

Guide to Winning Small Grants from Community Sources

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Guide to Winning Small Grants from Community Sources

As a math or science leader in your school or district, you have a vision for improving or enhancing programs that help your students achieve and providing your teachers with the skills they need to lead students to that goal.

Sometimes funding is the catalyst that will help you move toward your vision. A foundation or company that invests in your local community may be the best resource for those funds.

To win grant funding from any foundation or corporate giving source, your proposal must be carefully planned, complete, compliant, and persuasive. When it comes to local community giving sources, you should also focus on the benefits your proposed program has for the community, and how you will include community resources to make the project sustainable.

A grant reviewer will receive many proposals and it is an advantage if you make sure that you carefully and succinctly answer these questions within your proposal:

1. What is that you want to accomplish?
2. What are the costs associated with this purpose or goal or project?
3. How long will take to complete the project?
4. How does your proposal directly relate to the sponsor's areas of interest?
5. What will be the outcomes and how will they make a difference in your district, school, students, discipline, etc. (Whatever the appropriate categories are.)
6. What has been accomplished already in your area of need?
7. How do you plan to implement your project?
8. How will you measure your results?
9. Why should you or your organization carry out this project rather than someone else?

Step 1: Define Your Need

Foundations and corporate giving sources fund projects to solve problems or address clearly defined needs and issues in your community. Most granting organizations look for a program that has a strategic impact and sustainability beyond the life of the grant.

If you have a small need, you should frame it as part of a larger need with a vision of success for your students and community. An example of such a project would be to revamp 7th and 8th grade mathematics curricula to increase the percentage of students who successfully pass Algebra I. As part of that project, you will integrate graphing technology into instruction and provide extensive professional development to the mathematics teachers. Additional components of such a program could include developing an after-school tutoring program in conjunction with the Boys & Girls Clubs, and evaluating the program at various points during the year. You may only ask the funding organization for money to fund a portion of this entire program, but providing the full scope of your vision will show the organization that you are serious, organized and likely to be successful.

The first step in creating a proposal is defining your need. This is the most important step, and you should start by asking some key questions:

- Why are you requesting funds? (This will become your need statement.)
- How will this funding improve your school and community? (This will become your mission/goal.)
- What will it take to reach this goal? (This will drive the budget and the identification of your partners.)
- What will the community look like when this need is addressed? (This will become your project goal.)
- Who else in the community supports addressing this need? (These people and organizations will become your partners.)

Step 2: Seek the Support of Your School or District

Once you have conceptualized your project, you may want or need to get the support of your school or district leadership to apply for a grant. Begin by discussing your project idea with your department chair and/or your principal. Your district may have an Office of Grants and Development that could assist you in identifying potential funding sources and help you write your proposal.

Step 3: Identify Potential Funding Sources and Gather Information About Them

You will need to engage in some research to find potential funders. The Internet may be a good place to start, but you may be able to narrow your search quickly by looking up local business associations (Rotary International, a local Business Roundtable, an economic development office, a convention and visitors bureau).

You should also check with colleagues in your school, district or neighboring communities to learn where they have received grant funding for special projects. In addition, use your local library to research companies with headquarters in your community and check with your school district office to identify funding sources. Often large corporations or foundations will specify on their web site what specific geographical areas that they are most interested to receive a proposal. This may be given in terms of a state, city or a region where one of their offices are located. Don't rule out a funding opportunity without first making sure that you meet the eligibility criteria.

Once you have developed your list of potential funders, contact them to request their annual reports (this will give you a list of the kinds of programs the organization tends to fund), grant guidelines, and application forms. With the advent of the Internet most funding organizations will provide you with this information either at their web site or by providing you the email address to request this information.

Foundations and corporate giving sources may provide you with very detailed information about themselves and their proposal requirements, or they may simply tell you to submit a short written request for funds. After you have studied the available information, ask yourself the following questions:

- Does the organization give grants in my geographic area?
- Does the organization support science and mathematics projects in the grades and populations I want to reach?

- Does the organization provide direct support for projects, as opposed to other funding mechanisms such as loans, matching funds, or scholarships?
- Based on the organization's funding patterns and requirements, is my proposal likely to be competitive?

Step 4: Organize to Win

Once you have completed your research and chosen which grant(s) to pursue, organize to win. This will involve the following activities:

- Receiving formal permission from your school or district, if necessary.
- Creating a grant template that will provide you with the exact information you need for each section of your proposal. This will also include the margins, font, size of font, number of pages, the file format for submission (MS Word or Adobe pdf or Excel)
- Developing a schedule for your proposal development so that you can submit a complete, compliant, and persuasive proposal by the deadline.
- Identifying your partners and the information and support they will need to provide you.
- Including a deadline for each type of information so that everyone is aware of time limitations and the importance of their contribution.
- Outlining the entire application from the cover letter through the appendices.

Step 5: Develop Your Proposal

As you put together your application, you may, depending upon the proposal requirements, need to undertake up to three kinds of overlapping activities: (1) completing the required forms, which will require the signatures of school officials; (2) writing the narrative proposal; (3) and (4) developing the appendices. Funding organizations will ask you to submit either a letter of inquiry or a full proposal. A letter of inquiry helps the organization determine whether it is interested in reviewing your proposal and will save you the time and energy of developing a proposal if the organization is not interested in funding your project.

