

# NATIONAL CONSUMER SUPPORTER TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER

## Guide to Proposal Writing

National Consumer Supporter Technical Assistance Center  
National Mental Health Association  
1021 Prince Street, Alexandria, VA 22314-2971  
Tel.: (800) 969-NMHA Fax: (703) 684-5968  
E-Mail: [ConsumerTA@NMHA.org](mailto:ConsumerTA@NMHA.org) Web: [www.ncstac.org](http://www.ncstac.org)

*The material contained in this volume may be used or reproduced without permission from the National Mental Health Association or the authors. Citation of the source is appreciated.*



Funded by the Center for Mental Health Services  
Community Support Program Branch

---

## **Acknowledgements**

The National Consumer Supporter Technical Assistance Center of the National Mental Health Association would like to thank Kathleen McKinney and Ellen Alderton for their work in preparing this manual.

---

## Table of Contents

I.	Determining the Specific Need for Funding .....	4
II.	Funding Sources .....	5
	A. Types of Funders .....	5
	B. Locating Funders.....	6
	C. Creating a Prospect List.....	8
	D. Approaching Funders .....	9
III.	Preparing the Proposal.....	10
	A. Proposal Types.....	10
	B. Components of a Proposal .....	11
	1. Executive Summary .....	11
	2. Introduction .....	12
	3. Statement of Need .....	12
	4. Objectives .....	14
	5. Methods .....	14
	6. Evaluation.....	14
	7. Future Funding .....	15
	8. Budget .....	15
IV.	Miscellaneous .....	17
	A. Outline of the Process.....	17
	B. Tips on Writing Style .....	17
	C. Hints on Submission.....	17
	D. Attachments .....	18
V.	Sample Grant Proposal .....	19
	Additional Resources .....	29

---

## I. Determining the Specific Need for Funding

Funding from a grant proposal can provide your organization with one time funding for such projects as developing a new product or service, conducting research or purchasing equipment. Because it is not usually an on-going source of support for general operating expenses or staff salaries, grantseeking should be only one part of your overall fundraising plan.

Writing the actual proposal is just one step in the grantseeking process, and it is not the most important step. Far more time should be spent developing the program or project and researching and cultivating appropriate funders than on the actual preparation of a proposal.

It is important that you have a good sense of how the project fits into the philosophy and mission of your agency. The need that the proposal is addressing must also be documented. These concepts must be well-articulated in the proposal. Funders want to know that a project reinforces the overall direction of an organization, and they may need to be convinced that the case for the project is compelling. You should collect background data on your organization and on the need to be addressed so that your arguments are well-documented.

### How to Start

- Commit your ideas to paper.
- Thoroughly describe your program.
- State the goals and objectives of your program.
- Construct a timeline.
- Estimate costs for staff, materials, and equipment.
- Plan for the evaluation of your program.
- Write job descriptions for your program staff.

---

## II. Funding Sources

### A. Types of Funders

- government agencies: federal, state, and local
- foundations: private and corporate
- public charities

#### *Federal Agencies*

Normally, a federal agency is considered either a general support agency or a mission-oriented agency. A general support agency is one which supports basic and applied research that contribute to the body of knowledge in a general subject field, such as the National Institutes of Health or the National Science Foundation. Mission-oriented agencies only fund work that directly furthers their specific missions. Examples of such agencies include the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services.

#### *State and Local Agencies*

State and local government agencies support research and training projects from both federal “pass-through” funds (which may or may not be intermingled with state/local monies) and from their own funds.

Pass-through funds are federal monies given to a state or local government to support specific area programs. These programs operate much like federal programs with specific guidelines, program deadlines, and formal review processes.

Projects funded solely from state or local funds are often handled less formally. Rather than developing programs, many agencies simply identify specific needs, then look for individuals to address those needs.

#### *Foundations*

Private foundations typically draw their funds from a single source, either an individual, a family, or a company. Private and corporate foundations fund projects in areas related to their established purpose in much the same way as federal agencies. Before you submit a proposal to a private foundation or a corporation you need to research the organization to determine what its funding interests are.

Most foundations require a preliminary proposal, usually a two- or three-page summary of what you plan to do. This is a basis for discussion and does not commit you to anything. However, preliminary proposals often do become the basis for negotiation for actual funding, so a realistic budget or funding amount should be included.

---

## *Public Charities*

The Foundation Center defines a grantmaking public charity as a nongovernmental, nonprofit organization that is supported substantially by contributions from individuals, foundations, churches, and/or government agencies, augmented in some cases with income generated by charitable activities. Public charities are the recipients of most foundation and corporate grants. But some public charities also raise money and make grants. Some examples of grantmaking public charities are:

- United Way
- Junior League

## **B. Locating Funders**

The internet has made funding research much easier. You may still prefer to use printed publications to conduct your search, but keep in mind that many of these publications are also available online. Other electronic resources are available on CD Rom.

