

## Step 3

# Writing a Compelling Need Statement

**IN THIS STEP** you will learn the key elements of a need statement, including the four requirements for it to be successful. Then a worksheet and sample will guide you in preparing a statement of need for your organization's proposal.

## Purpose of the Need Statement

What is the need to be addressed? Your organization's need statement will—or at least it should—directly address this question. Therefore this is the best place to begin writing your proposal. A need statement sets the framework for the entire proposal, as it describes a critical condition, set of conditions, or a social need affecting certain people or things in a specific place at a specific time. The need statement is fundamental to your proposal because funders must agree with the organization that the project meets an important need. Bolstered by accurate data (quantitative statistics) combined with the right selection of stories that provide a more personal illustration of the need (qualitative data), a compelling need statement is often the component that motivates a funder to give serious consideration to a nonprofit's request. Make no mistake: a good, solid, and well-supported need statement is the key that unlocks the door, moving your proposal that much closer to funding consideration.

Finally, the need—and your organization's ability to successfully address it—gives grantmakers an opportunity to realize their own goals.

## Content of the Need Statement

Here are some basic rules to follow when developing the project's needs statement:

- The need you address in the statement should have a clear relationship to your organization's mission and purpose.

- The need statement should focus squarely on those the organization serves and their specific needs, rather than your organization's needs—unless you are specifically seeking a capacity-building grant.
- Any assertions about the need should be well supported with evidence (statistical facts, expert views, trends found in the experience of doing the work, and so on).
- You must be able to directly connect—and substantiate—the need you describe in the proposal with your organization's ability to successfully respond to that need (that ability will be described in a subsequent section of the proposal).
- The need statement must be easily digestible. You accomplish this by KISSing (Keeping It Sweet and Simple). Avoid using jargon, and do not make the reader have to work to understand what you are trying to say.

The need your organization is addressing may be specific to its geographical area or it may be found in many communities. Be careful not to overpromise: if the need occurs in an area larger than that served by your organization, it is important to focus only on what your organization can reasonably accomplish. That said, if this is your nonprofit's situation, consider positioning your organization's program as a potential model for other nonprofits in other locations. By taking the model approach, an organization broadens the pool of potential funders to include those concerned with the need in other geographical areas. You might also want to research to find out if other organizations in your service area have—or are developing—similar programs to address the same need. Should this be the case, consider exploring a collaborative program that would leverage and expand the reach of your plans and grant funds.

If your organization decides to take either the model or collaborative approach, make mention in the need statement that your organization is addressing the need on a larger level through the development of a program that can be a model for others or that it is leveraging its efforts with another organization so it can expand the reach and impact of its program. Then in the methods component (discussed in Step Five), you should discuss how the

### Definition

*Collaboration.* "A mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations to achieve common goals. The relationship includes a commitment to mutual relationships and goals, a jointly developed structure and shared responsibility, mutual authority and accountability for success, and sharing of resources and rewards."

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program information will be disseminated to other organizations or exactly how the collaborative process will work with the partnering organization(s).

Oftentimes arts organizations struggle with this section owing to a perception that the arts do not meet a compelling community need. However, if you represent an arts organization, be encouraged. Arts organizations do meet important needs. Without these nonprofits, certain cultures and traditions would be lost, lives would not be enriched, and young people would not learn new and different ways of expressing themselves. Additionally, with national media efforts such as VH-1's Save-the-Music ([http://www.vh1.com/partners/save\\_the\\_music](http://www.vh1.com/partners/save_the_music)) as examples, you will be able to find even more substantive statistics as well as qualitative data than you could before to support the statement that the arts have been proven to significantly enhance the learning process for both children and adults.

The same holds true for nonprofits seeking general support grants. You might struggle with the statement of need because your proposal addresses the general work of the organization. Focus on describing the needs the organization meets: mission and purpose. This, again, goes back to something touched on earlier in this workbook: when focusing on soliciting general operating support, always use your nonprofit's mission and purpose as your guide.

## **Tips for Writing the Need Statement**

As impossible as this sounds, try to contain your needs statement within no more than two to three pages—that is, be concise. (Most foundation guidelines limit proposals to ten to twelve pages in total; corporate guidelines typically limit proposals to even fewer pages.)

In stating the need use hard statistics from reputable sources, and steer clear of assumptions and undocumented assertions masquerading as legitimate facts.

