GRANT SUPPORT WHITE PAPER

# Research Gets You Funding

Learn how qualitative and quantitative research can make your organization shine when applying for grants.

springtideresearch.org

Springtide™ RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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## Here's what we know:

You need a grant. Depending on where you're at in the process of building your program, your grant needs to demonstrate something different. Maybe you're just getting started, and you want to show the feasibility of the future project you want funded. Maybe you need a way to evaluate and demonstrate the effect your organization has *already* had, but you don't know how to show it. No matter the case, the most persuasive way to show a funder or potential funder your impact and worth is through consistent, data-driven evaluation.

So how do you use data collection to get grant funding? That's where we come in.

At Springtide, we've helped lots of mission-driven organizations get grant funding for their projects. So we know what kinds of obstacles are likely to come up. If you're seeking funding from grant-giving foundation or institutes, you might be running into these very obstacles—without even knowing it.

In this white paper, we'll walk you through the **before**, **during,** and **after** of getting grant funding using data.

1 ***BEFORE: Build a strong case.***

2 ***DURING: Make plans for evaluation.***

3 ***AFTER: Demonstrate impact.***

## A Case Study in Seeking Funding

### *Let's start with a story.*

Our client, like you, had innovative and engaging ideas for programs that make a difference in the world. They were, like you, experts in their area. And, like you, they needed funding for a big project to have all the impact it possibly could.

Read the challenges they faced below, and see if they match any you've encountered:

- While their data collection plan was rooted in sound research methodology, they did not design a plan for what they would *do* with the data that they collected . . .
- Their team's expertise was in their content area, not data collection or analysis . . .
- They did not have, nor could they build, the expertise on their team to do data analysis . . .
- They had no idea how much their data could do for them in the future, and they didn't know how to make it work for them, but they did want to maximize what they could learn from good evaluation . . .
- They were overwhelmed by the amount of data that they'd collected and didn't know where to begin . . .

**STEP 1—BEFORE**

# Build a strong case—for need now, and impact in the future . . .

This client's particular project would span many years and impact many people, and for those logistical reasons alone, they knew it would require a significant amount of funding. So they started seeking a major funder for support. As they wrote the application for funding, they knew—and included a reference to the fact—that they would have to collect data to report to the funder, but because they were not required to have a *whole* data collection plan spelled out in order to apply, they didn't have all the particulars in place.

This is really common. Data collection is often suggested or mandated when applying for a grant, but funders do not require a specific plan or outcome for the data. Most people who are applying for grants are not experts in conducting research—and they shouldn't have to be! Our client was no different. They wrote a very general intention to collect data in the application, assuming that they would sort out what to do with the data once they had it.

Why does referencing a plan for data collection and ongoing evaluation matter, even in the grant application? Because it shows a serious commitment to what you're doing, including your belief that it will have the impact you suggest in your proposal. In fact, you can use data in your grant proposal not only to show the impact you plan to have but also to demonstrate the ways your program or organization will fill a needed gap. Using secondary sources or evaluative tools in the application for funding itself is a powerful way to show this commitment to data collection. Our client talked to a diverse sampling of community members, asking questions and conducting interviews that helped make it clear how important and impactful their organization would be once it got off the ground.