### *Sources*

#### **Federal Register**

The Federal Register is a daily publication that frequently includes notices of government grant programs including some in education or mental health. To be successful in using the Federal Register, you must continually review the announced programs on a regular basis.

The document is published in partnership with the United States Government Printing Office (GPO). For questions or comments regarding the online service contact the GPO Access User Support Team:

Office of the Federal Register (NF)

National Archives and Records

Administration

700 Pennsylvania Ave. NW

Washington DC 20408-0001

E-mail: [gpoaccess@gpo.gov](mailto:gpoaccess@gpo.gov);

Tel: (202) 512-1530, Toll Free: (888) 293-6498, Fax: (202) 512-1262.

<http://www.gpo.gov>

#### **Foundation Center**

79 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10003

Tel: (212) 620-4230, Fax: (212) 691-1828

<http://www.foundationcenter.org/>

Whether you're searching for grant funds in print or electronic resources, the Foundation Center is one of your best options. For research online, the Foundation

---

Center provides thorough annotations that can be searched using the grantmaker search engine on their website at <http://fdncenter.org/index.html>

*The Foundation Directory*—one of the publications of the Foundation Center, has become a standard reference for information about nongovernmental grantmaking foundations and is available in print or online. For a subscription fee, you may search The Foundation Directory Online to generate targeted lists of funding prospects from among over 10,000 of the nation's largest foundations. A variety of search options, user-friendly features, and around-the-clock Web access will bring your research to a new level of speed and efficiency.

### **Office of Management and Budget**

OMB, working cooperatively with Federal agencies and non-Federal parties, establishes government-wide grants management policies and guidelines and published the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA). The catalog is a government-wide compendium of federal programs and activities which provides information on federal programs, types of activities that have been funded, eligibility requirements, types of assistance, restrictions on the use of assistance and contacts including the administering office at the regional local level. Contact:

Federal Domestic Assistance Catalog Staff (MVS)  
General Services Administration  
300 7th Street, S.W., Suite 101  
Washington, DC 20407.

Tel: (202) 708-5126.  
<http://www.gsa.gov/fdac/>

### **National Institute of Mental Health**

The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) is part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the principal biomedical and behavioral research agency of the United States Government. NIH is a component of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. For information about NIMH and its programs, email, write or phone:

NIMH Public Inquiries  
6001 Executive Boulevard, Rm. 8184, MSC 9663  
Bethesda, MD 20892-9663 U.S.A.

Tel: (301) 443-4513, Fax: (301) 443-4279  
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/>

---

## U.S Department of Education

400 Maryland Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20202-0498

Tel: 1-800-USA-LEARN  
<http://www.ed.gov/>

In order to carry out its mandate, the Department of Education administers over 200 programs that are grant-funded. The Guide to U.S. Department of Education Programs provides a concise description of each program, who may apply, and the name and telephone number of the correct office to contact.

## U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

200 Independence Ave. S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20201

Tel: (202) 619-0257  
<http://www.hhs.gov/>

The Department of Health and Human Services is the United States government's principal agency for protecting the health of all Americans and providing essential human services, especially for those who are least able to help themselves.

Providing more than 300 programs and covering a wide spectrum of activities, HHS is the largest grant-making agency in the federal government, providing some 60,000 grants per year. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) is a subdivision of the department.

## C. Creating a Prospect List

Use the print and electronic resources to compile a list of possible funders. Choose prospective funders by examining their descriptive profiles and recent giving histories. For your prospect list, consider those foundations:

- that have already supported projects similar to yours.
- that award the type of support you seek.
- and/or that are in your geographic area.

The three basic approaches to foundation funding research, whether you are using print or electronic resources:

**Subject** approach identifies foundations that have expressed an interest in funding programs in a specific subject field, such as mental health services or technology.

**Geographic** approach identifies foundations that fund programs in a particular city, state, or region. Although some give nationally and even internationally, most funders limit their giving to specific geographic areas.

---

**Type of support** approach identifies foundations that provide specified types of support, such as building funds, seed money, scholarships to individuals or general operating support.

## **D. Approaching Funders**

Whether you are seeking funds from a government agency or a foundation, it's helpful to develop relationships with potential funding sources. However, getting to know your funders is not always possible and should not prevent you from submitting your requests.

Unlike government agencies and other funders, foundations rarely use standardized application forms. Some prefer brief letters of inquiry about a possible match between your program and their interests before you submit a proposal. The objective of a letter of inquiry is to get the funder to invite you to submit a full proposal. A letter of inquiry is similar to the summary of the body of a proposal which will be discussed in the next section.

A few foundations supply detailed instructions on what a proposal to them should include, and they expect these instructions to be followed. Some groups of funders have adopted common grant application forms that grantseekers may use when submitting proposals to them. Find out what style of approach your funder prefers.

