GRANT PARTNER FIELD GUIDE

PETER & ELIZABETH **TOWER FOUNDATION**

THIS GUIDE

Congratulations on your grant award!

We are investing in your project because we believe you play an important role in helping to improve the lives of young people living with learning disabilities, intellectual disabilities, mental illness, or substance use disorders. We look forward to our partnership throughout the duration of your grant -- and beyond.

This piece is designed as a general guide to what you can expect during the life of your grant.

While we hope this will answer questions that you might have about working with us, and be something you can refer to if needed, it is not intended to replace actual interactions, actual conversations. So never hesitate to call or schedule a visit!

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1.0 GETTING STARTED

WHAT TO EXPECT

Shortly after we notify you that your grant has been approved for funding, we will go over some housekeeping and next steps in a grant launch phone call (or in-person meeting, when we can make it happen).

During this conversation, we will review/establish:

- Who, on the grant partner side, is the key contact for general grant communications going forward? Preferably the person closest to the day-to-day unfolding of the work.
- How the key contact will access our online grant management portal (it is called Fluxx), if this has not already been set up. Who is your signatory authority? In other words, who will execute our Terms of Grant. It is usually the Executive Director, Chief Executive Officer, or other top administrator.
- What the Terms of Grant is (it is our contract with you) and what we have to do to get it executed (we used a web-enabled tool for this). We cannot issue a grant payment until this is done. First, the Terms of Grant is emailed to your signatory authority. Then, the key contact will be copied with the executed agreement. In some instances, the key contact might have to help expedite this process. It is usually as simple as saying “Hey, boss, read your email.”
- Also on this call, we will hit some other highlights from this guide: communications, scope or budget changes, reporting requirements, site visits, promotion/publicity.

2.0 YOUR PROJECT

YOUR PROJECT'S NORTH STAR

When you first submitted your application, we asked for a very brief summary of your project and its ultimate goals. We found your project to be fundamentally aligned with the Tower Foundation's own goals. Our Trustees signed on to an investment in your vision and the objectives supported by your evaluation strategy. Think of these high-level objectives as your project's guiding principle, its North Star.

You have shared a work plan with us too. And while we endorsed the basic strategies and on-the-ground tactical work that make up that plan, some of them are probably going to change during the lifetime of your grant. These changes will affect the scope of your project. They may affect how grant dollars are allocated. We will work through these changes with you, because if something isn't working we prefer course correction to straying down a false path. But please involve the Program Officer when making these changes.

REPORTING

Interim and final reports are important tools for communicating progress, project success, and challenges (anticipated and surprising). While we require that financial reports be submitted electronically, we now provide the option to complete the narrative component of required reporting in the form of a live conversation (either in person or via phone conference) between members of your team and your Program Officer. You will receive several questions in advance to help prepare for the call/meeting – these are the same as you would answer in writing through the grant management portal. We will record the conversation, but for internal use only. Information from interim and final reporting may be shared with other Foundation staff and Trustees -- mainly as a way of updating them on our grant partners' work. If the idea of doing this live doesn't sit well with you, you can submit the report narrative in writing online.

For multi-year grants, interim reporting will take place each year. We do call the report at the end of the grant the "final" report, though it has the same format as the interim report. It is primarily intended to document the final year of the grant, but also affords the opportunity to reflect on the work as a whole. Interim financial reports are due one month after the end of the grant's first twelve months (at the 13-month mark, essentially). We do this primarily so you have a chance to close the financial book on the year and reflect a bit on the work. We will contact you shortly after we have received the financial report to schedule our conversation for the remainder of the report. Subsequent interim reporting will also be scheduled at the 13-month period. The exception is the final reporting conversation. We will schedule the final reporting two months from the grant end date to provide additional time to wrap up and take stock.

What will we be talking about in these conversations? A copy of the basic questions -- and the financial reporting form -- are available in the online portal. We are certainly interested in the measures that you identified as most important to the work. How are those tracking, and what story do they tell? The key questions that form the foundation of the conversation are the same ones upon which you built your evaluation plan: How much did we do? How well did we do it? Is anyone better off?

The financial reporting is primarily by spreadsheet, where we ask for three columns: budgeted expenditures, what was actually spent, and the difference (variance) between what was budgeted and what was spent. We also ask you to describe variances of line items that exceed 10% or $1,000, whichever dollar amount is greater. We do ask for back-up to the financial expenditures you report. And we are often asked what level of detail we need. We don’t need invoices that account for every dollar spent. Payroll summaries are fine, we don’t need time sheets. General ledger entries for things like equipment purchases, consulting services, refreshments, and supplies are also fine.

