**Staying Out of “Hot Water” Tip Sheet[[1]](#footnote-1)**

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| “Success or failure is often determined by what transpires in the first weeks or months of the grant.”[[2]](#footnote-2) |

See below for several great tips and an “overview of the potential pitfalls and “red flag” issues that are guaranteed to challenge or cripple a grant.”

* Ask enough questions! As a new Project Director, the sheer volume of information can be daunting. The grant project and its proper management are important. The Grants Office is here to assist you.
* Keep the Grants Office informed and address problems before they become a crisis. Any grants project has the potential for going awry. Contact the Grants Office if things begin to get off track and to find early solutions.
* If you are contacted about a Site Visit, Desk Review, or audit, be sure to contact the Grants Office immediately to help in the planning of the visit.
* Remember that the Project Director is not the authorized person to accept a grant and must not sign forms that ask for something like an “authorized signature.”
* Set aside time at regular intervals to manage your grant. Depending on the size and complexity of the grant, this may require one or more hours per week.
* Read your e-mail and follow up all meetings with an e-mail or memo. Paper and e-mail trails protect the college and prevent misunderstood communications.
* Copy the Grants Office on key e-mails (including all correspondence with the Program Officer).
* Keep up with the budget. Grant funds represent the end result of a highly competitive process with other colleges. They are an investment by the public or private entity. The college will be held accountable for its stewardship of those funds.
* Follow all college procedures for purchasing goods and services. Avoid purchasing mistakes. “The purchasing process involves tasks such as securing purchase authorization, obtaining bids, navigating the electronic requisitioning system, creating purchase orders, and managing quote requirements, among others. Double checking policies before making purchases is the best way to ensure you follow the proper procedure,” (Maricopa Community Colleges Grants Management Handbook 2016 Revised Edition, 2016) (Pg. 2).
* Do not co-mingle your grant funds with other funds.
* Using grant funds to replace funds that were previously obtained from the college’s operational budget is supplanting and it is usually illegal.
* Keep electronic and hard copies of all important documents and correspondence. Maintain a comprehensive data collection system so that you will be able to document and report project performance and student outcomes.
* Adequate data collection is a must for any successful grant project. Project Directors should review project data analytically to identify what is and what is not working and to make continuous improvements. Projects that do not adequately collect data will find it difficult to document performance and demonstrate that they have succeeded in accomplishing their objectives.
* Do not select students for your program who do not meet the eligibility criteria. “Where the project has selection criteria that must be used to select students for participation, then documentation of the information used to determine student eligibility must be saved. Evidence that the information was reviewed (i.e. initials or signature of the reviewer, rubric forms used to score the applicant, etc.) and selection decision documentation must be retained and filed in a secure place.”[[3]](#footnote-3)
* Cultivate a “sixth sense” about ethical improprieties. If you are unsure about a planned action, run it by the Grants Office or your Business Office contacts. Do not hire relatives or do anything that could be construed as a conflict of interest.
* Don’t lobby, don’t politic, and don’t support religious activities. All of these interesting activities are strictly prohibited with grant funds. This includes using staff time for any of these activities.
* Meet all reporting deadlines. Grant reports must always be filed by the due date – no later! Mark due dates ahead of time on a calendar. Complete reports as if you plan to apply for funding again in the future.
* Credit the funding agency on any printed materials, news releases, brochures, major products, and in verbal presentations. List funders by full name. Work with the Grants Office to ensure that specific funder guidelines regarding such communications are being followed.
* Be considerate by providing lead time to others. People work best when adequate lead time is provided. Grant projects frequently deviate from routine college activities, thus more lead time is often needed to make special arrangements for grant activities.
* Grants do not have “slush” funds. All grant expenditures must be justifiable and documented based on the approved budget and proposal. Don’t buy a bunch of supplies at the end of the grant period just to use up the funds.

(Significant portions of this list were adapted from the Maricopa Community Colleges Grants Management Handbook 2016 Revised Ed., Pg. 5, and the Grand Rapids Community College Guide to Grant Management, 2013.)

1. Adapted from Maricopa CC handbook [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Maricopa Community Colleges Grants Management Handbook 2016 Revised Edition, 2016, Pg. 5 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Maricopa Community Colleges Grants Management Handbook, page 7) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)