---

### III. Preparing the Proposal

*The proposal should answer the following questions:*

**What** is the product or service to be developed? Identify the work.

**Why** is the product or service needed? Justify the work.

**How** will you develop it? Identify and justify methods.

**Who** will develop it? Identify and justify personnel.

**When** will it be developed and delivered? Identify and justify phases of work.

**Where** will it take place? Identify and justify available and necessary resources.

**How much** will it cost? Identify and justify costs in the budget.

#### A. Proposal Types

- unsolicited
- a response to a specific program
- a response to a Request for Proposals (RFP)

The unsolicited proposal is developed around general agency guidelines; within a subject field, the scope of the project is not limited by specific program guidelines. You may submit an unsolicited proposal at any time, although there may be target submission dates set to meet particular review panel meetings.

A proposal submitted to a specific agency program should be written to the program guidelines issued by the agency. These programs have recurring deadlines which you must meet to have your proposal considered.

To respond to an RFP, your proposed project would have to fit the needs described in the specific work statement developed by the funding agency. An RFP has a specific deadline; if the proposal arrives late, it normally will not be considered. Also, most RFPs are one-time solicitations to fit a specific need which is not expected to recur. When responding to an RFP, the agency should have a form or detailed guidelines about how to submit your proposal. It's important that you follow the guidelines and deadlines *exactly as stated*.

Although the prescribed format of any of these proposals will vary, all three should be prepared in the same general manner.

---

## B. Components of a Proposal

There are eight basic elements that most funders expect to see in a proposal:

1. *Summary*—clearly and concisely summarizes the request.
2. *Introduction*—describes the agency’s qualifications or “credibility.”
3. *Statement of Need* — documents the needs to be met or the problems to be solved.
4. *Objectives* — establishes the benefits of the project in measurable terms.
5. *Methods* — describes the activities to achieve the desired results.
6. *Evaluation* — presents a plan to determine the degree to which objectives were met and procedures were followed.
7. *Future funding* — describes a plan for continuation beyond the grant period and/or availability of other resources.
8. *Budget* — clearly delineates costs to be met by the grant.

### 1. Executive Summary

Although this is the first page of the proposal, it is the most important section of the entire document and should be written last. Here you will provide the reader with a snapshot of what is to follow. Specifically, it summarizes all of the key information and is a sales document designed to convince the reader that this project should be considered for support. Be certain to include:

- Organization and its expertise— a brief statement of the name, history, purpose, and activities of your agency, emphasizing its capacity to carry out this proposal (one paragraph);
- Problem—a brief statement of the problem or need your agency has recognized and is prepared to address (one or two paragraphs);
- Solution—a short description of the project, including what will take place and how many people will benefit from the program, how and where it will operate, for how long, and who will staff it (one or two paragraphs); and
- Funding requirements—an explanation of the amount of grant money required for the project and what your plans are for funding it in the future (one paragraph).

---

## 2. Introduction

In this section you will introduce your organization and its ability to complete the proposed project. Potential funding sources should be selected based on their possible interest in your type of organization or program. The introduction allows you to reinforce the connection between your organization's interests and those of the funding source.

Items to include in this section are:

- How you got started
- Why you got started (organization's goals)
- How long you've been around
- Anything unique about your organization's beginning
- Some of your most significant accomplishments as an organization, or if you are newly developed, some of the significant accomplishments of your Board or staff in previous roles.
- What support you have received from other organizations and prominent individuals (as letter of endorsement which may be attached in an appendix).

## 3. Statement of Need

If the funder reads beyond the executive summary, you have successfully piqued his or her interest. Your next task is to build on this initial interest in your project by enabling the funder to understand the problem that the project will remedy.

The statement of need will enable the reader to learn more about the issues. It presents the facts and evidence that support the need for the project and establishes that your nonprofit understands the problems and therefore can reasonably address them. The information used to support the case can come from authorities in the field, as well as from your agency's own experience.

You want the need section to be succinct, yet persuasive. Like a good debater, you must assemble all the arguments. Then present them in a logical sequence that will readily convince the reader of their importance. As you marshal your arguments, consider the following six points.

*First*, decide which facts or statistics best support the project. Be sure the data you present are accurate. There are few things more embarrassing than to have the funder tell you that your information is out of date or incorrect. Information that is too generic or broad will not help you develop a winning argument for your project.

Information that does not relate to your organization or the project you are presenting will cause the funder to question the entire proposal. There also should be a balance between the information presented and the scale of the program.

*Second*, give the reader hope. The picture you paint should not be so grim that the solution appears hopeless. The funder will wonder whether an investment in a solution

---

will be worthwhile. Here's an example of a solid statement of need: "Breast cancer kills. But statistics prove that regular check-ups catch most breast cancer in the early stages, reducing the likelihood of death. Hence, a program to encourage preventive check-ups will reduce the risk of death due to breast cancer." Avoid overstatement and overly emotional appeals.

