

Professional Learning Grant Application - EXAMPLE

(The answers below were provided by Lindsey James who received a “Professional Learning” grant in 2017. Personal and school information has been left out.)

Background Information:

Date: February 27, 2017

Project Title: CER PLC Superheroes

Name: Lindsey James

Proposal Description:

Questions:

1. What *Professional Learning* needs will be addressed by you and your team? 100 words

In the 2016-17 school year, our PLC has learned a great deal about effective writing instruction across the curriculum and have established some consistent best practices across our classrooms. In the 2017-18 school year, we hope to focus our professional learning on ways to embed claim-evidence writing in the curriculum of each discipline, to observe each other’s instructional practice, and to collaboratively evaluate student writing to develop common understanding of trends, growth, and areas of opportunity. We also plan to share our learning with colleagues, leading to school-wide professional learning and increased student outcomes

2. Describe your professional learning plan and how it directly relates to the current needs of your students. How does your plan contribute to the development of the participating teachers? Please provide at least two references, models, books or research citations (mla) related to your project. 500 words

In the spring of 2016, it was noted that freshmen students were struggling with claim-evidence writing, a skill that’s identified as a career and college readiness benchmark. To address this need, a group of teachers formed a PLC, which spent the 2016-17 school year investigating current writing practices across our school, identifying best practices, and implementing those practices in our classrooms. Our PLC is using the cycle of continuous improvement, outlined in the article “Learning Team Cycle of Continuous Development,” by Tracy Crow and Stephanie Hirsch, as a model for our collaborative work. In the 2017-18 school year, we plan to systematically collect student writing data, to embed writing-centered best practices into our classroom curricula, and to share resources and strategies with all ninth-grade teachers at our school.

We plan to administer common writing assessments to freshmen at three points during the school year. This portion of our work will be informed by *In Common*, a collection of annotated student writing that identifies characteristics of strong writing at each grade level. We will also use this resource as a model to develop our own annotated anchor set of student writing that can be shared with our colleagues in each discipline. Through collaborative

evaluation of student writing we'll be able to document the efficacy of our methods and come to a thorough understanding of what the range of student writing looks like. In addition we'll be able to identify areas of growth, isolate areas of opportunity that we'll systematically address.

After each common assessment, we'll research, select, and implement instructional strategies in our classrooms. Agreeing on common instructional strategies ensures better continuity for our students. When all teachers are asking students to cite evidence in a common format, the time required to teach the format is reduced and the time spent on practicing the skill of integrating that evidence is increased. Student uncertainty and stress will be reduced, leading to higher levels of confidence and engagement with writing.

As an ongoing part of our PLC, we plan to engage in peer observations. This practice allows us to see how our agreed-upon instructional strategies are used in other content areas, observe student engagement in writing, and see a wider range of effective instructional strategies.

Observing other teachers contributes to our development as professionals as we expand our pedagogical toolkits. It also benefits students as they begin to perceive their teachers as learners and as individuals who are committed to improving their practice for the benefit of student learning.

Crow, Tracy, and Hirsch, Stephanie. "Learning Team Cycle of Continuous Development" *Tools for Learning Schools, Fall 2015, Vol. 19, No. 1*. Learning Forward, n.d. Web. 21 Feb. 2017.

"In Common." *Achieve the Core*. Student Achievement Partners, <http://achievethecore.org/category/330/student-writing-samples>. Accessed 25 Feb. 2017.

3. Describe your school and the team of teachers who will participate in your project (years of teaching experience, etc.). 100 words

Walla Walla High School is a large comprehensive high school in rural southeastern Washington, serving approximately 1,800 students. Our school is racially and socioeconomically diverse, with 45% of our students receiving free or reduced lunch and 5% transitional bilingual.

The teachers in our PLC represent the core content areas and have a combined 40 years of teaching experience. We all teach 9th grade, and have representatives from the English, social studies, science, and health departments. While our team currently has six core members, we will be strategically adding members, including newly hired teachers, for the 2017-18 school year.

4. Describe how your plan differs from your teaching in the past, improves instruction and increases student learning. 250 words

To be college and career ready, students need to be able to write strong claims supported by evidence. This claim-evidence writing is an expectation in English, social studies, science, and health, but currently there's little consistency across contents. Students hear different vocabulary to refer to the same skills and teachers vary widely in how they teach those skills.

