

Kim Wilson - Empower Your Vision Transcript

- Welcome to Empower your Vision. Here's the scenario. You're building an arts integration lesson library. As you develop your arts integration skills, your ideas of how you could transform your classroom are growing, but your district allocated budget is not gonna fund your vision anytime soon. Do not despair. Funding opportunities exist and there are resources to help empower your vision. Hi, my name is Kim Wilson, I'm director of arts and basic curriculum project in South Carolina. I stumbled into grant writing at the age of 24 for a \$500 grant. But since that time, I've secured millions of dollars, beginning with my classrooms, then for entire organizations, and now for statewide partnership among groups. In this session, I wanna share some key lessons I've learned as a grant writer to help empower and equip you to take action. I'll share some stories, recommend some strategies, and provide some prompting questions for you to contemplate in your process for what I have found to be the two most strategic skills as a grant writer. One, crafting a persuasive narrative, and two, finding the right funding source. So let's get started. Key lesson learned, find your fit rather than fit to the find. I dare say most educators I know would welcome a larger classroom budget, but it's more likely that to many of us have been encouraged to find a sponsor or apply for a grant to provide supplemental boosts to our budgets. As a visual arts teacher, I was literally coached to ask for donations supplies materials from our school families. That was to help offset the lack of funds to purchase my wishlist. Unfortunately, my first few attempts resulted in undesirable outcomes. The art supply closet became a dumping ground for old, unwanted, sometimes unidentifiable items that then became an unnecessary burden for me to sort, to store, to then discard. This was of no fault of my families. I had failed to provide a clear direction for what I needed. Now, once I clearly communicated specific supplies, and the items I needed for a sequential curriculum, the support followed. The same concept holds true for grant requests. Oh, as a hopeful grant seeker, I would spend countless hours scanning and searching for grantors, foundation, sponsorships. But with the misguided focus of trying to find money rather than finding a partner. I want to help you avoid that ineffective approach. Rather than starting with sources that I've been successful with, let's start with your vision. Key lesson learned, know your destination. Most funding sources require a narrative and although a strong application needs more than just a narrative, the narrative is the persuasive piece. From a funder's perspective, everyone could use more money. They want to know you have an idea and that the funds will help you accomplish a goal. Knowing where you wanna grow, what's required to get there, and how you'll achieve your dream is much more important to funders than a passionate piece of writing on your teaching philosophy. The first step in grant writing is to determine your vision of what's possible with the additional funding. So what is your idea? More importantly, why is it important? Which educational ecosystem will be impacted by your idea? Will the idea be for your classroom only or for the whole school? Maybe the larger school community, or the entire school district. Who will benefit teachers, students, maybe both, maybe more? Who needs to be involved to make your idea a reality? Will your idea require permission or assistance? Once you've answered these questions for yourself, it's much easier to begin the writing process. Key

