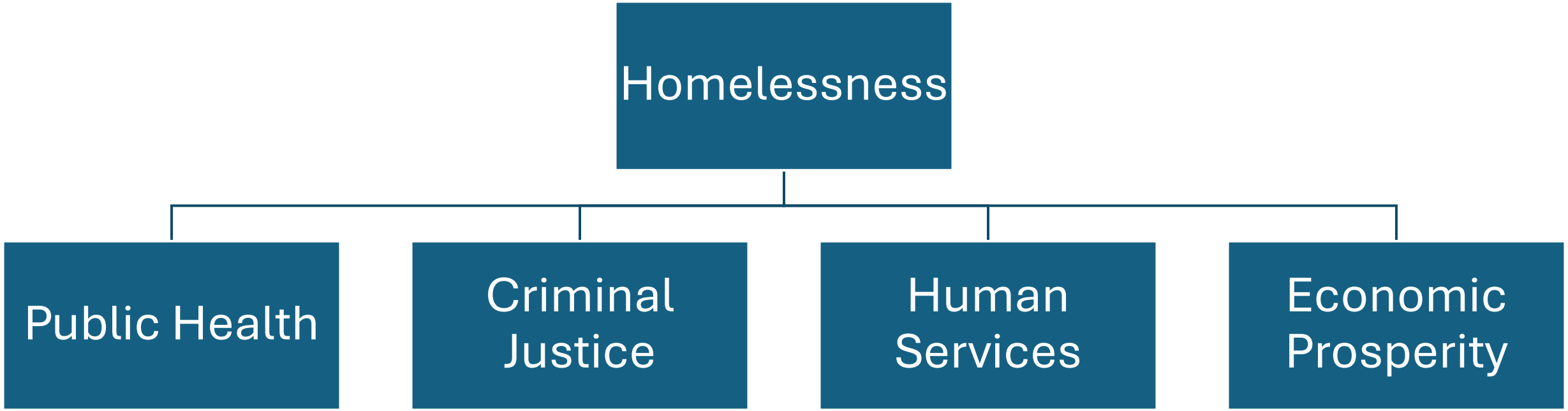
Defining The Problem

- Your program is not the problem, it's the solution, or intervention, to the problem.
- Consider the following questions:
  - What is the nature of the problem?
  - Who thinks this is a problem?
  - Who else is working on the problem?
  - What do the people experiencing the problem need?

- A positive framing of a program could be an "opportunity"

Why is that a problem?

- Framing of community issues matter!



Defining Needs

- Needs Assessment
  - Normative Need
  - Perceived Need
  - Expressed Need
  - Relative Need

