

Your Value Advantage: Five Ways to Highlight it in Grant Proposals

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1. Core competencies: Demonstrate how all your programs and initiatives are focused on, and reinforce, your organization's core competencies. Describe your approach, methodologies, and theory of change, and explain how these competencies enable you to create the greatest possible social return on investment.

2. Catalytic and transforming: A successful organization will design services that act as catalytic agents, creating change among its participants while propelling a greater sea change in its community and beyond. Any one grant or program has natural limitations by virtue of size, scope, etc. However, if an organization's services shows their catalytic and transforming impact by mobilizing others to act, lead, partner, contribute, and create, then the value of these services grows exponentially. Plan and implement your efforts with catalytic goals in mind and prove your value advantage.

3. Social return on investment: In a proposal, you have an opportunity to frame your program in ways that depict not only the cause being served, but also how this fits within a broader context. While your services most directly benefit a target population, issue, and/or cause at a certain scale, think about and describe the larger impact of your efforts. For example, you may have a program designed to increase college enrollment and graduation among low-income Latinos in San Jose, California. In addition to describing the population served, its needs, demographic and socio-economic characteristics, you can discuss how and why a larger number of college-educated Latinos in San Jose, and beyond, will be important for the future of your community, county, state, and even for the nation as a whole. Find the data and critical issues and present your work in the manner suggested above. In doing so, you will help funders to better understand your efforts, as well as how and why you create value in society.

4. No duplication of services: Know what other organizations in your community are doing. Describe how your organization helps to strengthen your community while avoiding unnecessary duplication of services. Funders appreciate knowing where and how your organization fits within the broader family of service agencies in your area.

5. Inclusiveness: Participant input matters. Ensure and demonstrate the relevance of your organization and services by describing how these are informed by community/program participants' input. Create methods to gather this information regularly via surveys, questionnaires, advisory committees, and/or focus groups, and explain how community input is integral to your organization's success. This will show funders that your organization does not operate as an island; instead, it is built on a platform of inclusiveness that reflects your commitment to positive social change.

In summary, remember to highlight your Value Advantage. Let your prospective funders know that your organization creates value as a catalytic, transforming engine; by delivering services that do not duplicate efforts; by embracing inclusive practices; and by promoting change in your sphere of impact, while keeping in mind how that fits within the larger context.