PROJECT STRONG:
A CAPACITY-BUILDING INTERVENTION TO IMPROVE
GRANT WRITING AMONG SUBSTANCE ABUSE
ORGANIZATIONS

STUDY PURPOSE
Grant-writing is a critical skill for substance abuse agencies, particularly as these organizations are often working within the constraints of limited resources. Structured capacity-building models to promote grant-writing for staff and administrators do not currently exist. Project STRONG (Strengthening Treatment and Recovery Organizations through Networking and Grantsmanship) was developed to provide grant-writing technical assistance for substance abuse organizations. The hope was that this intensive technical assistance model would build grant-writing capacity within these agencies.
PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Twenty-seven individuals from nine substance abuse agencies participated in
Project STRONG. Project STRONG took place over a four-month period and
consisted of three Community of Practice (CoP) meetings and three on-site
technical assistance meetings offered by the College of Social Work at the
University of South Carolina.

Participating Project STRONG agencies had submitted an original grant proposal
that an external review panel deemed innovative but needed additional revision
in order to fund. Revised grants were required to pass the same standards as the
original request for proposals (RfP). Upon completion and approval of a revised
grant proposal through Project STRONG, agencies understood that they would
receive full grant funding for the proposed project. To participate in Project
STRONG, agencies agreed to:

1. Commit a Team to Work on the Project: Agency commitment included
   forming a three-person agency planning/implementation team, which
   included an administrator, a front-line staff member, and another
   individual working with the proposed grant project.

2. Submit a Budget for Participation: Agencies involved in Project STRONG
   received $8,000 to support expenses such as travel and staff release time
   to attend meetings, as well as to hire consultants to assist with preparing
   a grant application.

3. Attend CoP Meetings: At each CoP meeting, information was provided on
   best practices for different sections of a grant proposal. The focus of the
   three meetings, respectively, were:

   a. Defining the problem: Using a needs assessment and agency data to
      write a successful problem statement (Meeting 1);

   b. Refining goals and implementation design: Defining and giving
      examples of goals, objectives, and deliverables in a grant proposal
      (Meeting 2);

   c. Evaluation, budgeting, and sustainability: Developing successful ways
      to evaluate a project, budget, and build in sustainability (Meeting 3).
In addition, agency planning/implementation teams practiced grant-writing skills with worksheets and collaborated within their teams and with staff at other service agencies.

4. Utilize Technical Assistance: Fifteen hours of targeted technical assistance was provided to each agency depending on the strengths and weaknesses of their grant proposal. A designated technical assistance provider traveled to each participating agency to review the progress on grant revisions. These meetings provided agencies with an opportunity to receive individualized feedback on their grant and ask questions. Agencies made an additional 38 requests for technical assistance through phone and e-mail. Examples of project-specific support included identifying research literature or resources and assisting with survey development.

**TIMING AND SEQUENCE OF COP MEETINGS AND ON-SITE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE**

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<th>CoP Meeting 1</th>
<th>CoP Meeting 2</th>
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<tr>
<td>Defining the problem</td>
<td>Goals and implementation design</td>
<td>Evaluation, budget, and sustainability</td>
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On-site TA
MEASURES & RESULTS

The success of Project STRONG and the technical assistance provided was assessed by:

1. A pre/post survey (paper and pencil) of general agency capacity and overall satisfaction with Project STRONG.

2. Process notes. These were analyzed from each on-site TA meeting, and qualitative feedback was collected during the final CoP meeting. These qualitative data were used to evaluate the program's acceptability and perceived effectiveness.

Agencies liked the opportunity to collaborate with other similar social service agencies during CoP meetings and noted the availability, support, and approachability of TA providers. By the end of Project STRONG, 8 out of 9 participating organizations submitted a revised grant application and received funding.

IMPLICATIONS

This capacity-building model shows potential to benefit substance abuse agencies by strengthening grant-writing skills of agency staff and administrators.

Agencies or organizations interested in replicating Project STRONG should consider the following recommendations based on the results of this project:

- Incorporate peer networking and incentives as part of the capacity-building process;
- Encourage organizations to seek multiple forms of technical support;
- Consider using a variety of media to convey information and provide TA (e.g., Webinars, practice briefs).
For the full article and additional references see Iachini, A., Clone, S., DeHart, D., Seay, K., & Browne, T. (in press) Project STRONG: A capacity-building intervention to improve grant writing among substance abuse organizations *Journal of Social Work Practice in the Addictions*.

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