



FRI Frontline Resource
Institute

Frontline Momentum

The Grant Process: Grant Writing
and Technical Assistance

Issue 2: Fall 2023

A Letter from FRI's Acting Director

This is a historic moment for frontline groups in the environmental and climate justice movement.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)'s Environmental and Climate Justice Grant Program, created by the Inflation Reduction Act, will be awarding nearly three billion dollars in passthrough funding to community-based organizations over the next three years. This is an unprecedented opportunity for frontline groups to receive resources and support, which are imperative for combatting the ongoing climate crisis.

Yet, obtaining funding of any kind continues to be a significant challenge for frontline groups. Small staffs and even smaller budgets can make accessing federal funding a herculean task. To help alleviate the funding hardships and challenges frontline groups face, FRI is leveraging innovative technologies and partnerships to build frontline groups' capacity to access crucial federal funding. One of these organizations, Writing for Green, is featured in this newsletter. Two other notable organizations are Nakodo and Grantable. Nakodo uses artificial intelligence (AI) and big data to match organizations with grants they are most qualified to apply for. Grantable uses AI to help community-based organizations develop stronger grant applications. These tools, coupled with Writing for Green's grant writing expertise, promise to be game changers for frontline groups.

I invite you to learn more about these resources in FRI's Resource Hub and if you have a suggestion for a resource not listed in the hub, please share it with us. Providing resources and technical assistance to frontline groups is our way to help ensure a future where we all enjoy healthy, safe, and sustainable environments.

Dr. Margot Brown

Margot Brown



**Want to contribute to FRI's Resource Hub?
[Submit a resource here!](#)**

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

Deep South Center for Environmental Justice

The Deep South Center for Environmental Justice (DSCEJ) was founded by Dr. Beverly Wright in 1992. Located In New Orleans, Louisiana, DSCEJ builds the capacity of community-based organizations, and communities in general, to fight environmental pollution and injustice. Since its inception, DSCEJ has established itself as a leader in the environmental justice movement in the Gulf Coast region. Its research produced one of the first Geographic Information Systems (GIS) maps showing the correlation between toxic pollution and race in the Mississippi River Chemical Corridor (also known as Cancer Alley), and its work on the map helped inform the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (U.S. EPA) definition of an environmental justice community. DSCEJ has also become a powerful resource for communities, providing education, training, and opportunities to engage in research concerning environmental justice and health.

A COMMUNIVERSITY APPROACH TO FIGHTING ENVIRONMENTAL INJUSTICE

DSCEJ stands out among peer organizations for its approach to working with communities. The Communiversality Model was developed by Dr. Wright in response to the one-sided relationships she observed between universities and communities. Before, it was not uncommon for professors to come into a community to collect data and conduct research and then leave without giving anything back. With the Communiversality Model, community members have an equal voice in developing and implementing environmental justice projects alongside professors. Communities provide input on things such as what they want to investigate, how they want research to be carried out, and the kinds of solutions they want to see put in place.

A VITAL CAPACITY-BUILDING RESOURCE FOR FRONTLINE COMMUNITIES

The Communiversality Model requires that DSCEJ work closely with communities so community members can make decisions about which issues to prioritize and address first. Before any training or education takes place, DSCEJ conducts a community assessment to identify and better understand the issues a community faces. This background allows DSCEJ to provide capacity-building resources that give community members



Dr. Beverly Wright, Founder and Executive Director, DSCEJ

the tools and knowledge they need to address their issues of concern. Training plays a big role in DSCEJ's capacity-building efforts. The center offers workshops that train community members on a wide range of topics including how to monitor environmental hazards and research environmental data online; how to organize and advocate for meaningful environmental, climate, and economic policies; and how to write letters and connect with local, state, and federal agencies. SCEJ also offers technical and organizational assistance to communities to further build their environmental

science and environmental justice knowledge and sustain momentum. Services include collecting toxicological and epidemiological data, GIS community mapping, providing legal support, grant writing and fundraising, and facilitating collaborations with other communities and diverse organizations.

