

Using AI to Write a Grant Proposal

A Teacher Training Guide

Sioux Falls School District — Innovation Grant Pool (IGP)

Prepared in support of the IGP Initiative | 2026

This guide is for teachers who have been directed by their principal to develop a grant proposal.

It is also for principals who want to build a faculty capable of winning grants.

Introduction

This guide exists because grant money goes unclaimed every year — not because teacher ideas lack merit, but because writing a competitive grant proposal feels like a task for someone else. Someone with more time. Someone who knows the process. Someone in a different role.

That assumption is wrong, and this guide is designed to prove it.

The Innovation Grant Pool (IGP) was built on a simple premise: the teachers best positioned to write grants are the experienced ones who already know what their students need and why current programs aren't meeting that need. The problem has never been a shortage of ideas. It has been a shortage of structured support for turning those ideas into funded proposals.

This guide is that support. It is an on-ramp — a first step into grant writing designed to be completed in a single professional development day, with AI doing the heavy lifting on research, drafting, and formatting while the teacher does what only a teacher can do: identify the problem, bring professional knowledge to the solution, and own the result.

This is the same model 3M used when it gave employees 15% of their time to pursue their own ideas — and produced Post-it Notes, Scotch Tape, and 22,800 patents. The IGP is the teacher's version of that permission.

For teachers:

You were sent here by your principal because you have an idea worth developing. By the end of this process, that idea will be a written proposal — ready to submit for IGP funding and structured to apply to outside grants as well.

For principals:

This program builds grant writing capacity in your faculty. Every teacher who completes this process becomes a resource — capable of pursuing federal, state, foundation, and corporate grants that bring outside dollars into your building.

There is a theoretical reason this process works. Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis — the same framework underlying the district's literacy initiative — holds that acquisition occurs when a learner encounters material at the level just beyond their current competence: $i+1$. You already have the idea (i). This guide stretches you one level further: from having a good idea to writing a funded proposal ($i+1$). That stretch is not arbitrary. It is the point. A teacher who completes this process does not just submit one grant. She becomes someone who knows how to move an idea through an institution — and that is a different kind of professional than she was when she walked in.

One more thing before we begin: AI is a tool — a powerful one. But the idea must come from you. No AI system can identify the gap in your students' learning, the unmet need in your classroom, or the vision you carry for what education could be. That is your contribution. What AI can do is help you articulate, research, and refine that vision into a document worthy of funding.

Section 1: The On-Ramp — What This Process Is Designed to Do

1.1 Why Teachers Don't Write Grants

Ask most experienced teachers why they haven't written a grant proposal, and the answers cluster around three themes:

- “I don't know where to start.”
- “I don't have time to do it properly.”
- “I wouldn't know how to write it.”

None of these is a statement about the quality of the teacher's ideas. They are statements about process — and process is exactly what this guide addresses.

The IGP on-ramp is designed to remove all three barriers at once. You start with an idea you already have. AI compresses the time required from weeks to a single day. And this guide shows you exactly how to write it — step by step, with examples drawn from real proposals developed within this initiative.

1.2 The Principal's Role

If you are working through this guide, your principal identified you as a teacher with an idea worth developing. That is not a small thing. It means:

- Your principal has already endorsed the direction of your idea
- The IGP pilot is funded from your building's own budget — you have a funding source before you write a single word
- Your proposal will travel a defined path to the Board of Education, not disappear into an inbox
- If your program succeeds and scales, you are the recognized expert — and the first person the district asks to lead the expansion

For principals, this process serves a second purpose: it builds capacity. A teacher who completes this guide doesn't just submit one IGP proposal. They learn a process that transfers directly to Title I applications, state education grants, private foundation awards, and corporate giving programs. Every outside dollar a Sioux Falls teacher wins is a dollar that did not come from local taxpayers.

1.3 Where This Process Leads

The IGP is the first grant you write. It is designed to be the easiest: your principal has already approved the pilot, the funding source is your own building's budget surplus, and you have institutional support throughout. No outside grant offers those conditions.

But the skills you develop here transfer exactly. The table below shows the range of grant sources available to teachers who know how to write a competitive proposal:

Source	Examples
Federal	Title I, Title II, Title IV, Perkins, IDEA, E-Rate
South Dakota State	SD Department of Education competitive grants, Governor's Office of Economic Development, state literacy and STEM initiatives

Source	Examples
Private Foundations	Gates Foundation, Walton Family Foundation, Lilly Endowment, local community foundations
Educational Nonprofits	NEA Foundation, ISTE, Dollar General Literacy Foundation, PTA grants, regional education funds
Corporate Giving	Local business partnerships, chamber of commerce education funds, corporate foundation grants

The IGP is the on-ramp. The destination is a faculty that pursues and wins grants from all of these sources — year after year — at no cost to local taxpayers.

