Wilder Research

Finding Funds: Sources and tips
Tips from Wilder Research program evaluation workshop series

Fundraising in an uncertain economic environment can be especially challenging. To be competitive among the many organizations vying for a limited supply of funding dollars, it is critical that your organization shows potential funders their investment is a good one.

First, you will want to explore a variety of funding sources – government, family, private and corporate foundations, and churches and organizations – and learn about their review process, and reviewers. Are they experts in the topic? Will they be receptive to your approach? Are they invested in solving the problem your program addresses?

Writing your proposal

When you find a potential funding fit, review all materials carefully, noting page requirements, deadlines, procedures, and specific instructions. Structure your proposal so that it mirrors the request as closely as possible and clearly demonstrates alignment between your project need and the funder's mission.

Present only the most relevant and compelling information, such as:

- Who benefits from the program and how.
- How the funding will address a need or solve a problem and/or what the potential consequences are of not providing services.
- Current efforts to address the need/problem and gaps that funding will help you address.
- What strategies have proven effective.
- Why your agency is the best choice to do the work (e.g., capacity, relationships, skills).
- How you will demonstrate your program is effective, including outcomes you will measure to show your program's benefits for participants and communities.

> **Common weaknesses reported by reviewers**
> - Proposed topic was seen as unimportant
> - Evidence for the need was insufficient, doubtful, or unsound
> - Potential contribution of the project is overstated
> - Rationale for the project was not valid
> - Applicant seen as not knowing relevant literature

Develop a persuasive argument:

- Know your audience: anticipate and answer questions.
- Make your opening remarks compelling – you have one minute to engage your reviewer.
- Engage your readers both emotionally and intellectually.
- Be sure your argument flows logically and seamlessly.
- Use unbiased language.
- Provide your reviewers with evidence they don't know – it is most likely to change their attitude.
- Avoid basing your need on old, debatable, or controversial sources of evidence.
- Frame your project around the work of others – build on existing research and demonstrate your contribution to improving the knowledge base.

The role of data

Whether you are demonstrating a community need or why your program can best meet it, using the right data is critical to making your case.

But be careful to avoid overwhelming the reader with too many facts and statistics. Look for data that are striking, attention-getting and credible, and that provide solid evidence for the arguments you are making.

Sources you may want to explore using include: data you have collected such as waiting lists and service records, client surveys and interviews, previous evaluation results and secondary data such as government reports, feasibility studies, or needs assessments.

But, again, choose carefully to include only data that reinforce and strengthen your argument. For example, census data may show a large increase in your service area of the type of clients who use your services, or client surveys may show a need for services you do not presently offer.

It is also important to present your data in an easy-to-understand manner such as graphs, charts, and diagrams.

Making evaluation part of your funding request

A general rule is to allocate about 10 percent of your budget for evaluation. Consider the following to demonstrate why your evaluation is necessary:

- Describe your evaluation plan: purpose, questions, target population, data collection methods and analysis, anticipated problems and solutions, and timeline and staffing.
- Outline how you will use evaluation results to improve your program and, if applicable, change systems or policies.
- Consider funder's questions, as well as those of the project staff and broader community.
- Link evaluation questions to the program goals.
- Clearly indicate your criteria to determine how successfully the project meets its objectives.

Funding resources

Foundation centers, computerized databases, publications, and public libraries are some of the resources available to assist your funding search. Some specific resources include:

Charity Channel—www.charitychannel.com
Resources, information, and grant opportunities for nonprofit professionals.

The Chronicle of Philanthropy—http://philanthropy.com
Newspaper for the philanthropy community. Includes RFPs for larger grants and projects.

Federal grants listings—www.grants.gov

Foundation Center—http://fconline.foundationcenter.org/
Paid subscription service provides national updated information on corporate and private foundations. Many libraries provide free access to the directory.

The Grantsmanship Center—http://www.tgci.com/
Provides training and information for grantseekers.

GrantStation—www.grantstation.com
Both free and paid information and training provided in an online format.

Minnesota Council on Foundations—www.mcf.org
Great resource for grants available in Minnesota. Paid subscription service – "Minnesota Grantmakers online."

State of Minnesota Office of Grants Management—http://www.grants.state.mn.us/public/
State grant opportunities listed in one place.