In many cases, there are some unspent funds. This is your opportunity to make the case for rolling funds over into the next year. Maybe there was a timing issue. What was expected to happen in year one won’t actually happen until the first quarter of year two. We are likely to approve a carryover of funds in such cases. Maybe there were simply some program “savings” -- a volume discount on supplies or a training event that was effectively delivered in three days instead of five. If you see an opportunity to reallocate these dollars in ways that benefit the project, describe (briefly!) the opportunity. It is also okay to “leave money on the table.” It doesn’t go to waste. It gets folded back into the funds available to support other worthy projects. [If a reallocation of funds makes sense during the course of the year, please contact your Program Officer to discuss at that time. Don’t let the report be the first time we learn about a budget modification!]

Finally, we will ask for a “new” budget for the coming year. It may be virtually unchanged from the original, or it may reflect your mid-course adjustments (including any funds you carry over into the next year), large and small.

What happens after you complete your report (oral or written) and submit the financials? Your Program Officer, as lead reviewer, carves out some time to summarize the conversation in an internal document (we call it a GMS, for “grant monitoring summary”). If this is an interim report and not a final, the summary includes a recommendation relating to continued funding support. Our internal report is then reviewed for final approval. The whole process can take a few weeks. After the report is approved, processing the grant payment may take another few weeks. Because this whole process can take a month or so, let us know if your project has cash flow issues. It is very rarely an issue, but we can move up the review timeline or issue a bridge funding payment to get a grant partner through the review process.

A final caveat: do not put off important communication about grant changes until a report is due. Scope and budget change requests should be submitted in writing (email is fine) in advance. We don’t want to read or hear about how a project has been taken in a wholly new direction ten months after the fact. We understand that the best laid plans may need to adapt to new challenges; we want to be part of the conversation.

3.0 COMMUNICATIONS

3.1 TOWER FOUNDATION PROGRAM OFFICER

For your grant, the assigned Program Officer is your go-to contact. The Program Officer will take point when you seek approval for program changes (scope or budget) and is the lead reviewer of your interim and final reports.

We are open to change requests that are responses to practical implementation realities, provided they don't undermine the original intent of your grant, dramatically overhaul the basic cost structure, or pursue widely divergent strategies. Program Officers will work with you to accommodate changing and evolving work plans as best we can.

Here are some things you can expect of your Program Officer.

- Responsiveness. We respond to calls and emails promptly, within a day or two, often sooner.
- Transparency about decision making. Program Officers exercise their own discretion answering many questions or responding to change requests. For some thornier issues, we may defer an answer until we can get our program staff together (including leadership) to deliberate as a team. We will let you know if this is happening. Our goal is to be consistent across Program Officers in the way we address program changes.
- We'd rather be responsive and flexible than formal and rigid. We will generally ask that you summarize a change request (with some justification) in an email. Expect our response by return email.
- We're usually happy to accommodate extensions to report due dates. We do appreciate knowing about significant delays in advance so we know when to carve out time for the review.

We welcome conversations about things other than the current grant in question, including:

- Other Tower Foundation funding opportunities
- Connections with other staff and Foundation leadership
- The funding/grantmaking landscape in Western NY and Eastern MA
- Contacts with other agencies, communities, government
- Opportunities for field-building and networking (conferences, convenings)

Here are a few things, your Program Officer is not.

A project manager. We are happy to be a sounding board, but this is your project or program.
A compliance officer. We don't follow up with checklists or surprise visits.

- A higher power. Consider your Program Officer a peer and partner.
- A robot. Program Officers, not programmed officers.

3.2 YOUR PROJECT TEAM

We do have a few expectations of you too.

- We do require a consistent and generally accessible key contact. This should be someone familiar with the grant on a day-to-day basis. If this contact changes, for whatever reason, please let us know in a timely manner.
- Err on the side of letting us know about a stalled project, the need to make work plan adjustments, reassess an evaluation strategy, or tweak a budget.
- Don't think in terms of good news/bad news. We really mean this. Stuff happens to programs. Embrace the learning opportunities that a project affords.
- Help us capture stories about your work. Let us know when there are opportunities to take pictures or video. We are always happy to accept photos that you can share with us. Occasionally we will provide funds to capture stories, whether photo-journalist style or on video.

3.3 PUBLICITY/PROMOTION

We encourage you to promote your work as you see fit. Just a few things we ask you to keep in mind.

- For grant-related publicity (e.g., press release, article), please submit copy to us for review before you go live. If it is time sensitive, let us know and we will fast-track review and approval.
- We don't require that you reference the Tower Foundation in public- facing documents and materials. But if you'd like to, we can provide high-quality versions of our logo.
- During the course of the grant, we ask that you consider sharing photos or other images with us that will help us to tell the story behind the important work that you do. Whenever we can, we like to promote this work on our website, in our annual reports, through social media, and other communications channels. Examples of images that we are looking for include engaged clients, staff members at work, and client artwork or other creative projects. Please confirm that the subjects of photos have given permission for use of their image.
- We do sometimes feature grant partner projects on our blog. We have also invited grant partners to guest blog about their work. Let us know if this interests you.