Section 2: What the Teacher Must Bring

2.1 The Idea

Every strong grant proposal begins with a teacher who has noticed something — a gap, an opportunity, a student need that existing programs are not meeting. This insight is irreplaceable. AI cannot generate the classroom knowledge that comes from years of professional experience and daily contact with students.

Before you open an AI tool, answer these four questions in plain language — even a sentence or two each:

- What is not working for my students, and why?
- What approach, if funded, might change that outcome?
- Has anyone else tried this? What did the research show?
- How would I know if it worked?

Your answers to these questions are the raw material of your proposal. Everything AI does builds on them. The more specific and honest your answers, the stronger the proposal that emerges.

2.2 A Working Knowledge of the Research

You do not need to be a researcher to write a grant proposal. You need to demonstrate that your idea is grounded in evidence — that someone has studied the approach you are proposing and found it worth pursuing.

One of the three proposals developed within this initiative was built around Stephen Krashen’s Input Hypothesis¹ — specifically, that students acquire reading ability not through drilling or testing but through sustained, self-selected, low-anxiety exposure to comprehensible text. The proposal correctly reflected that Krashen’s theory is not simply about “i+1” input levels. It also encompasses affective filter theory (anxiety blocks acquisition), the acquisition-learning distinction, and the importance of free voluntary reading as the curriculum itself — not merely a supplement.²

A note on what AI did here: The AI independently incorporated the affective filter and the acquisition-learning distinction without being explicitly directed to do so — because it

recognized what a complete and accurate treatment of Krashen’s theory required. The teacher had not mentioned these concepts by name. This is the kind of substantive contribution AI makes when the teacher brings genuine subject-matter knowledge to the conversation. It does not invent expertise. It amplifies the expertise that is already there.

A second proposal developed within this initiative illustrates the same principle at the other end of the learning spectrum. The K–6 AI-Assisted Authorship Program proposes that students use AI to create original published works — picture books and illustrated stories in the early grades, and in later grades whatever form best fits the idea: websites, apps, videos, songs, or structured debates. The output grows as the student grows. In each case, the student supplies the idea, the experience, and the voice. AI handles transcription, layout, and publishing. The student is the author. The AI is the press. That is the same division of labor this guide asks of you.

This depth of grounding did not require writing an academic paper. It required knowing the core argument well enough to direct AI toward accurate, relevant research support. That is all this process asks of you.

Section 3: How AI Assisted in Developing Real Proposals

The following is an honest account of the division of labor in developing the three proposals completed within this initiative: the K–6 AI-Assisted Authorship Program, the district literacy initiative grounded in Krashen’s Input Hypothesis, and the Innovation Grant Pool proposal itself.

It is shared not to diminish the teacher’s role, but to show what becomes possible when human expertise and AI capability are properly combined.

3.1 What the Teacher Did

- Identified the educational problem to be addressed
- Brought subject-matter knowledge (Krashen’s Input Hypothesis; AI literacy in schools; the authorship model for student publishing)
- Made all strategic and pedagogical decisions
- Reviewed, approved, and took ownership of the final document
- Directed revisions based on professional judgment

3.2 What AI Did

- Conducted background research on relevant theories and published studies
- Drafted and revised proposal language based on teacher direction
- Formatted the document to professional standards: headings, footnotes, spacing, consistent tone
- Suggested structural improvements — including adding a Definition of Success section
- Edited for clarity, concision, and adherence to Strunk & White principles
- Calibrated tone for the intended audience: district administrators, board members, or foundation reviewers
- Identified internally inconsistent language and flagged it for teacher review

- Incorporated research dimensions not explicitly requested — because it recognized what a complete treatment required
- Drew on emerging cognitive research³ to strengthen the evidence base for AI-related proposals

3.3 The Roles AI Played

Over the course of developing these proposals, AI served in four distinct roles. None of them replaced the teacher. What changed was the speed and ease with which strong ideas became strong documents.

Role AI Played	What That Meant in Practice
Campaign Manager	Shapes the overall strategic direction of the initiative — which grants to pursue, in what order, and how to position the proposal for its audience.
Political Strategist	Advises on how proposals will be received by different audiences: a school board, a foundation review panel, a federal program officer.
Executive Secretary	Handles drafting, formatting, research compilation, and revision across multiple document versions.
Research Assistant	Locates, synthesizes, and accurately represents relevant studies, theories, and evidence — including dimensions the teacher did not explicitly request.

