

8 Tips As You Begin a Grant Seeking Effort

#1: Make Sure Your Organization is Fundable by Foundations

First things first, is your organization registered with the IRS as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit charitable organization? If not, most foundations will not fund your programs (or you will need to find another nonprofit to serve as your fiscal sponsor). Make sure that you have a copy of your certification letter from the Internal Revenue Service on file (both print & digital), as many foundations will ask for a copy of it with any proposal that you submit.

#2: Use Free Resources to Find Grant Opportunities

You can spend a lot of money on grant resources. There are countless subscription databases and services that will identify grant opportunities for you (and these are great options if you're short on time and have the budget). One of the best sources of grant information is the Foundation Center. Their comprehensive database of foundations, grant opportunities and funded grants is second to none. They offer subscriptions where you can access the data from your own computer; however, they also partner with various entities (typically libraries) throughout the country to offer their database free of charge at their facility. In Pennsylvania, the locations with free access to the Foundation Center's database are:



- Aliquippa: Beaver County Library System
- Allentown: Allentown Public Library
- Bethlehem: Northampton Community College
- Blue Bell: Montgomery County Comm. College
- Bristol: Margaret Grundy Memorial Library
- Butler: Butler Area Public Library
- East Stroudsburg: East Stroudsburg University
- Erie: Erie County Public Library
- Exton: Chester County Library
- Harrisburg: Dauphin County Library System
- Hazleton: Hazleton Area Public Library
- Lancaster: Lancaster Public Library
- Philadelphia: Free Library of Philadelphia
- Pittsburgh: Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh
- Pittston: Nonprofit & Comm. Assistance Center
- Pottstown: Pottstown Regional Public Library
- Reading: Reading Public Library
- Scranton: Albright Memorial Library
- Sharon: Comm. Library of the Shenango Valley
- Washington: Citizens Library
- York: Martin Memorial Library

#3: Don't Build a New Program to Match a Grant Opportunity

When researching grant opportunities, you will inevitably come across foundations that support programs similar to what you offer, but aren't quite a perfect match. It will be very tempting to tweak your program to fit the guidelines of the funder, but you can't do this. This is a very slippery slope that leads to mission drift and many other problems. Your programs are created the way they are to best serve your constituents. Don't let the potential for funding dictate how you fulfill your mission. Create new programs to fulfill your mission, not to obtain funding.



#4: Funders Are People Too – Build a Relationship

As you find potential funding opportunities, the best first step is to simply pick up the phone and give them a call. Many funders (but not all) are more than willing to speak to you about your

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organization and programs. You can essentially vet the program you would be submitting with them before you do all the work of putting together a proposal. They will often provide feedback that makes your proposal even stronger. Remember, funders are people too. Figure out who the decision makers are and build a relationship with them.

#5: Assemble a Fundraising Go Bag



When you're ready to write your first grant it's tempting to go right to the application and start filling in blanks or to just start typing. But you'll be far better off if you take some time to assemble all of the information you'll need for your proposal in advance. There may even be some policies and procedures that your organization will need to create/adopt before you can submit your first grant. Go through the application/proposal requirements and see what you'll need before you start writing. Better yet, take an afternoon and

compile everything that you could possibly need for any application ... this is your "fundraising go bag." Here's a free list of what should go in it:

<http://productivfundraising.com/how-to-assemble-a-fundraising-go-bag/>

#6: Don't Reinvent the Wheel with Each Grant Request

After you write your first proposal, all proposals that follow will be so much easier. Don't reinvent the wheel, just take the information from your first proposal and tweak it for the next funder. You can't blindly send every funder the same proposal, but much of the information will stay consistent. You're just tweaking it for their individual funding preferences and requirements.



#7: Don't Put All Your Eggs in the Foundation Basket

It's easy to get really into writing grants and spend a lot of time doing it – especially once you experience some success. There's quite a rush of adrenaline when you receive that letter or phone call informing you that your request has been funded. But remember, foundation giving only represents 15% of all giving in the US (according to the 2015 edition of Giving USA). What group makes up the bulk of giving (72%)? That's right, individuals. Don't let writing grants take too much time away from getting out there and cultivating relationships with your individual donors. The most successful fundraisers don't spend much time at their desk at all for this reason.

#8: Consider Outsourcing Your Grant Writing

So how do you spend time with your donors and submit a lot of grant requests? That's easy ... you don't write the grants. The job of a development professional is to get the invitation to submit a grant proposal, not to actually write it. There are incredible grant writing freelancers out there that will gladly write your grants for you. And they'll most likely do a better job than you too since they've finely honed their craft and typically know the local foundations and their preferences.



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