*Third*, decide if you want to put your project forward as a model. This could expand the base of potential funders, but serving as a model works only for certain types of projects. Don't try to make this argument if it doesn't really fit. Funders may well expect your agency to follow through with a replication plan if you present your project as a model. If the decision about a model is affirmative, you should document how the problem you are addressing occurs in other communities. Be sure to explain how your solution could be a solution for others as well.

*Fourth*, determine whether it is reasonable to portray the need as acute. You are asking the funder to pay more attention to your proposal because either the problem you address is worse than others or the solution you propose makes more sense than others. Here is an example of a balanced but weighty statement: "Drug abuse is a national problem. Each day, children all over the country die from drug overdose. In the South Bronx the problem is worse. More children die here than any place else. It is an epidemic. Hence, our drug prevention program is needed more in the South Bronx than in any other part of the city."

*Fifth*, decide whether you can demonstrate that your program addresses the need differently or better than other projects that preceded it. It is often difficult to describe the need for your project without being critical of the competition. But you must be careful not to do so. Being critical of other nonprofits will not be well received by the funder. It may cause the funder to look more carefully at your own project to see why you felt you had to build your case by demeaning others. The funder may have invested in these other projects or may begin to consider them, now that you have brought them to their attention. If possible, you should make it clear that you are cognizant of, and on good terms with, others doing work in your field. Keep in mind that today's funders are very interested in collaboration. They may even ask why you are not collaborating with those you view as key competitors. So at the least you need to describe how your work complements, but does not duplicate, the work of others.

*Sixth*, avoid circular reasoning. In circular reasoning, 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 circular reasoning for building a community swimming pool might go like this: "The problem is that we have no pool in our community. Building a pool will solve the problem." A more persuasive case would cite what a pool has meant to a neighboring community, permitting it to offer recreation, exercise, and physical therapy programs. The statement might refer to a survey that underscores the target audience's planned usage of the facility and conclude with the connection between the proposed usage and potential benefits to enhance life in the community.

The statement of need does not have to be long and involved. Short, concise information captures the reader's attention.

---

## 4. Objectives

An objective is a specific, measurable outcome of your program. Once you've clearly defined a problem or statement of need, your objective should be to solve or reduce the problem. If the problem is the number of homeless people with mental illness in your community, then an objective of your program should be the reduction of the incidence of homelessness among people with mental illness in your community.

Be careful about stating a specific number simply to make your objective more measurable. If your objective is to decreasing homelessness among people with mental illness in your community by 10% (or any specific amount) make sure it's a realistic number based on your organization's ability, the project being designed, other similar programs, etc.

## 5. Methods

By now your proposal has covered who you are, the problem you want to work on and your objectives, so now you need to tell how you will bring about those results. You will describe the activities you will conduct to accomplish your objective.

The funder will want to know why you have selected the method you state. It's important that you be familiar with other similar programs and the methods used – and how they are successful. Your credibility is enhanced when you indicate your knowledge of alternative methods but have chosen a particular one for your project.

## 6. Evaluation

Evaluation can serve two purposes. You can evaluate your program to determine how effective it is in reaching the objectives you have established – solving the problems you are dealing with. Evaluation can also be used as a tool to provide information necessary to make appropriate changes and adjustments in your program as it proceeds. If you have specific objectives, you should be able to evaluate your progress toward reaching them.

Your project evaluation needs to be objective to have the most merit. Subjective evaluations are opinions or how people feel about a program. To get an objective evaluation, it may be possible to get an outside organization to evaluation your program. Other non-profit agencies, colleges and universities in your community might be able to help.

It's essential to build evaluation into your project and to implement your evaluation at the same time you start your program – or before. You have to measure the initial problem to be able to determine success in reducing or eliminating it.

---

## 7. Future Funding

Funding sources want to know how you will continue your program when their grant runs out. For one-time only grants such as for equipment, this doesn't apply. However, if you're proposing a program, service or on-going activity, then you need to explain how it will continue.

One possibility is to gain support from a local institution, government agency or business. If this is the case, get it in writing and include it with your proposal. A better plan is to generate funds through the project itself – such as fees for service.

## 8. Budget

As with proposals themselves, funding source requirements for budgets differ, with foundations requiring less extensive budgets than federal agencies. The following budget design will satisfy most funding sources that allow you to design your own budget and, with minor changes that the sources will tell you about, can be adapted to fit most federal agency requirements.

The budget is determined by what you have said in the narrative description and is divided into different categories for project expenses.

**Direct Costs.** These costs can be directly identified with your project and include:

**Personnel.** List each person who will work on the project by name or job type and indicate the amount of time that person will devote to the project. By using a person's current salary rate and allowing for estimated salary increases, you can determine the salary figure to include in your budget.

**Fringe Benefits.** For each dollar paid as salary or wage to an employee, the employer incurs an associated cost for fringe benefits. These benefits may include F.I.C.A., workmen's compensation, unemployment compensation, retirement, and life, dental, and health insurance. For grants, the benefits are estimated as an average percentage of salaries and wages.

**Equipment.** List each piece of permanent equipment not already available that is needed to conduct the project. Be as specific as possible in your description including model numbers and types.