On the following page is a sample of a one-page letter of inquiry. Please note that many funding organizations have separate "letter of intent" or inquiry deadlines.

Sample Letter of Inquiry

August 10, 2007

Heading

Dear Mr. Jones:

I am writing this letter of inquiry to determine whether or not the Jones Foundation would be interested in accepting a grant proposal to improve the teaching of Algebra I courses in Hometown's three high schools. The Jones Foundation has a history of funding high school science programs in Hometown, especially the Community Science Fair, which is so valuable to our students. Indeed, one of last year's winners went on to compete in the state Science Fair, representing Hometown very well! Because of your dedication to our high school students, I hope that you will see value in supporting our efforts to improve Algebra I learning, which is greatly needed for us to meet state standards and to assure our students take the higher mathematics courses they need to be ready for work and higher education.

For the last four years, standardized test scores in Algebra I courses have fallen an average of 17 percent at all of Hometown's three high schools. This drop in test scores means that many of Hometown's students will not succeed in mathematics, for without a strong foundation in basic Algebra they are likely to do poorly in Geometry and Advanced Algebra.

The Hometown School District has just purchased Texas Instruments TI-84 Plus Silver Edition Graphing Calculators for the students and teachers in each high school. These calculators are an excellent tool for helping students to understand algebra and graphing concepts in new and powerful way, for all of our Algebra I students. Teachers, however, do not know how to use the calculator effectively, and they need to redesign their curricula to incorporate the new technology into their day-to-day lessons. To accomplish this, the Hometown School District would like to host a two-week summer institute with follow-up activities for its 10 high school mathematics teachers to (1) learn to use the Calculator; and (2) begin jointly developing new lessons plans. We are confident that the combination of new technology and improved lesson plans will lead to greater success in Algebra I for our students.

We estimate that the two-week summer institute and fall follow-up activities would cost approximately \$7,500.00. Would the Jones Foundation be interested in considering this kind of application?

Thank you very much for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Many foundations and corporate giving sources have specific application guidelines. Some, however, do not. If you receive no guidelines, you may want to include the following information in your proposal narrative, which should not exceed five pages:

- Measurable, time-framed goals and outcomes.
- Detailed description of proposed project.
- Evaluation plan—this may be as much to meet your own school and district needs as the granting organization’s needs.
- Plan for sustainability beyond the granting period.
- Management of project and brief descriptions of key personnel.
- Organizational/School District background or overview.

In your appendices, you should attach a budget that includes the following categories: (1) personnel; (2) fringe benefits; (3) supplies; (4) equipment; (5) other expenses. The appendices also should include resumes of key personnel and a letter of support from your principal or superintendent.

Despite their variety, winning grant proposals usually answer the following questions clearly, concisely, and persuasively:

- What is the problem you are addressing?
- What is your solution?
- Does your project description answer the classic questions: Who? What? Where? How? Why?
- Why is it likely to be a sound and cost-effective solution?
- Why are you qualified to do it?
- How will you sustain your project?
- How will you measure outcomes and success?

Step 6: Have Your Proposal Reviewed by a Third Party

The most effective way to improve your proposal is to have a fellow teacher or administrator who has not been involved in the proposal process review it. The reviewer should provide line-by-line comments and changes and should focus on the following questions:

- Is the proposal well-organized and easy to follow?
- Is the information clearly presented and factually correct?
- Is the writing free of jargon and acronyms?
- Is the proposal fully responsive to the grant guidelines?
- Does the proposal demonstrate a superior understanding of the needs and problems?
- Is the proposed approach sound? Does it offer realistic solutions?
- Are there any problems? If so, how would you fix them?

Step 7: Revise, Finalize, Submit, and Create Documentary File

Use the reviewer's comments to revise and finalize your application. Make sure that you have addressed all the requirements and that the application is complete, neat, easy to read, and free of typographical and other errors.

Proposal readers review many proposals in a short period of time after the submission deadline. Be sure your proposal is easy to read. Choose a clear font type and size, leave plenty of white space on your page and clearly label each section of your proposal. After you submit your proposal, immediately create a file for it that includes all electronic documents and paper copies of the proposal.

Many organizations will send you a 'confirmation of receipt'. Place this document in your documentary file. If you do not receive a confirmation notice, please call to make sure that your proposal was received. Many things can happen along the way and this is an area that proactive measures are necessary.

Links to Other Grant Writing Resources

The following Web sites have an abundance of good information on writing strong proposals. You will notice overlap in some information, which should be taken as reinforcement that certain things are very important.