lesson learned, speak the language. As you craft your narrative, challenge yourself to be clear and concise. Remember, you're writing for an audience, an audience that may not speak the same language as you. When writing for an audience, I try to remember, be careful to avoid acronyms and educational jargon. Your granters may support education but not necessarily know the jargon. Even in education, one acronym may represent more than one group. Next, avoid assumptions and provide clear descriptors and identifiers. Think of your narrative as an audition. Your grantor may have an exhausting number of auditions to review. A narrative written in plain language with specificity will be heard and understood. Remember Susan's immortal words, clear is kind. The last recommendation here is just be realistic and honest. This is not a campaign or a sale so there's no need to include promises or results that are beyond our control. What is important to acknowledge is that your audience of granters will require reporting. So grant reports are an accountability measure. As you craft your story, contemplate and determine the key information or the data that demonstrates your vision and can communicate the effectiveness of your plan for accountability purposes. To begin, I suggest we return to the question, who will benefit from your vision or your idea? And then let's extend your thinking to include, how will you know if you accomplished the goal? What data will reflect achievement? What data will be influenced by the project? How will you collect the data? Now, this is easier than it may appear, how you answer the questions, however, will be determined by your vision. If product-oriented, save purchase orders and receipts. Are there products that are already in use? Then take pictures. If it's program oriented, save the bulletins, the play bills, the programs, collect attendance records, take photographs or recordings. If performance oriented, once again, photographs and recordings of student work, collect student self-reflections of the lesson. If relevant and appropriate to your project, include student scores on assessment instruments. Teachers are often cheerleaders who use anecdotal storytelling, but for granters, data is an important piece of the storytelling. So let's compare two grant reporting samples to demonstrate the power of concise storytelling with accountability data. The first sample reads, the Sample School's summer pilot program was a huge success. We used the arts to support Reading Recovery in rural State. Students enjoyed camp and want to return next year. We want to expand the program next summer so more students can experience the arts. Now as the reader or the audience, do you know exactly where the program occurred? Who participated, what was measured and what were the outcomes? Now let's take a look at a version that's a little bit more in line with grant speak. In its second year, the 2019 pilot program successfully engaged students participating in Community County's 3rd grade Reading Recovery summer reading program. Attendance for arts participants was 27.85% higher than non-arts participants, and reading gains were 29% higher than non-arts participants. In post-camp surveys, 90% of student reported never being bored in camp, and 100% of students reported that they wanted to attend next year. Due to the success of the program, additional funds have been secured from Y Foundation. The third year of the pilot program will expand into 2nd and 4th grades, activating storytelling and drama to support reading. As the audience or the reader, do you now know exactly where the program occurred? Who participated, what was measured, and what were the outcomes? One final recommendation for grant narrative writing, have someone proof your writing. There's no

better way to know if you've communicated effectively than having someone read it. And the more detached to your reader the better. So ask a colleague that's not in your grade level or your subject area, ask the principal, maybe even the guidance counselor. Now let's transition to the task of finding the right funder. Now that you've developed your idea and have a framework for your narrative, you're ready to find your funding partner. There are several different sources that may be available to you. Let's start with your educational ecosystem. Does your school district offer internal grants? Does your State Department of Education sponsor grants? Does your professional membership association, offer sponsorships or grants? Search for your local, regional, and state arts organizations. What grants are available through the Arts Council or sometimes called Arts Commission? Look for arts specific foundations such as Save The Music. Look to your community. Are there sponsorships from local businesses and corporations? Consider businesses and corporations that sell the type of supplies and materials you're interested in such as Crayola. Many teachers have been successful with crowdsourcing, such as DonorsChoose and GoFundMe, but it is really important that you check with your district, do they allow crowdsourcing campaigns? Now there are plenty of options, but as I mentioned, sifting and shifting can be overwhelming with all of the options that are available to you. So as you search, you want to focus on the funding priorities of the potential partner. If the funding priorities don't align with your vision, move on. It's okay. If the funder seems like a good fit, then check the guidelines for eligibility, restrictions, or requirements, matching funds. Now some grants do require a cash match. This means that the funder requires a portion of the total project to be paid by the requesting organization. This sounds challenging but it may not be as hard as it sounds. For example, I was able to use my allocated budget as matching funds for many of my classroom project grant applications. But each funder is different, so you have to check the details in the guidelines. For me, I've found it necessary to develop a recordkeeping method as I research possible partners. You may find this an effective approach, especially if you have more than one idea, you're collaborating with others, and even for practical reasons, such as like I found this great grant that fits my vision but the deadline has already passed, but I wanna keep it in mind for next year. Now, to assist you, I've provided a grant tracker form with the information and details that I have found helpful to keep track of as our research opportunities. Hopefully, you'll find it useful as well. I hope this session has been beneficial to you. If you've never sought funding before, I highly encourage you to take this step, it's okay to start small, it's okay to seek multiple funding sources for the one big ticket item. Just remember, when you know what you need, why it's valuable, others are more inclined to help you, and over time you can build that ideal learning environment. You hold the vision. Now it's time to empower it.