



**Name:** Brandon Shaw  
**Major:** Philosophy and Law  
**Job:** Grants Manager  
**Graduation Year:** 2014

Brandon Shaw serves as the Grants Manager for Second Harvest Food Bank of Middle Tennessee. With a double major while at Lipscomb, Brandon was well-prepared for the many responsibilities required for this position. Read more about his rewarding career and essential skills for success in Grants Management:

**What is the day in the life like at your job?**

I manage all aspects of looking for grant opportunities, researching, writing applications, budgetary allocations, and reporting. Additionally, I represent the organization at official functions, speaking engagements, grant award ceremonies, facility tours, donor meetings, and panel reviews.

**What do you love about your job?**

Grants is at the intersection of every department and function at my organization. I love this because it means I get to play in different areas all the time as an internal consultant. My curiosity is constantly stretching to various corners of the organization where I get to learn about and then write about everything from trucks to volunteers to network servers. The job has great variety for the person who has broad interests.

**What is challenging about your role?**

Details can be difficult to keep up with. There are many small nuanced elements to preparing a grant, tracking its execution through the life of the grant period, and reporting back progress to the funder at the conclusion. Details are very important, and organization becomes essential.

**What are the benefits of working in this field?**

Grants allow one to get broad exposure very quickly. If you are looking to learn a lot in a short amount of time, about nonprofits and the way they operate, this could be the way to go. If you are an introverted person, this field will fit you well as it is much more behind the scenes and less public facing (at most organizations). If you have a good supervisor who can mentor like mine did, you can get started with relatively little experience, unlike in other areas of fundraising such as corporate partnerships or individual giving. It becomes a good steppingstone to other fields as well since many of the skills translate (managing budgets, communication, research, strategic planning, program development, etc.).

**What experiences did you have that prepared you for this role?**

I double majored in two heavy research and writing degree fields: philosophy and law. My summer internship at the state capitol junior year built upon these skills. I worked there full time as a legislative clerk after graduation, further building my skills, especially in editing and attention to detail. My first role at the food bank was in volunteer program management, and I asked for as many learning opportunities as I could outside of that department. I became very good with donor relations which allowed me to be promoted into grants management without prior grant experience.

**What do you see happening in the future for these types of careers?**

Grants is a steady line of work for anyone wanting something stable. As long as you meet your deadlines and consistently hit your grants revenue goals, you should have no problem maintaining a career in the field. But as in any profession, staying abreast of the latest trends, tools, themes, skills, etc. will be important. This can position you to flex and evolve with the industry. For example, the grants landscape is more plenteous than ever with a lot of opportunities out there from many new and old foundations and granting entities. But there are also more nonprofits and philanthropic missions than ever. So, competition is definitely there, and for established organizations like mine, competition is actually increasing as new organizations enter the market. Grant writers must be able to help their organization adapt to shifting trends and respond to new expectations from funders. For example, a major trend currently is a hyper focus on program outcomes backed by data. It is not enough to just say you helped. You must be able to show it with evidence. So, any grant writer will want to make sure they are prepared either with the hard skills of data analytics and logic model development or know their way around them enough to collaborate with others in the organization.

**What should a student know about your field?**

Do not go into grants management unless you are okay with three things: spreadsheets, writing, and hearing “no” a lot. You will prepare many a spreadsheet for internal teams, tracking grants and program metrics, budgets that will accompany your application, and more. Writing will be your every day, and you must be able to do it quickly, succinctly, and clearly. Grants ride a fine line balanced between a mix of technical, stiff writing, and crafting nice heart strings- tugging imagery for the review committee. It is not easy writing and you will go through several drafts, especially as you work to fit the two pages of what you need to say into the half page you’re allowed to submit. And finally, hearing “no” is more common than hearing yes, as with any sales position. You are essentially “selling” the program or project to funders to see who will “buy” it (give you a grant). Not everyone will say yes, and in fact, many will say no. Once you get past your first couple of declined grants, the rejection stops being negative and starts being educational. You figure out what will work better next time. And there is almost always a next time.

**What advice do you have for a student considering a career in your profession?**

Know very clearly why you want to go into grants management, what you hope to learn, and how long you want to stay. Have a plan for your career trajectory. It is okay if that changes and flexes as the years pass but having a plan at the start will guide your professional development. You will be able to quickly identify, isolate, and take advantage of career-building opportunities. To land a job in grants management, think about what transferable skills you have. Gather 3-5 strong writing samples, preferably research based. And once you get the job, make sure you establish recurring reminders of why you do what you do, because on deadline days that vision can get blurry. I personally have motivating notes posted to myself and think of all the people my grant will help feed. That keeps me writing.