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I have used the book in previous editions and will be using this one now as it remains one of the most comprehensive, hands-on, affordable, and clear books available on this topic. Its 11 thorough and accessible sections cover all of the most important and basic information about grant searching, planning, and drafting for corporate and foundation grants, from stating one’s mission, overall goals, and priorities all the way to putting paragraphs together to submit a full proposal – for both operating support and project (or program) proposals.

The author clearly has an awesome knowledge of corporate and foundation grant opportunities and organizations. O’Neal-McElrath presents the information very clearly and uses good definitions (and includes alternate terms in several cases). Each edition has been clear, and this one includes a companion website with the worksheets and the sites to visit for information, for grant searching, and for other important aspects of the grant seeking game. The website also includes sample budget forms in Excel that students or grant writers can access to begin working on more complicated budgets early on. This is a benefit to those professionals who have bought the book to use right away on a major and complicated budget and on a big grant narrative to include in the proposal.

All of the above having been said, it is important to add that the book is about corporate and foundation grants, covering the vocabulary, traditions, rules, and procedures for applying to those two kinds of organizations for funding. The book does not cover government grants and makes only brief references to them, such as the statement on page 3 that government grants are really only for very narrow project topics. Although this is not necessarily true, it is a tradition for people to believe this. One of the myths of
fundraising believed by those who do not work with government grants is that these funding opportunities are somehow magical or esoteric programs. There is a paragraph like this, perpetuating some of the misunderstandings of how both narrow and general government grants work.

Further evidence of this mindset about government grants is the use of the term “onerous grant proposals” and the idea that there is a huge amount of required “stewardship once this kind of funding is secured.” The professional who is teaching or leading learning groups and classes can explain more about government grants and redirect confused students on these points to help shake up these myths.

A second problem with the book is the coverage of grant budgets, and especially the way the grant budgets are presented. The examples of the budget grids are much too complicated, at least for basic grants and smaller grants, the type most students and new grant writers will be pursuing. The notions of cost-sharing, indirect costs, and other budget complications muddy the waters and also overwhelm the students. There are so very, very many basic grant budgets being used by first-time grant applicants that it would make more sense to use them instead of those provided in the book.

Later in the grant seeking schedule, larger and more complicated budget grids would seem to make sense. However, using such detailed and confusing ones at the beginning adds to the notion that “grant writing is too technical” for the average person to do. This is really not the case, and professionals in fields such as education and social work do just fine in the workshops and classes I teach. So do the undergraduate and graduate students I teach in various kinds of courses and in various fields and majors.

A third problem with the book comes up in “Step 3: Writing a Compelling Problem Statement.” Here, there is a small, and common, error: the author uses the term “qualitative data” to refer to data that is the result of qualitative research methods (p. 31). This is incorrect. It is a common shortcut to refer to data that is the result of qualitative research methods in this way, but qualitative data is technically “categorical data,” such as Asian-American, left-handed, 44 years old, or suburban voter. Steering
students away from using the term this way while reminding them that some people do this are honorable activities for the presenter.

In contrast, there is a whole page on qualitative and quantitative research methods that is concise and correct (p. 59). The error explained above is not repeated there.

I have great things to say about the book as a comprehensive start for students and new grant writers faced with learning the vocabulary, traditions, components, and processes involved in finding grant opportunities, gathering thorough documentation and evidence, organizing the information, and responding to those opportunities.

I will use the text again soon, and I will include my own materials about government grants to cover that area also. There still is no book that covers all three areas clearly and comprehensively: corporate, foundation, and government grants.