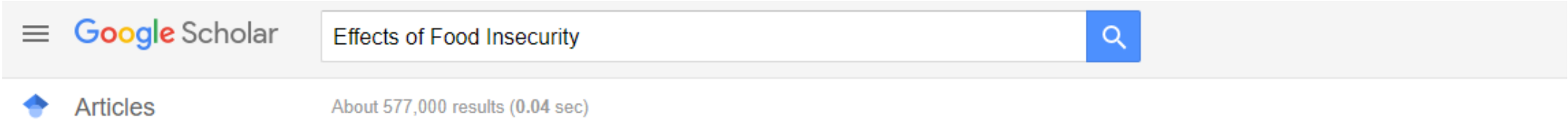
Normative Need

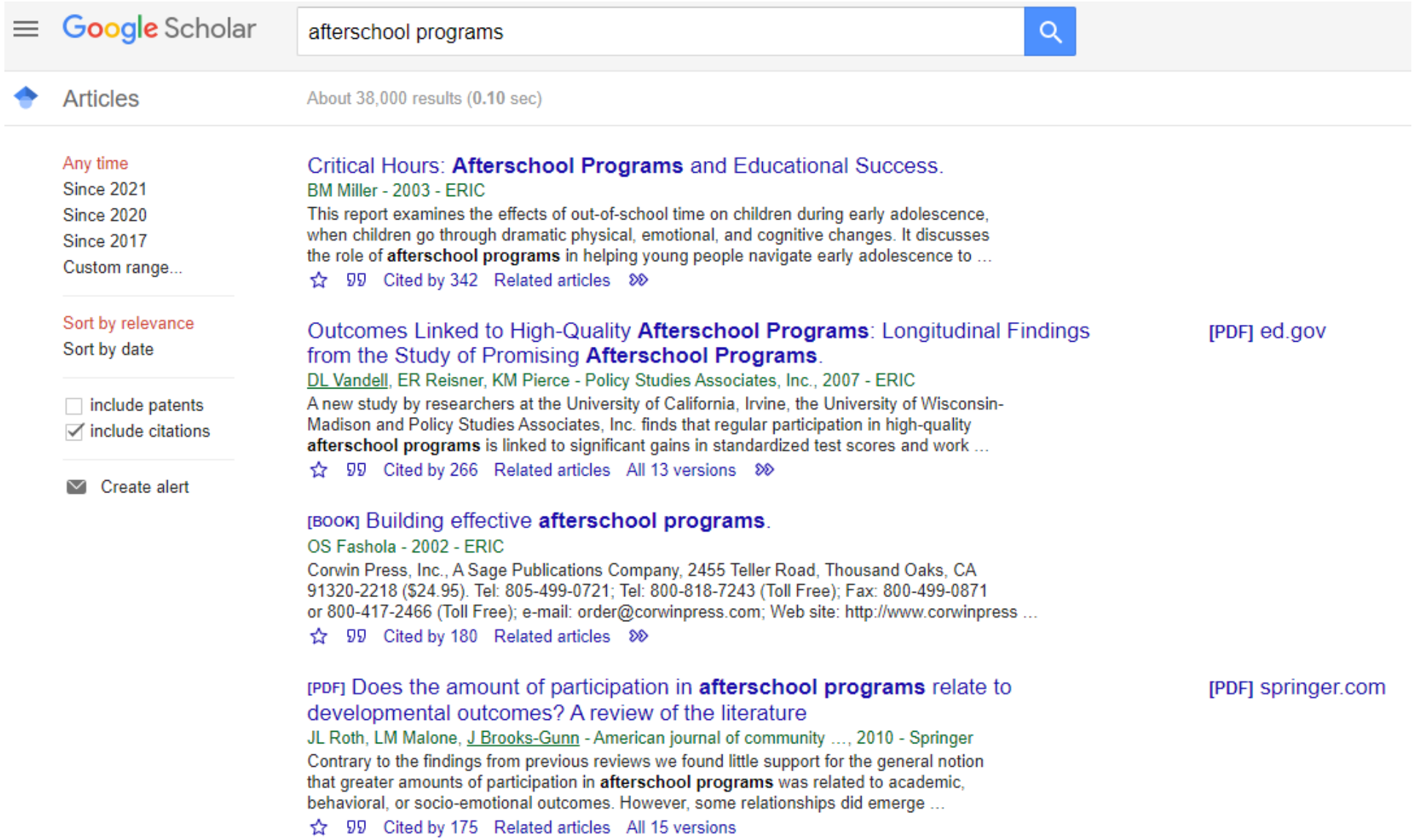
- Defined by experts in the field.
- When we add the concept of need based on the existence of some standard or criterion established by authority or general consensus.
- No new information is collected but rely on existing data