**Supplies and Materials.** Itemize the expendable supplies needed for your project.

**Travel.** Travel costs include travel necessary to conduct the project, consultant travel, and travel to professional meetings. Be specific and list costs for transportation (based on coach airfares) and per diem separately and include the number of people. Mileage reimbursement in privately owned automobile cannot exceed the amount of coach airfare to the same destination. If you are requesting support to attend a professional meeting, indicate the professional organization involved, and the site, if known. Travel reimbursement will be at actual, reasonable, and necessary costs if the contract/grant has been approved for such.

---

**Communications.** Include telephone and postage expenses related to your project.

**Printing.** Include costs for any copying or printing necessary to your project whether these are completed in-house or at an outside source.

**Subcontracts.** If your project requires the services of outside organizations, those expenses should be included as a subcontract in the proposed budget. The total subcontract cost should appear as a line item in your proposal budget, and a separate budget breakdown for subcontract costs should follow the proposal budget. In addition to the detailed subcontract budget, you should include with your proposal a statement of work for the subcontract and a letter signed by the individual authorized to contractually commit the subcontracting organization which indicates his/her knowledge of the project and the organization's willingness to participate.

**Indirect Costs.** Indirect costs are a part of your project expenses and need to be included in the project budget when allowable. In fact, indirect costs can be so expensive that they can make or break a project. They include building space, utilities, and related administrative services.

---

## **IV. Miscellaneous**

### **A. Outline of the Process**

1. Preliminaries
  - a. Identify potential funders
  - b. Conduct research to support the need
  - c. Obtain guidelines from funders
  - d. Develop a submission strategy or concept paper
  - e. Make personal contact with the funder – in phone or in person
  - f. Draft the preliminary proposal/letter of inquiry
2. Proposal preparation
  - a. Read guidelines
  - b. Prepare forms (if available)
  - c. Write the narrative, summary, and gather attachments
  - d. Edit the manuscript
  - e. Prepare the budget
  - f. Type final draft
  - g. Proof
3. Proposal Submission

### **B. Tips on Writing Style**

- Use active rather than passive voice.
- Do not use jargon or acronyms unless absolutely necessary, and then explain.
- Use simple sentences; keep paragraphs short; employ headings and subheadings.
- Write your proposal from the point of view of those who will benefit from it. Talk about their needs and how your program will help.

### **C. Hints on Proposal Submission**

- Deadlines are serious and should be respected. Keep in mind that after a proposal is submitted, there is often a significant delay before a decision is made on it. Try to submit your proposal six to nine months before your program is to be implemented, allowing time for you to apply elsewhere if need be.
- Do not fax or e-mail your proposal without first asking the funder if this is okay.

- 
- The same proposal should not be submitted to all funders, since many have different interests, priorities, and guidelines. But you may be sending the same basic proposal to several funders with customized cover letters.
  - Always address your cover letter to an individual. Never start out with “Dear Sir” or “To Whom It May Concern.” Verify spelling of all names, titles, and addresses.

## **D. Attachments**

You may want to include material that is related to, but not directly a part of, your proposal. Such information might include lengthy tables and charts and/or letters of support. Be sure to include all attachments requested by the funder. The most commonly requested attachments are:

- a copy of your organization’s 501(c)(3) letter from the IRS.
- a copy of your organization’s “not a private foundation” letter from the IRS.
- a list of your organization’s trustees and their professional affiliations.
- a copy of your organization’s budget and most recent audit.
- a brochure describing your agency.

---

(Sample grant proposal)

**THE NATIONAL MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION IN D.C.  
Fostering Student Advocacy for the Mentally Ill**

A Request for Funding Submitted to the Wellness Foundation

prepared by

Ellen Lee Alderton  
NMHA DC Volunteer

NMHA DC  
1234 Main Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 00000  
Tel. (202) 555-1212  
Fax. (202) 555-1212

---

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Every year, one in ten Americans will suffer from a mental disorder. With an estimated yearly impact to the economy of \$150 billion, mental illnesses present by far the most expensive health burden to our society. Unfortunately the general public remains largely ignorant concerning mental illness and social attitudes towards people affected by these diseases are riddled with prejudice. Ignorance and prejudice, in turn, have led to wide-spread discrimination in many realms including health insurance coverage, work protection, disability benefits and fair housing protection.

Advocacy groups confronting discrimination against people with mental illnesses have become increasingly more assertive and empowered in recent years, and their efforts to provide public education and to challenge prejudice have met with great critical acclaim. Few public education and advocacy groups, however, have thus far formed in the college community. Yet especially in this community, the need to raise awareness of mental illnesses is striking: One in five college students come from a family affected by mental illness; the typical years of onset for manic-depression and schizophrenia are the late teens and early twenties; and suicide is the third leading cause of death among people aged fifteen to twenty-four.