3.4 The Result

What would typically require multiple drafts over several days — a literature search, consultation with a curriculum coordinator, and back-and-forth editing — was accomplished in a single focused working session. The final documents were polished, footnoted, and ready for submission.

This is the promise of AI-assisted grant writing: not that the teacher does less thinking, but that the distance between thinking and submitting is dramatically shortened.

Section 4: Best Practices for Grant Proposal Writing

4.1 Start with a Rough Draft — Then Ask AI to Critique It

The most effective technique is to write a rough draft yourself first — even a few bullet points or a paragraph — and then ask AI to critique it. This approach has three advantages:

- It forces you to articulate your own thinking before AI shapes it
- AI can identify gaps in logic, missing evidence, and weak phrasing
- The resulting revision is more authentically yours

Say to the AI: “Here is my rough draft. Critique it for clarity, evidence, structure, and persuasiveness — then suggest a revised version.” AI will treat this as a genuine editorial task, not simply polish what you wrote.

This is also how you maintain ownership of the proposal. A document that begins with your thinking and is refined by AI is yours. A document that begins with an AI prompt and is approved by you is weaker — and reviewers can often tell the difference.

4.2 Include a Definition of Success

Every strong grant proposal answers the question: how will we know if this worked? A Definition of Success section signals to reviewers that the proposal is an accountable commitment, not aspirational wishful thinking.

This section should include:

- Measurable outcomes — reading level gains, engagement metrics, survey results, attendance data
- A timeline for measurement
- Who will assess the results
- What threshold constitutes success versus a need for adjustment

For IGP proposals, the Board of Education establishes the Definition of Success before the pilot launches and may suggest modifications. This is a governance function, not a gatekeeping one — it ensures the pilot is designed to answer questions the district actually needs answered.

For outside grants, the funder's review panel plays the same role. The more precisely you define success before they ask, the stronger your application.

4.3 Use Footnotes

Footnotes do three things in a grant proposal:

- They demonstrate that claims are evidence-based, not opinion
- They keep the main text readable without academic clutter
- They signal professional preparation and respect for the reviewer's time

Ask AI to identify every factual or theoretical claim in your proposal that should be cited, then generate appropriate footnotes. Review them for accuracy before submitting. AI can make errors in citations — the teacher's final review is not optional.

4.4 Calibrate Tone for the Audience

A proposal written for a teacher audience reads differently from one written for a school board, a federal program officer, or a foundation review panel. AI calibrates tone on request. Be explicit:

- "Write this for a district administrator who values fiscal accountability."
- "Write this for a foundation reviewer who funds literacy programs."
- "Write this for a teacher audience — collegial, practical, not academic."

The three proposals developed within this initiative were written for different audiences and required different tonal registers. AI handled both adjustments without requiring the teacher to rewrite from scratch.

4.5 Delegate Formatting to AI

Professional formatting — consistent heading levels, appropriate spacing, footnote numbering, clean paragraph structure — is time-consuming to produce manually and easy to do poorly. Delegate it entirely to AI. Your energy is better spent on content and ideas.

This includes the final submission package. Once your proposal is complete, ask AI to produce the one-page request form summary, check that footnotes are numbered correctly, and ensure heading levels are consistent throughout. These are mechanical tasks. AI does them well and quickly.

4.6 The Prompting Sequence — Step by Step

If you have never worked with AI on a writing task, the following sequence gives you a starting point. Each step builds on the previous one.

- **Step 1 — Describe the problem.** Tell AI what you have observed in plain language: what isn't working, for which students, and why you believe it matters. Ask AI to turn your description into a structured problem statement.
- **Step 2 — Request the research base.** Ask AI to identify the relevant research or theoretical framework that supports your proposed approach. Review the output carefully — ask follow-up questions if something seems incomplete or unfamiliar.
- **Step 3 — Write your rough draft.** Write a paragraph or two describing your proposed program in your own words. Then ask AI to critique it: "What is weak, what is missing, and what should be strengthened?"
- **Step 4 — Develop the Definition of Success.** Ask AI to help you define what success looks like in measurable terms. Be specific about your student population, the timeline, and the data you can realistically collect.
- **Step 5 — Build the budget.** Describe what you need to purchase or fund. Ask AI to organize this into an itemized budget with justifications for each line item.
- **Step 6 — Request a full draft.** Ask AI to assemble all the components into a complete proposal draft. Review it against your own knowledge of the problem — correct anything that doesn't reflect your intent.
- **Step 7 — Polish and footnote.** Ask AI to edit for concision, check for internally inconsistent language, add appropriate footnotes, and format the document for professional submission.