## *The Springtide Insight:* ***Fix It in Design***

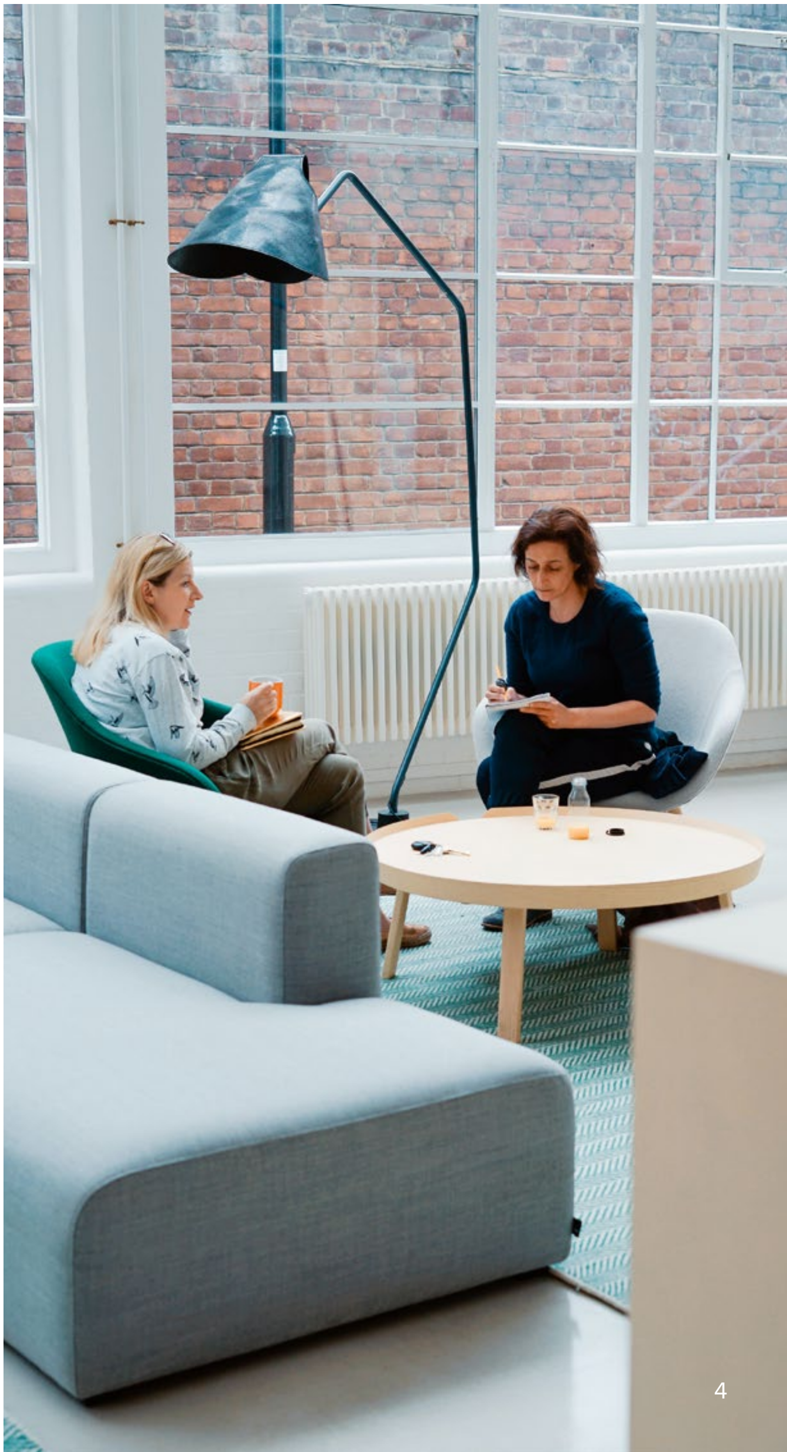
Believe it or not, even without a solid plan in place for conducting research *during* their program, this client was actually ahead of the game compared to many others we've worked with or heard from. We've worked with CEOs and executive directors who approached us in a total frenzy because they *never planned* to collect data at all, and now they needed data to demonstrate impact. More often than not, these groups will say something like, "We've been running this program for a while now, and we'd like to get a grant to increase our reach. We *know* it works, but we don't have any data. **Can you help us show funders how effective we've been?"**

In the case study above, despite the lack of research design, the group we were working with *at least* had a tentative plan to collect data. The truth is that it's nearly impossible to prove the impact a program has without knowing where people were *before* they came to your program. Even before you demonstrate impact, data can help lay the groundwork for why the program is needed in the first place. That's why data collection has to be part of your application—it's why data collection has to be part of your program's entire design and structure.

To avoid frantically trying to make up for lost data, you have to "*Fix it in Design*."

A colleague of ours in the field had this simple mantra that we've adopted to succinctly capture what's needed at this step. He explained it this way: "If we have to fix a problem in the design phase, it will cost you $1. If we have to fix it in production, it will cost you $10. If we have to fix at the end, it will cost you $100. So let's spend the time to fix it in design."

The lesson here for those of you looking for funding couldn't be clearer: Start thinking about your evaluation plan the same day you start thinking about your program plan. It will prevent you from having to spend more time, energy, and money later.



# Make plans for evaluation . . .

Let's return to the case study we started above. After they received a significant grant from their chosen funder, they employed the help of an academic colleague to help them formulate a plan to collect data as they had promised in the grant application—but they still didn't have a way to analyze or use it. Perhaps more notably, they realized in the process that they did not have the capacity to do it in-house. They didn't have the tools, skills, or resources to do data collection and analysis.

Beyond just needing the data to report back to their funder as part of the terms of the grant, this client genuinely *wanted* to build an evaluation plan that helped them track impact. They wanted a way to understand how the program was working and what things could be improved in future iterations. They wanted to truly evaluate their success and reach.

Aware of the gap between what they wanted to track and what skills and resources they had to do it, they decided to seek outside help to collect and analyze their data.