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance – Developing and writing grant proposals. This is a must-read for those applying for federal grants.

http://12.46.245.173/pls/portal30/CATALOG.GRANT_PROPOSAL_DYN.show

Corporation for Public Broadcasting – Basic Elements of Grant Writing

<http://www.cpb.org/grants/grantwriting.html>

The Foundation Center – A Proposal Writing Short Course

<http://fdncenter.org/learn/shortcourse/prop1.html>

Grant proposal information – From the Center for Nonprofit Management in Los Angeles, CA

<http://www.silcom.com/~paladin/promaster.html>

Lone Eagle Consulting – Grant Writing Tips

<http://lone-eagles.com/granthelp.htm>

The Minnesota Council on Foundations – Writing a Successful Grant Proposal

<http://www.mcf.org/mcf/grant/writing.htm>

National Science Foundation – A Guide for Proposal Writing

<http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/1998/nsf9891/nsf9891.htm>

Non-profit guides – Offers sample letters of inquiry and various formats

<http://www.npguides.org>

SchoolGrants – Grant Writing Tips

<http://www.schoolgrants.org/tips.htm>

University of Wisconsin Grants Information Center – an excellent listing of grant resources

<http://grants.library.wisc.edu/organizations/proposalwebsites.html>

(Please note these are links to outside resources we think you might be interested in visiting. TI is not responsible for the content, accuracy, or functionality of any non-TI site.)

Books on Grant Writing

Best Practices in Grants & Funding, eSchool News Special Report.

This booklet provides strategies and techniques for developing proposals and includes sample documents and best practices. Purchase at: http://www.eschoolnews.com/catalog/product_info.php?cPath=26&products_id=30

Complete Idiot's Guide to Grant Writing, Thompson, Mandy, Alpha; 2007

A comprehensive guide for all levels providing information on the grant writing process and components. Includes a CD loaded with sample applications, proposals, and follow-up letters.

Purchase at:

http://www.pppindia.com/cgi-bin/shop/bab_products_catalog.cgi?Operation=ItemLookup&ItemId=1592575897

Demystifying Grant Seeking: What You Really Need to Do to Get Grants

Golden-Brown, Larrissa and Brown, John, John Wiley and Sons Inc, 2001

The book provides a systematic and logical way of searching for grants, and helps to identify which foundations to approach. Purchase at: <http://www.addall.com/detail/0787956503.html>

Everything Grant Writing Book: Create the Perfect Proposal to Raise the Funds You Need

Tremore, Judy and Burke-Smith, Nancy, Adams Media Corp, 2003

Offers advice to grant writers on how to work within the competitive market to obtain the funds most suitable to given needs. Purchase at: <http://www.addall.com/detail/158062877X.html>

Finding Funding, 4th ed., Brewer, Ernest, and Charles M. Achilles, Jay R. Fuhrman, Connie Hollingsworth. Corwin Press, 2001.

This book includes strategies for writing successful government and foundation grants and includes project management and Internet use. Purchase at: <http://www.corwinpress.com/book.aspx?pid=5263>

Fundraising For Dummies, Second Edition Mutz, John, John Wiley & Sons, 2005

A straight-forward detailed guide to the basics of fundraising, with more than 25 percent new material.

Purchase at:

http://www.pppindia.com/cgi-bin/shop/bab_products_catalog.cgi?Operation=ItemLookup&ItemId=0764598473

Grantseeking: A Step-by-Step Approach, rev. ed. Zimmerman, Robert M. San Francisco, CA: Zimmerman, Lehman & Associates, 1998.

The book explains the how to's of: writing a letter of intent, with a sample, creating a proposal and budget, and follow-up with funders. Purchase at: <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/B0007YLEOU/>

I'll Grant You That, Burke, Jim and Carol Ann Prater, Heinemann, 2000.

This resource is a book and CD-ROM for finding funds, designing projects, and writing proposals. Purchase at:

<http://www.heinemann.com/shared/products/E00197.asp>

The First-Time Grantwriter's Guide to Success, Knowles, Cynthia, Corwin Press, 2002

Presents a systematic approach identifying internal needs and moves through the process of research, proposal development, and outreach to funders. Purchase at:

<http://www.corwinpress.com/booksProdReviews.nav?prodId=Book225477>

The Foundation Center's Guide to Proposal Writing, 4th ed. Geever, Jane C. United States of America, 2004.

Provides information on how to prepare award winning proposals, including examples. Purchase at:

http://fdncenter.org/marketplace/catalog/product_monograph.jhtml?id=prod10047

The Grantwriter's Internet Companion, Peterson, Susan, Corwin Press, 2000.

This book offers tools for using the Internet to find funding and grants. Purchase at:

<http://www.corwinpress.com/book.aspx?pid=5184>

Winning Grants Step by Step, Carlson, Mim. San Francisco, CA: Support Centers of America, 1995.

Contains exercises designed to help with proposal planning and writing skills and to meet the requirements of both government agencies and foundation funders. Purchase at *Amazon.com* or:

<http://www.josseybass.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-078795876X.htm>

Writing for a Good Cause: The Complete Guide to Crafting Proposals and Other Persuasive Pieces for Non-Profits, Furlich, Danielle S, and Barbato, Joseph, Simon and Schuster, 2000

A comprehensive how-to book, furnishing helpful advice on how to write the best proposal--from initial research to final product. Purchase at:

http://www.pppindia.com/cgi-bin/shop/bab_products_catalog.cgi?Operation=ItemLookup&ItemId=0684857405