Frequently Deducted Points From Grant Applications
Maximize your score! Use this checklist to avoid losing points commonly deducted by reviewers on PCCD and other grant applications.

Applying for a grant to fund an evidence-based program? Use this guide to gain a better understanding of what funders are looking for in a grant application. Section titles and requested content varies for each Request For Proposal (RFP). Following these strategies will help ensure a high score from grant reviewers. Remember, reviewers may have a limited knowledge of the proposed project—your proposal should be clear and easy to understand.

Executive Summary
Write this section last! It should be a CONCISE summary of the entire application. Provide a brief overview of the project that includes:

- Targets for the major deliverables. Many applicants fail to explain where programming will be delivered, the program format (i.e. number of programs or lessons), and the number of individuals to be served per year.
- The grant amount requested and the amount and source of any match funding.
- Your program goals and how they align with the RFP’s objectives. Tie your proposed project to the RFP’s identified goals.
- Summarize (briefly) the outcomes demonstrated in research.
- Local intended impacts that align with the program research and intended goals of the program (as designed by the developer.)

Applicant Overview
Your objective is to increase the reviewers’ confidence in your organization’s ability to deliver the requested program effectively and efficiently. Grant writers often do not help the reviewers to understand the purpose and goals of the applicant agency.

- Provide a brief explanation of the history of the organization. Also, state the mission of the applicant agency.
- Summarize past accomplishments and/or recognitions.
- Highlight your organizational strengths and capacity, such as fiscal, personnel, or governance structures.
- Explain your connection to collaborative planning for public health impact and local positive youth development (e.g. participation on a Communities That Care board).
- Explain the status of existing implementation. Highlight demand, support, and outcomes.
- Include past program successes and challenges that relate to the selected program and demonstrate an ability to learn and overcome barriers.
Statement of the Problem
Successful grant applications demonstrate applicant’s understanding of their community’s needs—demonstrating the existing needs in your community justifies program selection. Remember to keep in mind how the selected program aligns with local goals for long-term behavioral change.

☐ Data and facts should be used to validate the identified need.

☐ Avoid providing too much or too little data, using data that is unrelated to the selected program’s outcomes, or not selecting the most current data.

☐ Always use state and/or national comparison rates to give context for local rates. Just listing local rates (such as the percentage of youth that report substance use) does not allow the reviewer to assess how elevated the rates may be from the norm.

☐ If possible, include the locally prioritized risk and protective factors from the Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS). Include the score and demonstrate an understanding that 50 is the normative score; risk factors above 50 are elevated and protective factors below 50 are in need of enhancing.

☐ Provide an explanation of the risk and resource assessment process along with the completion date. Do not just attach a report or provide a web link.

☐ Key elements of the identification and prioritization of local risks and targeted behavioral changes include diverse representation and community collaboration. Indicate the larger community’s involvement in program selection.

☐ Do not assume that reviewers will receive or read the letters of support. Always include who submitted letters and what commitments they outlined in the narrative section.

☐ Explain funding gaps that necessitate the grant request.

Project Design and Implementation
Match your communities identified needs (risks) to the research on the selected program. Help the reviewer to understand why the program you selected has the potential to impact targeted behavioral outcomes in your community.

☐ Is the project new, continuation, or expansion? If a project is expanding, explain how (and the new geographic area if applicable) and justify the demand or need for expansion.

☐ Define the target population. Provide basic demographic and geographic details, such as race breakdown, poverty levels, or school districts to be served. State the number of individuals to be served and provide details about recruitment or referrals for participation in the program.

☐ Provide a timeline in list or chart format outlining your proposed project’s implementation and delivery with dates for training, hiring, and program delivery.

☐ Explain training, hiring, and coordination. Indicate who, when, and how.

☐ Ensure the requested letters of support outline the supporter’s commitment to the project.

☐ For projects being continued or expanded it is imperative that outcomes data is shared to
demonstrate to the reviewer the impact of previous funds and that continued funding is a prudent investment. Also include performance measure data if it was collected, and state the outcomes.

**Impacts and Outcomes**
Reviewers are assessing your knowledge of the program model and your understanding of the program’s demonstrated outcomes. You have to show proof that you contacted the program developer and have reviewed the program format, model adherence requirements, and research. The EPISCenter provides a variety of resources, such as logic models and implementation manuals that will help to increase your knowledge of evidence-based programs.

- Explain how the program leads to short-term changes in attitudes, skills, behaviors, and knowledge and long-term changes in behavioral outcomes. Explain the program research.
- Before writing, understand Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency’s data collection and fidelity assessment processes. Reference these expectations and demonstrate how you will fulfill them. Think who, how, where, and when!
- If asked to share baseline data, briefly highlight the community indicators or data that led to the selection of the program and explain the projected impact on the baseline data.

**Sustainability**
Funding is provided with the expectation that quality implementation will lead to local community investment in program continuation.

- Include existing support and cash or in-kind contributions.
- Highlight past success in fundraising or sustainability.
- Applicants often fail to effectively explain their strategy for generating future support. Explain marketing, relationship building, fundraising, and grant-writing plans.
- Letters of commitment should also explain a cash or in-kind commitment.

**Budget**
Justify all expenses!

- Many grant applications fail to explain expenses in detail. Include calculations for all costs and provide an explanation of the purpose of each requested item in the narrative.
- Explain the role on the project of all identified staff and clearly indicate their time commitment. Also, state whether they are currently staff or will be hired. Outline the qualifications of each person.
- Seek a list of program materials and costs from the developer (or the EPISCenter) and include all necessary implementation and training costs.
- Limit administrative costs.
- In the narrative, provide a summary of the items supported by matching funds and the amount for each.
- Provide an annual total and a cost per participant.
Additional Grant Writing Tips

• Start early! Start planning before funding announcements are released and allow ample
time for the writing process.

• The grant writing process should be approached as a team process. Involve all key
stakeholders in the planning and writing.

• Read the announcement carefully, highlight all response requests, and make a list of all the
information to be collected.

• Create a checklist of required attachments.

• Request letters of support early. Provide templates that support organizations can
customize.

• Follow all of the announcement requirements, such as spacing and page or character limits.

• Proofread! Even small spelling or grammatical errors can cause your reviewer to question
your commitment, attention to detail, or ability to manage the proposed project. Seek
feedback on your draft and revise until the content is clear, comprehensive, concise, and
grammatically correct.