

The Importance of SMART Objectives in Securing Funding for Public Health Grants to Support Expert Nursing Care for Vulnerable Populations

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Tools for Grant-Writing: Using SMART objectives

Original Date: November 3, 2017 Updated: September 2023

Introduction

Crafting effective objectives is a cornerstone of successful grant writing for public health projects, particularly those aimed at providing expert nursing care to vulnerable populations. In nursing practice, objectives must be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound (SMART) to ensure alignment with clinical goals and evidence-based practices (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2020). In public health grant proposals, SMART objectives provide a clear, structured framework that enhances the likelihood of securing funding by demonstrating a project's clarity, feasibility, and impact on vulnerable populations. This paper expands on the importance of SMART objectives in public health grant writing, emphasizing their role in supporting expert nursing care for vulnerable groups, and incorporates scholarly references to support evidence-based practices.

The SMART Framework in Public Health Grant Writing for Nursing Care

The SMART framework ensures that objectives are actionable, aligned with project goals, and compelling to funders (CDC, 2020). Each component is critical when designing interventions to deliver expert nursing care to vulnerable populations:

- **Specific:** Objectives must clearly define the intended outcome, target population (e.g., underserved communities, elderly, or substance-dependent individuals), and scope of the nursing intervention. For example, “provide opioid misuse education to 500 homeless individuals in Queen Anne’s County” is more specific than “improve community health” (Bamberger et al., 2019).
- **Measurable:** Objectives must include quantifiable criteria to track progress and evaluate success. Funders require measurable outcomes, such as “reduce hospital readmissions for chronic disease management by 20% among low-income patients” (Doran, 1981).
- **Achievable:** Objectives should be feasible within the project’s resources, timeline, and constraints. For instance, training nurses to deliver care in underserved areas must account for available staff and funding (Bamberger et al., 2019).

- **Relevant:** Objectives must align with the project's mission to address the specific health needs of vulnerable populations and funder priorities. In nursing care, objectives should reflect evidence-based interventions tailored to community needs (Issel & Wells, 2018).
- **Time-bound:** Objectives should specify a timeline for completion, ensuring accountability. For example, "deliver mental health screenings to 300 elderly patients by June 2026" provides a clear deadline (CDC, 2020).

In providing expert nursing care, the SMART framework aligns objectives with clinical competencies, similar to how Bloom's revised taxonomy (Krathwohl, 2002) categorizes cognitive processes (e.g., remembering, applying, evaluating) in educational settings. In public health grants, SMART objectives ensure that nursing interventions are evidence-based, targeted, and responsive to the unique challenges faced by vulnerable populations.

Importance of SMART Objectives in Securing Funding

SMART objectives are critical in public health grant proposals for delivering expert nursing care to vulnerable populations for the following reasons:

1. **Clarity for Funders:** Funders prioritize proposals with clear objectives that outline specific nursing interventions for vulnerable groups. SMART objectives articulate the project's goals, such as "train 100 nurses to implement trauma-informed care for 1,000 domestic violence survivors by December 2026" (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2023).
2. **Demonstrating Feasibility:** Achievable and time-bound objectives show funders that the project is realistic. For example, "provide telehealth consultations to 200 rural patients with diabetes by March 2027, reducing A1C levels by 10%" demonstrates practicality and measurable impact (Issel & Wells, 2018).
3. **Facilitating Evaluation:** Measurable objectives enable nurses and project evaluators to track outcomes, such as "decrease emergency room visits for asthma exacerbations by 25% among low-income children over 18 months" (CDC, 2020). This ensures accountability and aligns with funder expectations.
4. **Alignment with Evidence-Based Practices:** Relevant objectives ensure that nursing interventions address documented health disparities in vulnerable populations. For instance, objectives targeting opioid misuse prevention should cite current research (SAMHSA, 2023), similar to how clinical protocols are updated to reflect evidence-based practices (Butcher et al., 2021).
5. **Enhancing Accountability:** Time-bound objectives establish deadlines, ensuring that nursing care initiatives stay on track. For example, "screen 500 homeless individuals for hypertension by September 2026" fosters accountability and builds funder trust (Bamberger et al., 2019).

Application to Public Health Projects for Vulnerable Populations

SMART objectives bridge the gap between the health needs of vulnerable populations and funder expectations. For example, a grant proposal for a substance abuse prevention program might include: "By December 2026, deliver a community education campaign to increase awareness of prescription drug misuse risks among 1,000 adolescents in foster care, as measured by a 30% increase in knowledge via pre- and post-campaign surveys" (SAMHSA, 2023). This objective is specific (adolescents in foster care), measurable

(30% knowledge increase), achievable (1,000 participants), relevant (addressing prescription drug misuse), and time-bound (by December 2026).