- *Use statistics that are clear and that support your argument.* If you are talking about a specific community within a city, you might offer one or two data points about the city, then zero in on the data specific to that community.
- *Use comparative statistics and research where possible.* Look at the examples in the accompanying Reality Check box. As shown, using data from a community that did something very similar to what you want to do and citing the benefits that community derived can make a strong case for the nonprofit to do the same.
- *Quote authorities who have spoken on your topic.* Be sure to cite the person who made each statement and the source where you found it, and if

appropriate, provide backup information that substantiates that this person is indeed an authority on the subject matter.

- *Make sure all data collection is well documented.* Most likely you will have used the Internet for your research, which is appropriate. However, make sure that the websites you are referencing are reputable and your links are current; then you need to clearly cite your sources—including those found on the Internet.
- *Use touching stories of people as examples.* This is very effective, but only when balanced against hard data. As one funder interviewed for this workbook stated: “Foundations vary in what they seek in terms of the right mix of vignettes and numbers. That said I haven’t met a funder yet who doesn’t respond to that one great personal story in a well-supported needs statement that brings the entire proposal to life. Just don’t overdo it!”
- *Give a clear sense of the urgency of your request.* Funders need to understand why the funding is important now.

Take a look at the following Sample Need Statement from the Senior Latino Community Outreach Pilot Project. Then, using the proposal idea you identified and developed in Step One, answer the questions on Worksheet 3.1A, as this will assist you as you begin to define the need your organization is addressing. Worksheet 3.1B is an example of a completed questionnaire for the Senior Latino Community Outreach Pilot Project. After reviewing the Sample Need Statement and completing the worksheet questionnaire, write your own organization’s statement of need, based on the information you have developed. Next answer the Need Statement Review Questions listed at the end of this step to make sure you have written your statement well. Rewrite your need statement until you feel you have addressed all the review questions.

### Reality Check

Avoid the trap of circular reasoning, which commonly occurs in need statements. To use the Foundation Center’s definition and example, circular reasoning occurs when “you present the absence of your solution as the actual problem. Then your solution is offered as the way to solve the problem. For example, ‘The problem is that we have no pool in our community. Building a pool will solve the problem.’”

This statement does not communicate a problem: communities across the country thrive with no community pool. However, if you stated that a community pool in your neighborhood would specifically address certain challenges your community is facing, and if you followed that up by citing a community similar to yours where a community pool has had a positive impact in ways that are documented, you could potentially build a compelling argument.

### Sample Need Statement

According to the 2000 Census, Any County now has the second largest population of our state, with That County being first. Of the approximately 750,000 people in Any County, 114,000 are older adults—or 15.2% of the total population. The number of older adults in Any County increased 21.7% between 1995 and 2005, a greater increase than occurred at the state and national levels.

The Some City Senior Center plays a vital role in the lives of senior residents in the cities of Some City, Valley Vista, Grove Beach, and Hill Viejo. These four cities account for 39.8% of Any County's total senior population. Our four-city service area has a rapidly growing older adult population (people aged 60 and older), which has nearly doubled since 2000 and is expected to double again over the next two decades, as is stated in the Any County's Aging Task Force 2003 report ([www.anycounty.gov/agingtf/report/pdf](http://www.anycounty.gov/agingtf/report/pdf)). This same report also asserts that the large numbers of seniors living in Some City, Valley Vista, Grove Beach, and Hill Viejo are largely attributable to the lower rents in those areas compared to the rest of Any County.

Given the demographics of our center's service area, one might assume that a plethora of services would be available to seniors. And while there are some very good fee-for-service and for-profit services available for seniors, the lower rents mentioned in the previous paragraph indicate the socioeconomic reality of many of the seniors in the Some City Senior Center service area. Over 50% of the seniors living in one of the four service cities we serve reported income below the poverty levels according to a survey conducted by the Interagency Committee on Aging (ICG) in 2003. Latino seniors make up nearly 35% of that low-income group, and roughly 20% of these Latino seniors are thought to be monolingual Spanish speakers.

In a survey conducted by the Any County Long-Term Care Multilingual Senior Needs Assessment of 2005, only 3.9% of Spanish-speaking older adults surveyed in our four-city service area reported using senior centers regularly during the previous year, as opposed to 58% of Caucasian seniors. Almost 90% of Spanish-speaking older adults surveyed indicated that they depend primarily on their spouse or other family members for assistance. The survey also indicated that 72.8% of the surveyed individuals reported that they are not at all familiar with any services for older adults—whether with fees or without—which clearly indicates the extent to which this population of seniors is currently being overlooked for health and social services in Any County. The follow-up question in the survey asked about seniors' interest in both learning about and accessing services; nearly 55% indicated that they would be very interested in accessing health, social, and recreational services for seniors—as long as language was not a barrier and/or they felt welcomed.