Finding Normative Need



ResearchGate


Google Scholar
Effects of Food Insecurity
Articles
About 577,000 results (0.04 sec)
Any time
Since 2021
Since 2020
Since 2017
Custom range...
Sort by relevance
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[HTML] Bounding the effects of food insecurity on children's health outcomes
[HTML] sciencedirect.com
C Gundersen, B Kreider - Journal of health economics, 2009 - Elsevier
Previous research has estimated that food insecure children are more likely to suffer from a wide array of negative health outcomes than food secure children, leading many to claim that alleviating food insecurity would lead to better health outcomes. Identifying the causal ...
Cited by 253 Related articles All 19 versions
The economics of food insecurity in the United States
[PDF] jstor.org
C Gundersen, B Kreider... - ... Perspectives and Policy, 2011 - Wiley Online Library
... important nutrition-related public health issues in the US In this article, we address three questions where economic insights and models have made important contributions: What are the determinants of food insecurity?; What are the causal effects of food insecurity on health ...
Cited by 457 Related articles All 20 versions
Food insecurity: a nutritional outcome or a predictor variable?
CC Campbell - The Journal of nutrition, 1991 - academic.oup.com
... the existence and extent of food insecurity but also to model the effects of its predisposing factors. POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES ... stood, it will be possible to determine whether there are direct effects of food insecurity on health that are not mediated by nutrient deficiencies ...
Cited by 671 Related articles All 9 versions
Food insecurity: special considerations for women
[HTML] oup.com
LC Ivers, KA Cullen - The American journal of clinical nutrition, 2011 - academic.oup.com
... There is a lack of evidence and understanding of the effects of food insecurity in resource-poor settings, including its effect on weight, nutritional outcomes, and pregnancy outcomes, as well as its effect on progression of diseases such as HIV infection ...
Cited by 338 Related articles All 9 versions


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afterschool programs
Articles
About 38,000 results (0.10 sec)
Any time
Since 2021
Since 2020
Since 2017
Custom range...
Sort by relevance
Sort by date
include patents
include citations
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Critical Hours: Afterschool Programs and Educational Success.
BM Miller - 2003 - ERIC
This report examines the effects of out-of-school time on children during early adolescence, when children go through dramatic physical, emotional, and cognitive changes. It discusses the role of afterschool programs in helping young people navigate early adolescence to ...
Cited by 342 Related articles
Outcomes Linked to High-Quality Afterschool Programs: Longitudinal Findings from the Study of Promising Afterschool Programs.
[PDF] ed.gov
DL Vandell, ER Reisner, KM Pierce - Policy Studies Associates, Inc., 2007 - ERIC
A new study by researchers at the University of California, Irvine, the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Policy Studies Associates, Inc. finds that regular participation in high-quality afterschool programs is linked to significant gains in standardized test scores and work ...
Cited by 266 Related articles All 13 versions
[BOOK] Building effective afterschool programs.
OS Fashola - 2002 - ERIC
Corwin Press, Inc., A Sage Publications Company, 2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks, CA 91320-2218 ($24.95). Tel: 805-499-0721; Tel: 800-818-7243 (Toll Free); Fax: 800-499-0871 or 800-417-2466 (Toll Free); e-mail: order@corwinpress.com; Web site: http://www.corwinpress ...
Cited by 180 Related articles
[PDF] Does the amount of participation in afterschool programs relate to developmental outcomes? A review of the literature
[PDF] springer.com
JL Roth, LM Malone, J Brooks-Gunn - American journal of community ..., 2010 - Springer
Contrary to the findings from previous reviews we found little support for the general notion that greater amounts of participation in afterschool programs was related to academic, behavioral, or socio-emotional outcomes. However, some relationships did emerge ...
Cited by 175 Related articles All 15 versions

If You Cannot Find a Report/Article/Dataset

- Search the title on Google to see if there is an archived copy
- Check to see if your local library has access, or request it via "Interlibrary Loan"
- E-mail the author of the report directly
  - Academics are lonely, so if you e-mail them directly, they are happy to share their work!

  - TIP: If you find a report that shares information on the state or regional level, e-mail the publishers of the research to see if they have local level data that they would be willing to share.

Perceived Need

- Seen by those experiencing the need – An individual's PERCEPTION of the problem.
- Defined in terms of what people think they needs are or feel their needs to be
- Consumers may express what in reality are symptoms of problems and not causes, and professionals may provide what they consider to be the clients “real” needs.
  - For example, an individual experiencing homelessness may say that the reason they are homeless is because they don’t have housing or a job—while true, they may have other challenges related to mental or physical health.

Collecting Perceived Need



Focus Group



Survey

Expressed Needs

- From those who seek out services – “Expressing an interest in getting services”
- This approach considered whether the individual actually attempts to obtain a service rather than whether or not some expert judges that the individual needs a service
- Call Centers / 2-1-1

Collecting Expressed Needs



“Line Out The Door”



Waiting List



2·1·1

Get Connected. Get Help.™

Relative Need

- Needs and resources in one geographic area compared with needs and resources in another geographic area
- Is measured as the gap between the level of services existing in one community and those existing in similar communities or geographic areas.