NMHA DC wishes to address the dearth of knowledge in the college community by establishing mental illness public education and advocacy groups at District of Columbia-area universities. We will train students in the epidemiology and treatment of mental illnesses, in consumers' civil rights, and in American mental health care systems; we will assist participating students to disseminate this new information and throughout their college communities; and, at the same time, we will call upon these students to support us in our advocacy efforts.

Washington, D.C., as the nation's capitol and as a city currently restructuring its social services, provides the ideal venue for launching this campus advocacy program. Students will be able to work for change both at the national and the local levels. We will provide student volunteers with experience and direction to begin professional careers in public health, and we fully expect many of our alumni to become responsible, informed adults active in improving the lot of America's mentally ill.

Initially, we will start-up groups at four universities over a three-semester period. With continuing funding, we wish to establish permanent, largely self-sufficient student groups at all six D.C.-area universities. As part of a grass-roots association with over 340 state and local affiliates, NMHA DC will also present this project as a model to our numerous sister organizations.

NMHA DC has long relied upon volunteers to accomplish a great deal with limited resources. We are currently seeking \$50,000 in seed money to launch this initiative over its first eighteen-month period. Our fundraising process is just beginning, so no funds have been committed to date. We hope to secure this entire amount, or any portion of it, from the Wellness Foundation.

---

## ABOUT NMHA DC

NMHA DC is a local affiliate of a national consumer and family organization lauded by the American Institute of Philanthropy as one of the top ten philanthropic organizations in the country. Although our chapter operates on a shoestring budget of \$65,000 per year, we take seriously our mission to improve the quality of life for all D.C. citizens affected by mental illness. Since our establishment in 1981, we have participated as stakeholders and advocates throughout the D.C. mental health care system. Our 249 volunteers work vigorously to establish quality assurance, elderly care, fair housing standards, and other consumer rights in the District of Columbia.

In 1998, NMHA DC sent a coalition of D.C. citizens to Capitol Hill to speak with Congressional Representative Eleanor Holmes Norton about concerns from Fair Housing Act amendments to the treatment of mentally ill prisoners. Our volunteers participated in the national Walk the Walk against Mental Illness while our staff distributed educational materials at this event.

We also responded to discriminatory portrayals of mental illness in the District as they arose: Thanks to our volunteers' efforts, we ended a "go plum crazy" advertising campaign at a local D.C. grocery store. Similarly, NMHA DC changed the tone of planned television news coverage on John Hinckley Jr. from decidedly alarmist to more measured and informative in nature.

We work closely with other mental health organizations, and members of our Board of Directors — comprised of consumers, family members and professionals — hold prominent positions in both the D.C. and the federal mental health care systems. Many of our members also belong to the D.C. Mental Health Consumer's League, a consumer-run support and advocacy organization. We offer weekly support groups for mental health consumers, family members and friends. We also organize various educational services including our weekly Family-to-Family sessions.

---

## STATEMENT OF NEED

Almost three percent of American adults suffer from schizophrenia, mood disorders or anxiety disorders. Indeed, mental illnesses constitute by far the most expensive health burden to our economy, costing an estimated \$150 billion yearly in treatment outlays, social services, lost productivity, and premature mortality (NIMH).

Yet support for individuals suffering from these diseases remains weak. Despite the passage of some favorable legislation regulating insurance for mental health care during the Clinton years, a recent Hay Group study found that “caps, limits and deductibles for behavioral health have not changed substantially in the past ten years.” Indeed, behavioral health as a percent of total healthcare benefits fell 50% in this time period.

This discriminatory treatment of the mentally ill in our society finds its roots in pervasive negative social attitudes. To cite only a few studies, Westbrook et al have found mental illnesses to be among the least accepted of all diseases. Arkar and Eker have found that a psychiatric label significantly increases social distance towards a person. According to Madianos et al, “rejection, suspicion and marked fear” best characterize public attitudes towards the mentally ill. Indeed, Ingamells at al’s sobering overview of the literature concludes: “Four decades of research into attitudes towards mental illness have uncovered largely unfavorable perceptions among the general public.”

Particularly in the college community, the need to raise awareness of mental illnesses and to foster support for people with mental illness is compelling: One in five college students comes from a family affected by mental illness; the typical years of onset for manic-depression and schizophrenia — acute mental illnesses which strike two percent of the population — are the late teens and early twenties; and suicide is the third leading cause of death among people aged fifteen to twenty-four. Yet in Washington, D.C., there are six universities and not one has a student group devoted to mental illness public education and advocacy.

NMHA DC wishes to bring much-needed information about mental illness to the college community by establishing NMHA DC student groups at local universities. We will train students in the epidemiology and treatment of mental illnesses, in consumers’ civil rights, and in American mental health care systems. We will ask students to assist us in our regular local and national advocacy efforts, and we will guide students in implementing campus public education and advocacy activities of their own.