DSCEJ'S SELECTION AS A TCTAC OFFERS AN OPPORTUNITY TO FURTHER ITS MISSION

Earlier this year, DSCEJ was selected by the U.S. EPA to serve as one of 17 Environmental Justice Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Centers (EJ TCTACs). The goal of the TCTACs is to build the capacity of community-based organizations to apply for and manage federal grant funds as well as foster community engagement and participation around environmental and climate justice issues.

DSCEJ's TCTAC will serve 220 community-based organizations located in Regions 4 and 6. Recognizing that no two organizations will start from the same place, the TCTAC will provide services through six levels of capacity building and training to meet communities where they are. Services span everything from the basics of community organizing and identifying issues of concern to building partnerships and helping communities tell their story. Technical assistance will be available to help communities build knowledge of environmental, health, and climate issues and develop research skills to access, analyze, and present data. Of course, a major component of the TCTAC involves grant writing assistance, and services will be available to help organizations access opportunities and write, submit, and manage grants.

DSCEJ's role as a TCTAC also opens the door for the center to serve frontline communities outside of the Gulf Coast region, allowing more community-based organizations to benefit from the valuable services that DSCEJ provides. DSCEJ invites community-based organizations to visit its website to learn more about its work and connect with the center's staff.



[Click here](#) to learn more about DSCEJ!

IN FRI NEWS

Writing for Green Course Provides Valuable Grant Writing Guidance to Frontline Organizations

Grant writing can be a daunting task for small frontline organizations that don't have time and/or dedicated development staff to commit to the effort. This past spring, Writing for Green, a FRI partner, offered a grant writing course for FRI network organizations to help remove some of these obstacles and build their capacity to draft and submit competitive grant applications. The course was held over the course of five weeks, from mid-April to the end of May, and consisted of 35 hours of training. Participants not only learned the basics of writing a grant, but they also learned how to tell their

organization's unique story and how to use that story to make a pitch for funding. Leading the course was Writing for Green's co-founders, Aaron Rome and Courtenay Strickland, who bring over 20 years of combined experience as independent grant writers, having worked with organizations of all sizes and addressing a wide variety of topics. Writing for Green's focus is building grant writing capacity for frontline organizations that serve traditionally disadvantaged, marginalized, and underserved communities. Over their careers, Aaron and Courtenay came up with a formula for submitting

large grant applications that involves breaking down the grant into bite-sized, manageable pieces. They applied a similar approach during the course, using a federal grant proposal as an example since these tend to be the most challenging to complete. Participants stepped through each of the basic components of a federal grant proposal, from drafting a needs statement to describing methodologies to be used to crafting a budget. Small frontline organizations often rely on teams of people to draft and submit grants. So, another key component of the course involved learning how to lead and work within a team. Participants learned tools and techniques to facilitate an effective workflow process, how to gain buy-in from team members before pursuing grant proposals, and how to lead teams and work through a collaborative process.

The course was well received, and many people felt it was well worth the time. Participants hailed from a variety of organizations in different stages of growth and with varying development needs. This diversity provided a valuable opportunity for participants to learn from their peers. Participants often worked together to complete exercises and during this time they were able to share their unique experiences and learn from each other's strengths.

While the course may be over, the learning has not stopped. Organizations that participated in the course are now engaged in a coaching process with Writing for Green that will span 12 months. Each organization has been assigned a coach who will provide customized capacity-building support in terms of continued skills building and guidance in authoring proposals, including reviewing draft applications and identifying opportunities to pursue. In addition to ongoing coaching, Writing for Green is also creating a set of self-directed training courses that can be administered via video as well as a train-the-trainer module that will allow organizations to deploy the self-directed training to others.

Having both live and self-directed formats ensures the training is both available and accessible to more people. Writing for Green hopes to launch the self-directed training in Fall 2023.

Visit [Writing for Green's website](#) to learn more about their services and training opportunities.