Collecting Relative Need

BLS
BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

United States Census 2020

TEA®
Texas Education Agency

Arlington

Enter a country, state, county or city

City in Tarrant County, Texas, United States of America, North America

Population: 394,266 (2020) *census.gov*

OVERVIEW



Rankings (in)	Tarrant County	Texas	United States of America
Largest Population	2 of 47	7 of 993	52 of 23821
Highest Median Income	30 of 45	317 of 963	6486 of 15167
Highest Median Age	40 of 45	699 of 963	12971 of 15167
Highest Unemployment Rate	5 of 16	63 of 123	1051 of 2674
Highest Crime Per Capita	5 of 37	103 of 656	1734 of 7430

Data from census.gov, fbi.gov, bls.gov

Need / Problem Statement

- The need you address must clearly related to your nonprofit's mission and purpose
- It should focus on the people you serve, rather than your organization's needs
- It should be well supported with evidence such as statistics, expert views, and trends
- It must directly connect to, and support, your organization's ability to respond to that need
- It must be easy to understand

What is the NEED or PROBLEM your nonprofit will address?

- Example:
  - Sunnyville has a growing problem of youth homelessness.
  - Many homeless youth have significant mental health problems, including depression, anxiety disorders, posttraumatic stress disorder, suicidal ideation, and substance abuse disorders.
  - WHY IS THAT A PROBLEM? (It generally takes asking this four times)

More Detailed Example

Normative

Sunnyville has an increasing number of youth that are experiencing homelessness. According to the latest Point in Time Count for homelessness in Sunshine County, TX a total of 405 children were experiencing homelessness in the county between April – June 2025.

Research on youth homelessness indicates that youth living on the streets have an increased likelihood to commit property crimes, sell and use drugs, and turn to prostitution in order for funds or a place to stay.

Expressed

Currently, the ABC Youth Shelter has a waiting list of approximately 60 youths at any given time, indicating an increased demand for services that has likely been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Perceived

In a recent focus group, our youth residents shared that the primary reason they became homeless was either due to an unsafe home environment (e.g., guardians addicted to drugs, abusive home, kicked out due to gender identity and/or sexual orientation)

Relative

The ABC Youth Shelter is the only homeless shelter licensed to house individuals under the age of 21.

Program Design Checklist

- Program will deliver intended results
- The logic behind the program makes sense as the services link to outcomes
- Program is research-supported and theoretically-sound
- There is congruence across program elements
- The program is appropriately timed and located
- The program is implemented in culturally competent ways
- Feedback loops for evaluation

A Good Logic Model

- Logically links activities and effects
- Identifies measurable outcomes
- Is visually engaging (simple, parsimonious) yet contains the appropriate degree of detail for the purpose (not too simple or too confusing)
- Provokes thought, triggers questions
- Includes forces known to influence the desired outcomes (drawn from research)

Adapted from: Community Tool Box at www.ctb.ku.edu

Program Logic Model

INPUTS The Things You Need	ACTIVITIES The Things You Need	OUTPUTS Things You Can Count	OUTCOMES The Change That Occurs
YOUR BUDGET (SHOPPING LIST)	BASED ON RESEARCH	COMMITMENT TO COUNTING	COMMITMENT TO MEASURING

Program Logic Model

Example: Arts Program for Seniors

INPUTS The Things You Need	ACTIVITIES The Things You Need	OUTPUTS Things You Can Count	OUTCOMES The Change That Occurs
• Art Supplies • Art Instructors • Art Curriculum • Refreshments for Art Show	• Arts Workshops • Artist Talks • Collaborative Projects	• Number of Participants • Number of Paintings Produced • Number of Items Produced DOES IT REALLY COUNT?	• Participants feel less isolated • Participants report lower levels of stress / anxiety • Participants indicate they have gained new skills and/or coping mechanisms CAN WE REALLY CLAIM IT?

Our organization does (ACTIVITIES) to achieve (OUTCOME)

Our organization provides arts programming for seniors to reduce loneliness and isolation.

