

Key Strategies for Developing a Winning Head Start Recompetition Grant

In truth, there is no magic formula for writing a successful Head Start recompetition proposal. However, based on the grant knowledge we have developed over 15 years of grant writing, our success in capturing 100% of the recompetition grants we assisted with in each of the prior Head Start Recompetition competitions, and information gained during grant recompetition reviewer training Heartland has developed a list of key actions you can take to increase your grant score.

1. **Write clearly and address each element of the grant scoring criteria.** Grant reviewers are drawn from a diverse pool of professionals and content experts such as those working Head Start programs, consultants, and higher education faculty. It is vital that you are able to clearly articulate your strategies for meeting the Head Start Program Performance Standards and systems for managing your program in a manner that can reach varied the varied knowledge levels reviewers have of the Head Start program.
2. **Answer completely and create a detailed image for the reader.** Help the reader get to know your program. It is likely that despite your entry into recompetition you have established a strong history of success in many areas. Use examples and make sure each response you provide answers the following questions: *What are you going to do to meet the standard? How will it be done? Who is responsible? When will it happen? and How will it be monitored?*
3. **Use data to your advantage.** Make sure that you are able to justify your strategies and service design. This is best accomplished using data from your program and by pointing to research from the field. In addition, don't forget to include citations that show the evidence base for your curriculum, assessments, and other program models you are planning to practice. Since Head Start has prioritized the use of data, you need to make sure you convey its importance in your program operations.
4. **Cross-reference and avoid duplication, but answer all parts of each scoring criteria.** A grant writer must maintain a careful balance of information that is in full compliance with the page limit requirements identified in the grant application. Answer each part of every criterion in all sections of the grant narrative. *Make sure to leave room for 10-20 pages at the end of the 100 pg. Phase I section to allow for the inclusion of a complete program budget and budget narrative.* This means your narrative will typically be 80-90 pages. It is perfectly acceptable to cross-reference to other sections in your narrative if you have already addressed the criterion. For example, you may address recruitment of children with disabilities in a partnerships section and in the section on recruitment and enrollment.
5. **Create a complete appendix.** The grant appendix provides applicants another way of documenting their practices as well as success. Make a checklist for your appendix and review it with as much scrutiny as you would your grant narrative.