As part of an organization with over 12,000 affiliates in all fifty states, NMHA DC believes we are optimally positioned to promote this project as a model to our sister organizations. Moreover, Washington D.C., as the nation’s capitol, and as a city currently restructuring its social services, is uniquely suited for launching such a model program. While heightening awareness on their own campuses, students will also be able to advocate for systemic changes at the local and the national levels.

---

## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

### Goals and Objectives

The goals of the NMHA DC campus advocacy program are two-fold: We wish not only to improve public understanding of mental illnesses in the university community but also to stimulate mental illness advocacy among college students.

Our objective is to establish permanent, largely self-sufficient mental illness advocacy groups at local universities. Through this voluntary group structure we will be able to train students; expand public outreach; support ongoing advocacy work; reach out discreetly to campus consumers; encourage networking between different universities; encourage multi-organizational networking; and serve as a model for launching similar programs elsewhere.

### MISSION STATEMENT

The NMHA DC campus advocacy program's mission is to start-up lasting student mental illness public education and advocacy groups at Washington, D.C. universities. We will:

#### *train future leaders in*

- public education and advocacy for the mentally ill;
- the epidemiology and treatment of mental illnesses;
- the systems of care and insurance for the mentally ill in America;
- the functioning of the D.C. mental health system;

#### *expand public outreach through*

- opening workshops to the entire university community;
- offering on-campus public awareness events;
- arranging guest lectures at university courses;
- organizing campus screening days;
- making NMHA a visible presence on D.C. campuses;

#### *support ongoing advocacy activities by*

- participating in Mental Illness Awareness week and the candlelight vigil;
- supporting NMHA DC office work: letter-writing, phone-calling, etc.;
- organizing Capitol Hill visits;

#### *reach out discreetly to campus consumers by*

- disseminating information on NMHA support groups;
- providing information on civil rights;
- presenting the NMHA DC staff as consumer role models;

---

*encourage networking between different student groups via*

- joint workshops, meetings and educational trips;
- joint participation in NMHA DC public awareness efforts;
- awarding of student scholarships;

*encourage multi-organizational networking by*

- obtaining guest lecturers for workshops;
- participation in multi-organizational activities;

*serve as a model for future student volunteer groups by*

- distributing program results throughout the NMHA network;
- distributing program results to other voluntary organizations.

---

### **Method and Activities**

This start-up program is planned around the academic year and will take place over a three semester period. During the first two semesters of the program, NMHA DC will establish student advocacy groups at X, Y, and Z Universities. In the third semester, we will launch an additional group at W University.

Education for participating students and campus-wide public education will take place largely simultaneously. We will offer a series of twelve workshops open not only to the members of our groups but also to the entire college community. The workshops, lead by guest speakers from different mental health organizations, such as DRADA or the World Federation for Mental Health, will provide an overview of mental illnesses, of consumers' civil rights, and of American mental health care systems. In addition, NMHA DC student group members will be invited on educational fieldtrips to the National Institute of Mental Health and to Saint Elizabeth's psychiatric hospital. Two students will also receive scholarships to attend and to report on the NMHA national conference in summer.

Students will acquire hands-on experience in mental health care public education and advocacy both by arranging their own public awareness activities and by assisting NMHA DC in its advocacy work. Student groups will be responsible for publicizing program workshops on their campuses and for arranging special lectures on mental illness in their regular college courses. NMHA DC will help them to plan activities for Mental Illness Awareness Week, to conduct depression and anxiety screenings at their universities, and to arrange visits to Capitol Hill. We will also ask them to participate in our yearly candlelight vigil and to assist us regularly in letter-writing and phone-calling campaigns.

Although NMHA DC recognizes that many student volunteers may well be either consumers or family members of consumers, group membership should not

---

imply that an individual has a mental disorder. The groups will be open to any student who wishes to participate, and the groups' focus will remain on public education and advocacy. There is substantial evidence that stigma against mental illness can be particularly acute in the college community (Eker) (Arkar & Eker), and fear of stigma remains one of the primary barriers to seeking help for mental disorders (Docherty) (Bursztajn & Barsky). Consequently, NMHA DC believes that campus consumers are best served discreetly through an advocacy organization that also makes information about support services available.

### **Staffing**

*MaryLou Dobbs, NMHA DC Program Director*

Mary Lou Dobbs, NMHA DC Program Director will oversee the campus advocacy program. A mental health consumer, Mrs. Dobbs has spent over thirty years involved in advocacy work in Washington D.C. She has been involved in the civil right's movement, the women's movement and the environmental movement. She worked for ten years with the D.C. Department of Public Health as a research analyst before coming to NMHA DC. Mrs. Dobbs received her master's degree in social work from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

*Carla Ramirez, Campus Advocacy Program Coordinator*

Ms. Ramirez is a mental health consumer and a part-time student at George Washington University's graduate program in public health. Ms. Ramirez is concentrating on mental health for her master's degree and has volunteered for the past year and a half with NMHA DC.