Our organization provides reading programs to young people to ensure readiness to learn in the classroom and beyond.

Our organization provides housing and supportive services to support individuals to achieve economic freedom.

Possible Data Sources

- Existing files or databases
- Intake and exit records
- Case notes
- Follow up calls and notes
- Surveys (validated if possible)
  - Of participants
  - Of staff
  - Of family members, teachers, mentors, etc.
- Tests or measurement Instruments (validated if possible)

Validated indicates something has been tested numerous times and is proven to measure a particular item(s)

Examples of Assessments

- Reading
  - Reading A-Z
- Seniors
  - Geriatric Depression Scale
  - Global Assessment of Functioning (GAF) Scale
- Mentoring
  - Mentor Evaluation Tool
  - Mentoring Competency Assessment (MCA)
- Youth Programming
  - Youth Programming Assessment Tool
- Mental Health
  - PHQ-9 (Patient Health Questionnaire-9)
  - GAD-7 (Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7)

Collecting Data

OUTCOMES	MEASURED BY	COLLECTED BY	STORED WHERE	ANALYZED BY
What CHANGE will occur?	What will you measure to know if the change occurred?	How will you gather it? (e.g., Survey, Interview, Focus Group)	Where will you keep your data (e.g., Paper Files, Online, Server)	Who will analyze and interpret the data?
[Take directly from your logic model]				

Collecting Data

OUTCOMES	MEASURED BY	COLLECTED BY	STORED WHERE	ANALYZED BY
What CHANGE will occur?	What will you measure to know if the change occurred?	How will you gather it? (e.g., Survey, Interview, Focus Group)	Where will you keep your data (e.g., Paper Files, Online, Server)	Who will analyze and interpret the data?
Participants feel less isolated	UCLA Loneliness Scale – 3 Questions	Survey (Beginning, Midpoint, End of Program)	Paper files –> Entered into program database	Program Director
Participants report lower levels of stress / anxiety	GAD-7 (Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7) – 7 Questions	Survey (Beginning, Midpoint, End of Program)	Paper files –> Entered into program database	Program Director
Participants indicate they have gained new skills and/or coping mechanisms	Participant Survey	Survey (End of Program)	Paper files –> Entered into program database	Program Director

Consider your audience and how to get the best data possible.
Adoption of technology may vary based on location and age group.

Writing it Out

- Outcome - Participants feel less isolated
- Assessment Tool - UCLA Loneliness Scale

Our program does (ACTIVITIES) to achieve (OUTCOME) as measured by (TOOL)

We provide arts programing to seniors to reduce their levels of isolation as measured by the UCLA Loneliness Scale.

Budget Example: ABC Food Pantry

- Serves 100 families per week
- Located in a church basement
- One paid staff member (35 hours/week)
- Majority of the food is donated by congregation
- Needs three volunteers per day to run the pantry



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We Get That for FREE?

Farmer John is so generous to us!