Section 5: The Complete Grant Submission Package

A complete grant submission consists of up to three documents. The IGP requires all three. Outside grant applications typically require the first two, with the training document required only when the proposed program includes professional development for other teachers.

5.1 The Proposal Document

This is the primary document — the full case for the program. Every strong proposal includes:

- Statement of need: the specific student learning problem being addressed
- Research or theoretical foundation: the evidence base for the proposed approach

- Proposed program: what will be implemented, by whom, and how
- Budget: itemized, with justification for each expense
- Definition of Success: measurable outcomes, timeline, and assessment method
- Scaling description: what district-wide or school-wide adoption would look like if results warrant it
- Timeline: implementation, mid-cycle check-in, and reporting dates
- Footnotes and references

5.2 The IG-R (Teacher Innovation Request) Form

Separate from the proposal, the IG-R (Teacher Innovation Request) is the existing district protocol — a one-page administrative document used to formally initiate the grant review process with the School Board or the relevant funding organization.⁴ It includes the teacher's name, school, program title, funding requested, and a one-paragraph summary. AI can draft this in minutes once the proposal is complete.

5.3 Teacher Training Document (Where Applicable)

When the proposed program includes professional development for other teachers, a separate training document is required. It should outline:

- What teachers will learn
- How training will be delivered: workshop, self-paced, peer-led, or blended
- Timeline and contact hours
- Connection to district professional development standards

This guide is itself an example of the kind of professional development content that can be produced as part of a grant proposal — developed using the same AI-assisted approach it describes.

Section 6: From the IGP to the Wider World

The IGP is the first grant you write under this program. It is the easiest version of the process: your principal has approved the pilot, your building's budget surplus is the funding source, and the Board of Education is your review panel. No outside grant offers those conditions.

But the proposal you produce here — the problem statement, the research foundation, the Definition of Success, the budget narrative — is the same document, in structure and in quality, that federal agencies, state education departments, private foundations, and corporate giving programs expect to receive.

Teachers who complete this process are not just IGP participants. They are grant writers. And the district benefits from every outside dollar they bring in.

What changes between the IGP and an outside grant: The funder changes. The audience changes. The tone may shift. The specific formatting requirements of the application will differ. **What does not change:** you identify the problem, you bring the professional knowledge, you own the result. AI handles the rest.

The IGP is designed to give every participating teacher a funded pilot, a documented outcome, and a grant proposal they wrote themselves. That combination — experience, evidence, and a track record — is exactly what outside funders want to see in subsequent applications.

Write this one well. It will not be the last.

A Final Word to Teachers

You already have the most important ingredient for a successful grant proposal: you know your students. You have seen what works and what does not. You carry professional knowledge that no algorithm possesses.

The grant program exists to fund your best ideas. This guide exists to make sure those ideas reach the page in a form that earns the support they deserve.

Use the tools available to you. Ask AI to research, draft, critique, and format. But never forget: the proposal is yours. The vision is yours. The impact on students will be yours.

Your principal sent you here because they believe your idea is worth developing. Prove them right.

— *Sioux Falls Innovation Grant Pool, 2026*

Notes

¹ Stephen Krashen, *The Input Hypothesis: Issues and Implications* (1985). Krashen's theory holds that language and literacy acquisition occur when learners encounter comprehensible input slightly beyond their current level ($i+1$), in a low-anxiety environment, with no forced output or testing of recreational reading.

² Krashen distinguishes between 'acquisition' (subconscious, natural) and 'learning' (conscious, rule-based). Testing students on pleasure reading converts an acquisition activity into a learning task, undermining its effectiveness. The affective filter hypothesis further holds that anxiety, low motivation, or low self-confidence can block acquisition even when comprehensible input is present.

³ MIT Media Lab (2023); Gerlich, M. (2025). Studies suggest that heavy AI reliance without deliberate cognitive engagement may reduce critical thinking and retention — underscoring the importance of human-directed AI use in educational settings.

⁴ The IG-R (Teacher Innovation Request) is the existing district protocol — a brief administrative document, separate from the full proposal — used to formally initiate the grant review process with the School Board or the relevant funding organization. For IGP proposals, submission through the IG-R gives the pilot access to district resources, a place in the annual Innovation Showcase, and eligibility for citywide scaling.