## *The Springtide Insight:* *Begin with the End in Mind*

When it comes to collecting data and building systems for evaluation, we have to emphasize how important it is to *begin with the end in mind*. It's a critical step not only for your program goals but also for the evaluation of those goals so you can share your impact with your stakeholders. But what does it mean, concretely, to begin with the end in mind?

As you start to make plans for evaluation right in the design of the program itself, you can do a few simple things in the beginning that will set you up for success down the road, most of which cost little or no money as you begin any new endeavor:

1. **Track Demographics.** Create an intake form and collect basic data from everyone who is starting your program. Things like demographics (race, gender, age, etc.) are critical for communicating to funders, who will almost always have specific target audiences.
2. **Collect Baseline Data.** Determine what your key outcome measures are. How will you know if the program is a success—that is, what is it designed to do? Increase self-esteem? Decrease destructive behaviors? Then, add some simple questions to your intake document to assess a baseline of these measures.
3. **Don't Forget the Qualitative.** Don't think just about a form or survey. Do some quick interviews and record the responses as people come into a program. These stories are key to unlocking the full picture of program impact.

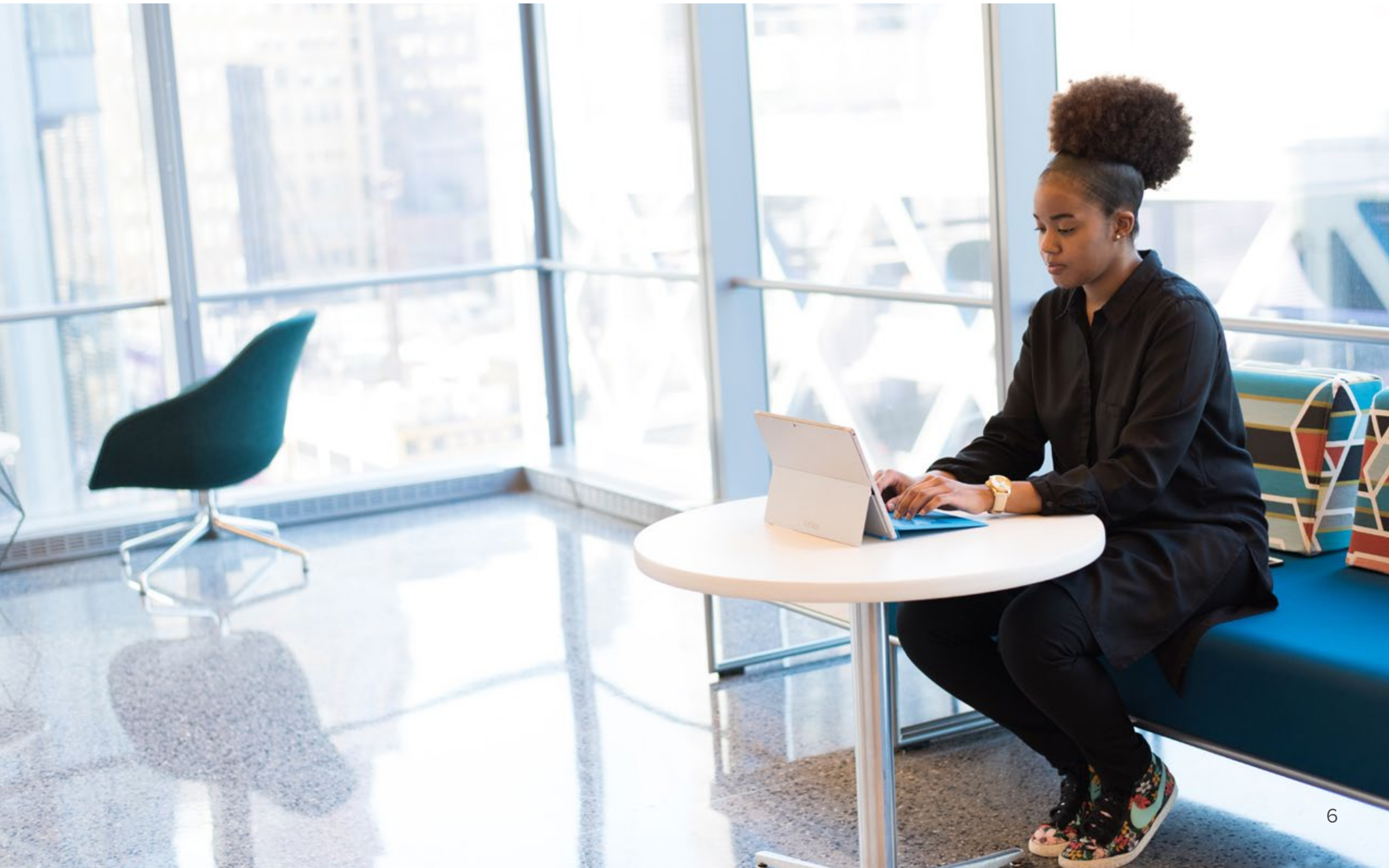
If you do these three simple things, you'll be in much better shape when it comes time to apply for funding, raise money, or start working with an external evaluator to demonstrate impact.