Students experience inconsistent instructional strategies and varied performance expectations. There's also no clear and agreed upon understanding regarding what grade-level writing looks like, which results in students getting mixed messages about expectations.

In the past, teachers tended to collaborate within their departments, but each department operated separately. By including representatives from multiple departments, teachers have the opportunity to learn together and share best practices across disciplines. They are allowed to collaborate in finding common areas of opportunity to address in strategic and comprehensive ways.

Through this process, teachers will be more confident and intentional in their instructional practices. Instruction will be more aligned to Washington State Learning Standards and it will be more consistent across all classrooms and disciplines. As class time that was previously devoted to teaching the "process of writing" is freed up, more of that time can be used to cover the content and critical thinking skills that students need.

5. Inquiry, Reflection, Documentation: What questions will guide your learning? In light of your questions how will you document teacher and student learning? 200 words

Our learning will be guided by three questions: What are characteristics of strong claim-evidence writing? What are the areas of strength and what are the areas of opportunity for our 9th grade students? And what instructional strategies are most effective for teaching claim-evidence writing across disciplines?

As we engage in our cycle of inquiry, we will document our learning informally through collaboration notes. These notes will serve as a narrative reminder of our journey and our progress over the course of the year.

After each common assessment, we will document trends and observations using graphic organizers to record strengths, areas of growth, and areas of opportunity for our high, middle, and low writers. These graphic organizers will allow us to document our own learning about our students' writing as well as how those trends shift over the course of the school year as a result of our interventions.

We will also compile quantitative data on student writing. Each common assessment will be evaluated based on a four-point rubric. We will collect those scores and track student growth over the course of the school year. This quantitative data will allow for statistical analysis of the efficacy of our instructional strategies.

6. Describe the products you'll use to disseminate your plan to other groups of teachers (e.g. reflective journals, set of lesson plans, social media, power point, etc.) 200 words

One of the products from our 2016-2017 work is a strategy using post-its for planning writing that has been adapted and used successfully in our ELA, science and social studies courses.

There are several other instructional strategies and writing rubrics that have led to student growth in writing this year. A portion of our requested release time will involve peer observations and recording lessons of teachers using these common instructional strategies for further dissemination. We have developed plans to share these strategies with our content teams, AVID site team and building leadership team, and we also plan to share over social

media in the 2017-2018 school year. In addition to sharing within our district, our group is submitting a proposal to share what we've learned about writing strategies and interdisciplinary work at the WSTA (Washington Science Teachers Association) meeting in October 2017.

As we collaboratively analyze student writing, another planned outcome is to develop an anchor set of ninth grade student work to assess levels of performance. These anchor sets will support teachers in understanding and assessing standards as well as being a tool to help students to self and peer assess their claim-evidence writing.

7. Describe your plan to implement the project, including timeline. 100 words

- August: Establish group norms and expectations, develop a baseline common assessment; set up data collection format and protocols.
- September: Administer the baseline common assessment, collaboratively analyze student writing.
- October-December: Identify and implement instructional strategies that address areas of opportunity in student writing. Conduct peer observations, refine and enhance the use of the instructional strategies.
- January: Administer the mid-year common assessment, collaboratively analyze student writing.
- February-April: Identify and implement additional instructional strategies, and use peer observations and collaboration to refine and enhance those strategies.
- May: Administer the end-of-year common assessment, collaboratively analyze student writing, finalize and share collected data.

Budget:

Please list how your funding will be used.

Item:	Cost:	How are expenses related to your project?
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1. Substitute expenses for release time (\$135/day, 3 days each for up to 10 teachers)	\$4,050	
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This release time will allow teachers to conduct peer observations, debrief, and plan further steps to refine common practices. This time will also allow the team to collaboratively evaluate student writing, create annotated anchor sets of student writing, and to collect quantitative and qualitative data that will inform next steps.

2. Green sheet time for 2.5 hours planning in August. (\$35/hour, 2.5 hours for up to 10 teachers)	\$875	
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This planning time in August will allow teachers to establish group norms and expectations, develop a baseline common assessment and set up data collection format and protocols.

3. Supplies to support instructional strategies (Post-it notes, colored pens, highlighters, etc.).	\$75	
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These supplies, distributed to teachers involved in the PLC, will provide teachers with the tools they need to implement the instructional strategies in their classrooms more consistently.