Aaron Rome, Co-Founder, Writing for Green



Courtenay Strickland, Co-Founder, Writing for Green



[Click here to learn more about Writing for Green!](#)



GUEST AUTHOR

Five Best Practices for Preparing Competitive Grant Proposals

By Aaron Rome, Co-Founder of Writing for Green

Your organization's work is important – perhaps it's even changing lives as you create cleaner and healthier environments for the communities you serve. You see your work's impact daily. What is evident to you, however, may not be so clear to outside observers, including grantmakers and other donors. Two key questions to ask as you craft your grant proposals are, "How do I make the reader care?" and "How do I establish credibility?" Below are five actionable tips to help guide your process.

TELL A STORY

A story helps create context and allows the reader to visualize your work's impact on people. Capturing the attention of the reader ensures they feel interested and invested in the problem, solution, and/or the people you seek to help. Can you think of a story about a person or community that your organization's work has positively impacted, or a problem that has detrimentally affected your target demographic? Can you tell this story in a way that is universally relatable? In some instances, a story could be used to highlight a problem associated with a type of pollution. For example, maybe children in a community you worked with had to miss school due to asthma attacks linked to a local petrochemical plant. Presenting evidence – even anecdotal – that shows how real people are being affected can be powerful.

USE DATA TO YOUR ADVANTAGE (BUT DON'T OVERDO IT)

Stories can be an integral way to augment your proposal. You shouldn't, however, rely solely on anecdotal evidence to make your case. Interspersing key data in your proposal in ways that support your narrative is a best practice. Be sure to cite your sources and vet the quality of the data and sources. Unreliable data and sources (e.g., data that doesn't provide substantiation or that comes from old sources) should be avoided. Too much data can create a problem, especially if that data doesn't directly connect to the points you are trying to make (or even worse, if the data contradicts the written narrative). Data should also be put in context. Tell the reader why you are including certain data and how it relates to the project.

LEVERAGE THE EXPERIENCE OF YOUR ORGANIZATION AND KEY INDIVIDUALS ON YOUR TEAM

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CONNECT THE PROBLEM TO A LOGICAL AND ACHIEVABLE SOLUTION

Identifying the people you are seeking to help, and the life challenges they are facing, is of paramount importance. Your narrative's needs statement or problem statement is a good place to incorporate data and statistics. However, a grantmaker is unlikely to be spurred to action (in this case, the action being to approve your application for funding!) simply because you presented a bunch of credible data that illustrates the problem. You must go a step further by linking your solution directly and unambiguously to the problem. Problem A should be addressed by Solution A, not Solution B. Even if you brilliantly describe the problem using some data and stories and you have the reader onboard, you still must go on to demonstrate that your proposed solution (the program for which you are seeking funding) has a strong likelihood of addressing that problem. One way to be sure you have this covered is to include a logic model (also referred to as a "theory of change") as part of your proposal.

AVOID AMBIGUITY AND "CONNECT THE DOTS"

Think about your audience at every phase of the writing process and remember, they may have limited or potentially no knowledge about your organization's work or programs. What may be crystal clear to you will probably need to be explained – simply and succinctly – for the benefit of the reader. After every sentence, ask yourself, "Will the reader understand what I just wrote... will they know to whom or to what I am referring?" If the answer is "no" or "I'm not sure," then take the time to modify that sentence or paragraph to eliminate any potential ambiguities. One of the most common and easy-to-mitigate mistakes is not being clear regarding what or who the subject is. Overuse of pronouns like it or they may confuse the reader because they may not know whether you are referring to Person A, Person B, Object A, or Object B. Instead, whenever possible, use proper names when referring to your subjects. Similarly, when describing your programs or proposed project, avoid 'insider' language or references, and assume the reader knows nothing about the program's history, rationale, target demographic, etc.

Aaron Rome is a co-founder of Writing for Green, a FRI partner. Writing for Green provides training and coaching services aimed at increasing the grant writing capacity of frontline organizations.

THANK YOU FOR BEING A PART OF FRI'S NETWORK!



[Click here](#) to learn more about FRI and our work!



[Click here](#) to view our grant opportunity database!