### **OUTCOMES**

During this eighteen month start-up phase of the campus advocacy program, NMHA DC will found student groups, provide public education and encourage student advocacy on D.C. college campuses. Specifically, we will meet the following objectives:

#### **Groups launched**

- During the first two semesters of this program, we will start up NMHA DC student groups at X, Y and Z Universities.
- In the program's third semester, we will launch an additional group at W University.

#### **Public education**

- We will offer twelve educational workshops open to participating students and to the entire college community.

- 
- We will offer two educational fieldtrips to the National Institute of Mental Health and to St. Elizabeth's psychiatric hospital.
  - We will offer a mental illness job fair for students to learn about career opportunities.
  - Students will organize public education activities for Mental Illness Awareness Week.
  - Students will arrange for special presentations on mental illness advocacy to be offered in their regular classes.
  - Students will participate in the annual candlelight vigil.
  - Students will conduct on-campus screenings for National Depression Screening Day and for National Anxiety Disorders screening day.

**Advocacy**

- Students will visit Capitol Hill to meet with their representatives.
- Students will assist in regular letter-writing and phone-calling campaigns.
- Students will speak for consumer rights on their own campuses.

---

## CONCLUSION

All Americans are at risk for mental illnesses, and college students bear particular risks. NMHA DC wishes to raise public awareness of mental illnesses in the D.C. college community and to encourage local students to take part in mental illness advocacy. As the nation's capitol and as a city undergoing massive restructuring of its mental health care system, Washington, D.C. provides a unique venue for students to learn how to reform this sub-standard sector of health care.

Student volunteers have traditionally provided a backbone for public interest campaigns ranging from environmentalism to AIDS. With our expertise in mental illness advocacy, our talented staff, and the support of local universities, NMHA DC can now empower students to help the most disenfranchised and stigmatized individuals in American society.

In an eighteen month period, with \$50,000 in seed-money, we can establish student volunteer groups at four D.C. universities and we can be poised to expand the program to the area's remaining institutes of higher learning. But only through the kind contributions of donors will this initiative be possible. NMHA DC hopes that the Wellness Foundation will be able to join us in this endeavor.

## PROGRAM BUDGET

### EXPENSES FOR 3 SEMESTERS/ 18 MONTHS

#### Personnel

NMHA Program Manager (x% of salary & benefits, over 18 months)	\$ 7,500
Campus Coordinator (25 hrs/week, benefits, over 18 months)	<u>\$34,125</u>
Total Personnel Expense:\$41,625	

#### Non-Personnel

Student Scholarships  
(travel and hotel for 2 students to attend national conference) \$ 2,100

#### General Operating Costs

Office cleaning	(15% NMHA DC costs)	\$ 150
Occupancy	" "	\$ 2,205
Security	" "	\$ 70
Insurance	" "	\$ 405
Equipment	" "	\$ 360
Water cooler	" "	\$ 70
Phone	" "	\$ 475
AOL	" "	\$ 60
Electricity	" "	\$ 248
Water/Sewer	" "	\$ 57
Publicity		\$ 1,400
Supplies		\$ 450
Travel		<u>\$ 550</u>

Total Non-Personnel Expense: \$ 8,600

Total Expenses: \$50,225

#### Amount to be Raised

Student membership dues (\$5 x 3 semesters x 15 students) -\$ 225

**Balance Requested: \$50,000**

---

## **Additional Resources**

### **Books**

*Fundraising Cost Effectiveness: A Self-Assessment Workbook*, J..M. Greenfield, © 1996, New York, New York; John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

*Fundraising Basics: A Complete Guide*, Barbara Kushner Ciconte, Jeanne G. Jacob, © 1997, Gaithersburg, Maryland: Aspen Publishers, Inc.

*Keep the Money Coming: A Step-by Step Strategic Guide to Annual Fundraising*, Christine Graham, © 1992, Sarasota, Florida: Pineapple Press, Inc.

### **Internet Source**

The EPA Grant-Writing Tutorial

<http://www.epa.gov/seahome/grants/src/grant.htm>

### **Organizations**

The Foundation Center

79 Fifth Avenue

New York, NY 10003

Phone: (212) 620-4230

Fax: (212) 691-1828

E-mail: [feedback@fdncenter.org](mailto:feedback@fdncenter.org)

Web site: <http://fdncenter.org/>

(The Foundation Center has affiliates throughout the country. Contact their main office to find the affiliate nearest you.)

The Grantsmanship Center

P.O. Box 17220

Los Angeles, CA 90017

Phone: (213) 482-9860

Fax: (213) 482-9863

Web site: <http://www.tgci.com/>

The National Consumer Supporter Technical Assistance Center (NCSTAC)

The National Mental Health Association

1021 Prince Street

Alexandria, VA 22314-2971

Phone: (703) 837-4795

Phone: (800) 969-NMHA

Fax: (703)684-5968

E-mal: [consumerta@nmha.org](mailto:consumerta@nmha.org)

Web: [www.ncstac.org](http://www.ncstac.org)