The Church pays our electric bill

We have a volunteer that does that for us

We don't need to pay for that since we are a nonprofit

All of our items are given to us for free



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Example:
ABC Food Pantry

- Famer John sell the farm
- The church is getting less in donations

- $1,275/Week = $66,300/Year
- $2,763/Week = $143,676/Year

116.7% Increase in Costs

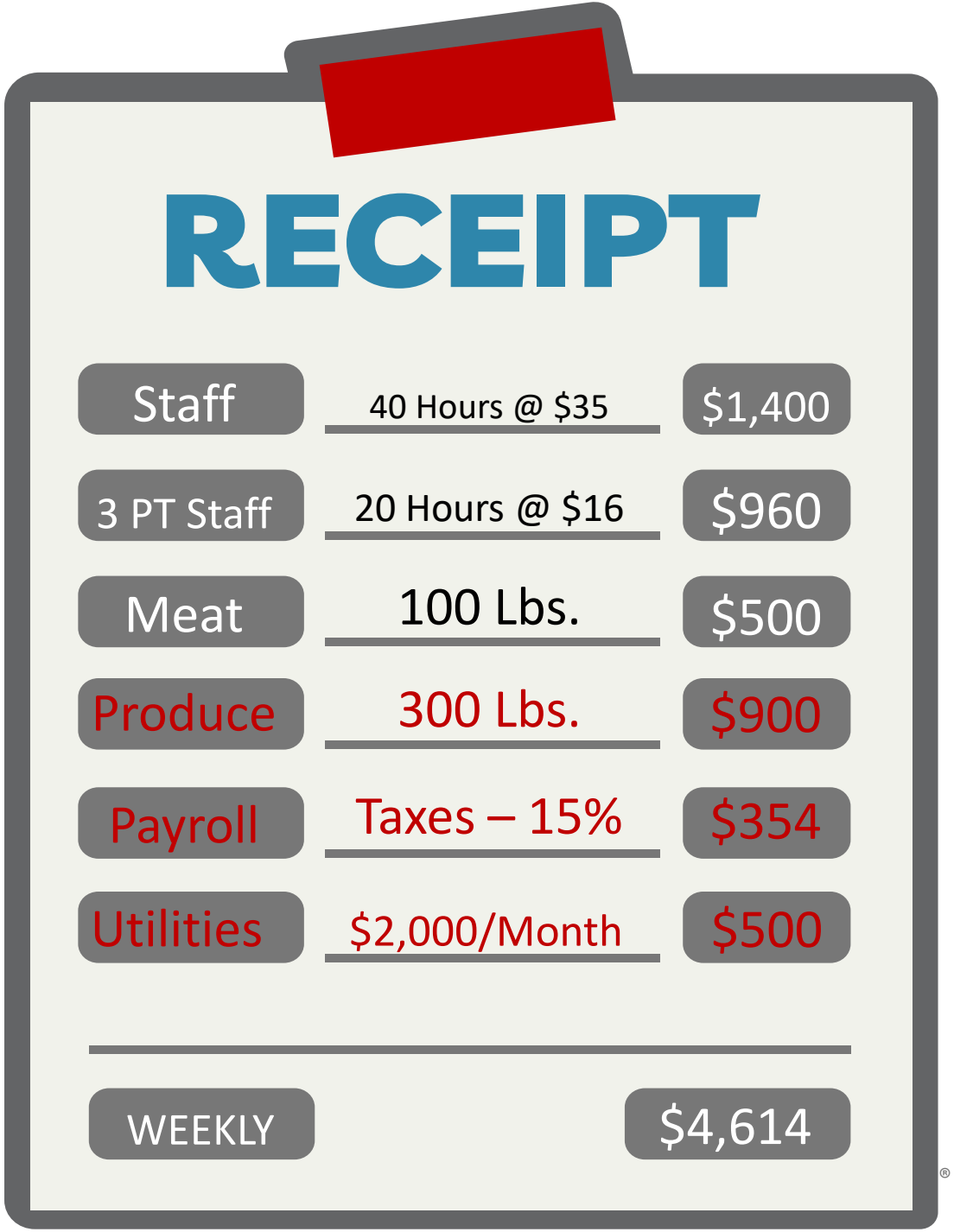


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Example:
ABC Food Pantry

- Executive Director retires
- Volunteers are a challenge to get – so part-time staff are hired to support operations

- $1,275/Week = $66,300/Year
- $2,763/Week = $143,676/Year
- $4,614/Week = $239,928/Year



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Social Value

- In the example, the costs to run the pantry increased 261.9%; however, what is the overall value of the service provided?

- Scenario 1 ($66,300/Year) = $12.75 per family per week
- Scenario 2 ($143,676/Year) = $27.63 per family per week
- Scenario 3 ($239,928/Year) = $46.14 per family per week

Average weekly cost of groceries for a family is $243.80.

Even with higher costs, the value generated is still $200/week per family, or $1,040,000 per year

Grant Budget Tips

- Donated goods can often be counted as “In-Kind Contributions”
- In-kind contributions can often be considered in matching funds
- Volunteer hours have a value
  - $36.14 in 2026 (Independent Sector & Do Good Institute)
- All expenses should be presented - even if some items are being donated or discounted.
- A grant this year is not automatically a grant next year.
- Creating a budget is not like creating a Christmas wishlist - there must be rationale and reasoning.

Questions?

Feel free to reach out!

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