STEP 3—AFTER

# Demonstrate impact . . .

The client throughout this extended case study experienced great success—not just in getting the funding they applied for, but in having the impact they hoped to have on their community. We were able to meet them at every stage: *before*, *during*, and *after*, to help them build their case, evaluate, and demonstrate impact all *using data*. This success meant they were candidates for more funding and had opportunities to expand on their initial vision.

Their data was assembled so that they could read and use it in an accessible way. The analysis gave them a set of statistics to share with their current and future funders to demonstrate impact. The analysis of their data led to action items that could help them improve their program in the future. Exploring their own data led them to new discoveries about their work and informed the questions they wanted to ask in future data collections, including how they might act on the data they collected. This client learned how to build data collection and analysis plans into their future funding applications using Springtide as a research partner, which freed them up to do the work they were most passionate about—the work they set about doing when they realized they needed funding and, to get funding, they needed data.



## *The Springtide Insight: Show Your Impact in Diverse Ways*

Like the organization in this case study, your organization is phenomenal. You know it. But do funders? Demonstrating impact is all about making sure others see what you already know to be true about the good work you're doing.

So how can you demonstrate impact with data—in such a way that even those *outside* your organization can see just how important and effective the work is that you're doing? It can seem like a tall order.  After all, *you* know firsthand how the work that you and your staff are doing changes lives, changes organizations, changes the world. But you'll need more than your own pride and joy at what you've created to convince others to start funding and supporting your work in a significant way.

We have learned how to take the mystery out of demonstrating both the depth and breadth of your program or organization's impact. It comes down to three key ideas.

1. **Change over Time.** The first key to making sure that you're demonstrating impact is to capture change over time. We can't simply measure where people are at the end of your program or event; we have to know where they started. If we don't know where they started, it's almost impossible to measure the specific ways your organization impacted them. Intake forms and surveys are an important and easy-to-implement step in this process.

2. **Don't Reinvent the Wheel.** We trust that you're the only organization doing *exactly* what you do. But in all likelihood, other people and companies have come before that had similar goals, even if the execution was different. Don't reinvent the wheel: if your program is designed to increase religious engagement across generations, you might already know of another organization or study tackling or tracking that question in a different way than you. Look at their outcomes and draw out the connections your organization makes at a more particular level. Doing this not only saves you time, effort and money, but also communicates how well you know your work within a wider conversation.

3. **Tell the Story.** Data is nothing without communication. It should be accessible, not impossible to interpret. Figuring out how to tell the story of your program's impact is vital. Along with tables and graphs, you'll want graphics that reflect your brand, video(s), and, maybe most importantly—*narrative*. Make sure your data are embedded into a larger story that effectively communicates impact in a predictable and accessible structure. You may want to highlight the particular story of one individual, an "ideal" candidate or model user of your program. Relying on step 1 from these tips, you'll want to show a before and after in narrative form: how and what they struggled with, the way your program is designed to meet their need, and how that individual has been impacted positively since working with you. Personal stories are always simple and powerful.

# Conclusion

As you've seen in the steps we outline and the example we offer from our own work, we've honed this process of building a case, making plans for evaluation, and demonstrating impact—because we know what funders are looking for, and we've figured out how to deliver it efficiently and effectively. Remember to think about how to use data to your advantage **before**, **during**, and **after** you seek or get grant funding:

***BEFORE*** **Plan for data collection. If you do not know how, ask us (or someone). Do this in design so that you are collecting the right things (both for evaluation and for funder reporting) throughout the program.**

***DURING*** **If you already have data, find out the best ways to use what you have and what else you might need to collect in order to learn what you need to know.**

***AFTER*** **Even if a grant funder does not ask for it, have a data collection plan—for your own accountability and to demonstrate that you are a trustworthy investment.**

Springtide doesn't just suggest you do this for your work. We don't just insist on these methods with the clients we serve—we do this with our own research. Look through our reports, and you'll see a similar model to the one above. We rely on experts and storytelling to help us document how young people's religious lives are changing. We ask where they started and where they're going, and we *keep* asking them questions, tweaking our process along the way to make sure it's effective.

You can easily implement these same tactics in your own organization—and if you need any help doing so, don't hesitate to be in touch. You can email Megan Bissell, Head of Research for Springtide Research Institute: *megan@springtideresearch.org*

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