The board and staff of the Some City Senior Center are fully committed to successfully reaching out to and serving the Latino seniors of Some City, Valley Vista, Grove Beach, and Hill Viejo in order to help them meet their need for health, social, and recreational services—as well as learning and growing in our own cultural competence as an organization dedicated to helping all seniors improve and maintain a healthy and independent lifestyle and maximize their quality of life. We are the largest senior center in Any County and have a 92% satisfaction rate with the seniors we currently serve through our on-site daily meal services, recreation and leisure programs, health screenings, disease management, physical activities, and social services (according to our most recent internal member survey, conducted in February 2007).

As an organization we are conscious of the changing demographics in the center's service area and want very much to respond—and respond appropriately—to them to successfully meet the community's needs. We believe that the need for this pilot project is clearly evident.

## WORKSHEET 3.1A: Statement of Need Questionnaire



Worksheet 3.1B contains sample answers to these questions. Please use it as an example as you complete this questionnaire.

<b>Who? Where? When?</b>	<b>What? Why?</b>	<b>Evidence of Problem</b>	<b>Impact If Problem Is Resolved?</b>
Who is in need (people, animals, land, and so forth)?	What is the need?	What evidence do you have to support your claim?	What will occur if the needs are met? What will be different—and how?
Where are they?	Why does this need exist?		How is the need linked to your organization?
When is the need evident?			

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### WORKSHEET 3.1B: Statement of Need Questionnaire Example

Who? Where? When?	What? Why?	Evidence of Problem	Impact If Problem Is Resolved?
<p>Who is in need (people, animals, land, and so forth)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Senior Latino adults—both bilingual and monolingual.</li> </ul> <p>Where are they?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within our service area of Some City, Valley Vista, Grove Beach, and Hill Viejo.</li> </ul>	<p>What is the need?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No senior services offered in Spanish, resulting in access issues.</li> <li>• Healthy and vibrant seniors without access to or knowledge of services that can significantly increase their quality of life.</li> </ul>	<p>What evidence do you have to support your claim?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Any County has a rapidly growing older adult population; the population in our four-city service area has more than doubled since 1990 and is expected to double again over the next two decades. In Any County, 37% of Spanish-speaking older adults reported income below the poverty level.</li> <li>• Our center serves older adults from four cities, three of which have the highest concentrations of low-income, minority, older adults in Any County. Those cities are Valley Vista, Grove Beach, and Hill Viejo. Of these three cities, Valley Vista has the largest Latino population. Its population is approximately 70% Latino, and in that Latino group over 50% are monolingual Spanish speaking.</li> </ul>	<p>What will occur if the needs are met? What will be different—and how?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A minimum of 75 Spanish-speaking seniors with Type II diabetes who complete our disease management classes will maintain stabilized blood sugar levels for three consecutive months.</li> <li>• The monolingual Spanish-speaking seniors who access the services of our center for the first time within the grant period will increase by 50%.</li> <li>• A minimum of 50 Latino seniors in our new healthy Mexican food cooking class will learn how to cook healthier versions of the meals they love and eat most often.</li> <li>• Our referrals of Latino seniors from the community clinics and partnering nonprofit organizations specifically serving the Latino community will increase by 50% within the grant period.</li> </ul>

### WORKSHEET 3.1B: Statement of Need Questionnaire Example (Continued)

Who? Where? When?	What? Why?	Evidence of Problem	Impact If Problem Is Resolved?
<p>When is the need evident?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>When these individuals have no "medical home," when they can't manage their chronic illnesses, and/or when they are socially isolated.</i></li> </ul>	<p>Why does this need exist?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>No culturally competent organizations are serving this senior population. It has essentially been ignored.</i></li> <li>• <i>Many in this segment of our member audience are living at or below the federal poverty line and therefore cannot purchase such services elsewhere.</i></li> </ul>		<p>How is the need linked to your organization?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Our center's mission is to help seniors improve and maintain a healthy and independent lifestyle and to maximize their quality of life.</i></li> </ul>



## Need Statement Review Questions

Once you have completed your need statement, answer the following six questions to see if what you've developed hits the mark:

1. Is your need statement focused on those you plan to serve (and not on your organization)?
2. Does your need statement directly connect to your organization's mission statement?
3. Given your organization's size and resources, can it meet the need in a meaningful way?
4. Is your need statement adequately supported by solid and reputable quantitative and qualitative data on the nature, size, and scope of the need to be addressed?
5. Have you practiced KISSing (Keeping It Sweet and Simple)?
6. Is your need statement persuasive without being wordy?

Your program's need is now established—you are on a roll. So keep it going by diving right into the goals and objectives section of your proposal.