In nursing practice, objectives are tailored to clinical resources, such as training materials or community partnerships, to ensure feasibility (Butcher et al., 2021). For example, a grant to improve maternal health in underserved communities might include: “Train 50 nurses in evidence-based prenatal care protocols by September 2026, resulting in a 15% reduction in preterm births among low-income mothers” (World Health Organization [WHO], 2022).

Challenges and Considerations

Crafting SMART objectives for nursing care projects can present challenges. Overly ambitious objectives, such as screening an entire population without sufficient resources, may undermine credibility (Issel & Wells, 2018). Compound objectives, such as combining training and patient outcomes, may complicate evaluation, similar to challenges in educational settings (Bastable, 2023). Nurses and grant writers may need to separate complex objectives to ensure clarity and measurability. It is important to recognize what needs to be accomplished and appropriately identify outcomes. Additionally, one must be willing to update current objectives using the SMART format.

Transforming Non-SMART Objectives

Non-SMART objectives often lack specificity, measurability, or alignment with module content. Below are examples of poorly constructed objectives from a patient safety lecture, followed by their SMART revisions.

Non-SMART Objective 1: *Explain the concept of ‘First do no harm.’*

- **Issue:** Lacks measurability and specificity.
- **SMART Revision:** Name the Greek physician credited with the origin of the phrase ‘First do no harm,’ and explain its application to nurse-patient interactions, providing four specific nursing interventions to demonstrate this concept (Potter et al., 2021).

Non-SMART Objective 2: *Discuss causes of medical errors.*

- **Issue:** Not measurable or specific to module content.
- **SMART Revision:** List at least five of the seven causes of medical errors identified by Makary and Daniel (2016) in hospital and community settings, and for each, describe a specific nursing intervention to prevent the error (Makary & Daniel, 2016).

Non-SMART Objective 3: *List 5 ways to reduce the risk of transmission of pathogens.*

- **Issue:** Measurable but not specific to module content.
- **SMART Revision:** List the five hallmark strategies to reduce pathogen transmission as outlined in module content on patient safety, citing specific evidence-based practices (Potter et al., 2021). *Note:* If the content is not fully covered in the module, educators must upload a synopsis to the LMS, citing sources such as Potter et al. (2021).

Conclusion

SMART objectives are essential for crafting compelling public health grant proposals to support expert nursing care for vulnerable populations. By ensuring specificity, measurability, achievability, relevance, and time-bound criteria, SMART objectives provide clarity, demonstrate feasibility, facilitate evaluation, align with evidence-based practices, and enhance accountability. These qualities make proposals more competitive, increasing the likelihood of securing funding for initiatives that address health disparities. Regularly updating objectives to reflect current research and community needs ensures that nursing care remains impactful and fundable.

References

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Appendix A

SMART Objectives Framework Aligned with Bloom's Taxonomy for Nursing and Public Health Interventions

Cognitive Process	Verbs	Parameters	Measurement Criteria	Example Objective
Remembering	List, describe, recall, define, identify, name, state, reproduce, label	Details from module content	Specific data, whole number, proper noun, definition	List two non-steroidal anti-inflammatory agents used in the treatment of musculoskeletal injuries (Burchum & Rosenthal, 2021).
Understanding	Summarize, interpret, estimate, paraphrase, articulate	Module-specific concepts	Clear explanation or summary	Summarize the physical, cognitive, and psychosocial characteristics of learners that influence learning at various stages of growth and development (Bastable, 2023).
Applying	Classify, demonstrate, construct, prepare	Practical application of knowledge	Observable action or product	Demonstrate the process for testing each of the 12 cranial nerves (Burchum & Rosenthal, 2021).
Analyzing	Explain, differentiate, categorize, compare, contrast, illustrate, outline	Module-specific relationships	Detailed comparison or categorization	Differentiate between partial and generalized seizures based on their clinical manifestations (Burchum & Rosenthal, 2021).
Evaluating	Assess, rank, compare, describe, summarize	Critical assessment	Evidence-based judgment	Assess the three components of determinants of learning and their impact on patient education (Bastable, 2023).
Creating	Compose, plan, create, diagram, organize, summarize, design	Synthesis of knowledge	Original product or plan	Given a diagram of the brain, create a labeled model identifying the functional areas of the cerebral cortex (Burchum & Rosenthal, 2021).