- We also post videos related to Tower Foundation grants on our website. If your project has generated video, or you would like to use video to communicate about it, get in touch. In some cases, we have supported the creation of grant partner video content.

3.4 SOCIAL MEDIA

The Tower Foundation is active on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Please follow us. We are generally happy to promote your grant-related events and accomplishments through social media.

@towerfdn @thetowerfoundation

The Peter and Elizabeth C. Tower Foundation

4.0 SITE VISITS & LEARNING

At roughly the six-month mark of a grant's first year and, for multi-year grants, annually thereafter, we will schedule a site visit. Your Program Officer will conduct this in person whenever possible. We fall back on phone or video conferences if the logistics of a visit don't work. We will give you several weeks' notice, and look for mutually convenient dates.

4.1 WHAT IS A SITE VISIT LIKE?

They vary quite a bit, depending of the complexity of your project. They can range from an hour or so to a half day or more. We certainly like to speak with as many stakeholders as we can – within your organization primarily, but invite others if they help to flesh out a sense of the work. We largely leave the agenda to you. We don't request that anything be put together in advance, just be prepared to offer a basic update. Some grant partners take advantage of the opportunity to get a head start on annual reports, using the report template to gather program information.

A few other thoughts about site visits:

- If it makes sense to schedule a site visit when there is something particular going on (e.g., open house, community workshop), let us know and we will consider scheduling accordingly. If there is something to sit in on/observe, we welcome it.
- We are not professional photographers or film directors, but if there is an opportunity to visually document the work you are doing, let us know. If the opportunity warrants, we'd consider bringing back-up to help with photography or video.
- When possible, we like to use the opportunity of a site visit to spend time with the young people that you work with.
- Sometimes there is not much to see, and that is okay.

4.2 WHY DO WE DO THEM?

- Site visits make the abstract real for us. Plans on paper are one thing.
- Site visits expose us to your and your colleagues' passion, the very real benefits for the people you serve, and actual environmental factors that affect your work.
  We get to meet and speak with other members of your team.
- They present a chance to give our relationship with you some depth. They reinforce the two-way communication that we hope for.

- Site visits help us capture stories and give us ideas for blog posts and grant partner highlights to share with Trustees.
- They help us uncover other ways we could be collaborating.

4.3 OTHER LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Reports

Site visits are valuable learning opportunities, but interim and final reporting probably represent the most significant means of sharing the learning about your project or program. What caused your plans to change? What unintended consequences (for good or ill) came to light? The reporting process asks you to measure actual progress against your evaluation plan. Are you doing as much as you expected? Are you doing as well as you expected? Are your clients actually better off as a result?

As you prepare your report, we invite you to share photos or other images that tell your story, whether day-to-day activities or special events. Photos of staff and clients are always welcome; please confirm that releases have been obtained. We are continuously looking for new material to feature on our website and social media. Images that relate to the grant specifically can be uploaded along with report material, just let us know if there are any limitations on use.

Lessons Learned Assessment

When a grant is closed, Program Officers complete an internal assessment that looks first at the overall success of a grant in achieving its primary objective. Was the objective fully met? Mostly met? Partially met? Not met at all? We also try to capture the drivers (whether they were built into your processes or represent external forces) that contributed to achievement of grant outcomes. Then we score for impact (significant, some, or none) on the population served, on your organizational capabilities, and on the field.

This is a confidential exercise. We do periodically blog about the cumulative results from several years of grantmaking, but do not identify individual grant partners.

5.0 OUR PARTNERSHIP

At the Tower Foundation, we consider grant recipients to be *partners*. More than that, our grant partners are doing the actual work to improve the lives of young people with learning disabilities, intellectual disabilities, mental health challenges, and substance use disorders. We are privileged to support you.

As partners, we value two-way communication and learning. Feedback and communication about how your grant is doing is part of the relationship. But grant partners should feel like they can give us feedback about how we are doing too. Do the Foundation's processes support or impede your efforts? How could we be better partners? What about partnerships is particularly important to you? Are we filling that role?

We've touched on some of these already, but here is what we feel we gain as partners:

- Learning from the grant alongside you
- Learning about the challenges you face as an organization
- Learning about the conditions and new forces that most affect your field
- Getting your input on how we can improve our processes and interactions with you
- Crafting an effective and accurate story from your work
- Connecting you to other grant partners or resources that can support what you do
- Translating the lessons learned from your grant's ups and downs into better grantmaking, better technical assistance for other grant partners Connect you to additional funding opportunities at the Tower Foundation
- Amplifying important messages about this grant or other work

Our partnership with you need not end when your grant does. Here are a couple of reasons for not breaking up:

- Consider us a sounding board for projects you are considering.
- We welcome guest bloggers on our website.
- Explore with us the community-building and networking potential of social media.
- Keep current on Tower Foundation funding opportunities.