

# Grant Narrative Structure Guide

Module 4.6 — Fundraising Narratives: Story Map Adapted for Institutional Funders

## Why Institutional Funders Need Stories Too

Foundation program officers are humans. Transportation works on them too. They read dozens of grant narratives describing programs — organizational history, staff credentials, logic models, evaluation frameworks. Most of these documents are interchangeable. A narrative that transports the reader is remembered. The six-element structure below adapts the Story Map for the institutional funder context without sacrificing the required programmatic content.

## The Six-Element Grant Narrative Structure

Element	What It Does	Craft Note	Target Length	Annotated Example
1. Setting (Problem Landscape)	The world as it is — the conditions that make this grant necessary	Open with a specific scene or documented condition. Not your organization's history. The problem's geography.	75–100 words	'In [County], commercial dog tethering affects an estimated [X] animals with no current legal protections and an underfunded animal control structure that cannot investigate cruelty complaints proactively.'
2. Character (Affected Population)	The specific individual or community that experiences the problem	Name (real, anonymized, or composite) + one specific detail that makes the character human, not demographic	50–75 words	'Maria is a humane investigator who covers 800 square miles with a vehicle that has 140,000 miles. Last spring, she received 47 tethering complaints. She investigated 12.'
3. Conflict (Cost of Inaction)	What happens if this work isn't funded	Specific, documentable consequence. Not vague harm — a named loss.	75–100 words	'Without this funding, the investigation capacity gap remains. Complaints go uninvestigated. Community trust in humane enforcement erodes. Legislative momentum — built over two advocacy years — stalls for lack of an enforcement infrastructure to point to.'
4. Turn (Your Intervention)	What your organization's work makes possible that wouldn't happen otherwise	Be precise about what changes — not what you'll do, but what becomes possible because you did it	100–125 words	'This grant funds a full-time cruelty investigator, a revised tethering ordinance adoption campaign in three counties, and a community reporting system. The investigator covers what Maria cannot — tripling investigation capacity without adding burden to existing staff.'

5. Resolution (Measurable Outcome)	The specific, measurable change your work produces	Numbers, timelines, and named indicators. What will be different, by how much, by when?	75–100 words	'By grant year end: 90 complaints investigated (vs. 12 baseline); tethering ordinance adopted in two of three target counties; 500 community members trained as humane reporters; recidivism rate tracked for 12 months post-investigation.'
6. Ask (Grant Request + Narrative Tie)	The specific funding request, tied explicitly to the narrative's emotional payload	The amount, what it funds specifically, and a single sentence connecting the dollars to the story	50–75 words	'We request \$[X] to fund Year 1 of this initiative. Every dollar goes to the investigator Maria can't be, the calls that will finally get answered, and the ordinances that will exist because this work happened.'

### What Foundation Program Officers Look For

What They Look For	What It Means for Your Narrative
Clarity of theory of change	Can I follow the logic from this organization's work to the outcome they claim?
Specificity of outcomes	Are the outcomes measurable? Will I know in 12 months whether this worked?
Organizational credibility	Does this organization have the capacity to actually do what they're proposing?
Narrative transportation	Did I care? Did this story make me feel the urgency?
Fit with funder priorities	Does this work fall clearly within our stated grantmaking strategy?