

# STAR REPORT

"School Technology Action Report"



# GRANT-SEEKING ADVICE

you can take to the bank

Proven strategies that every school leader should know

- The 10 most common grant-seeking mistakes—and how to avoid them.
- Seven things every new grant writer should know.
- Five ways to beat those grant deadlines—and boost your funding chances, too.
- How to know when to apply for a grant, learn from your rejection, and more.



## About this publication

Times are tough, and schools need every dollar they can find to support their educational programs. This grant-seeking guide intends to help.

Strung throughout its pages are pearls of wisdom from *eSchool News* columnist Deborah Ward, a Certified Fund Raising Executive (CFRE) with more than 20 years of experience writing grant proposals for schools. Deb's monthly column has been a must-read feature of *eSchool News* for more than a dozen years, and we've taken the very best of her advice and assembled it here for your review.

When put into practice, the strategies contained in this guide should pay dividends for your schools. You can read more of Deb's monthly columns, and get the latest school technology funding information, in the Funding Center at **eSchool News Online**:

<http://www.eschoolnews.com/funding>

Good luck!

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## The 10 most common grant-seeking mistakes—and how to avoid them

Here is my list of the 10 most common mistakes made by grant seekers in their proposals, and some advice on how to avoid them. The list is based on my experiences as a proposal writer and reviewer, as well as conversations I've had with several funders over the years:

(1) The writing in the proposal isn't succinct or intelligible, resulting in a proposal that just doesn't make sense.

During my proposal-writing workshops, I often recommend that a finished proposal be given to someone outside the field of education to read before submission. This should help you identify whether any parts need to be rewritten for clarity's sake.

(2) The costs for technology are inaccurate or, in the worst-case scenario, are inflated.

Never guess at the cost of an item in your grant proposal, because chances are good that a staff person or a reviewer will identify a cost that seems inaccurate. This will affect the credibility of your proposal.

(3) No one proofreads the proposal before it is submitted, and the proposal contains typographical or grammatical errors.

Proposals with errors will be read; however, what kind of message does a proposal filled with errors send to a reviewer? (As an added note, don't rely solely on the spell-check function of your word processor; it won't identify words that are misspelled in context but otherwise are valid English words.)

(4) The budget doesn't match the narrative, and the reviewer sees costs on the budget pages that are not mentioned or explained in the narrative.

Always make sure that your budget reflects all project activities mentioned in your narrative, in dollars and cents. Reviewers are likely to suggest that unexplained costs be omitted from the amount of the grant award.

(5) The objectives cannot be measured, because they are too vague and open to individual interpretation in terms of success or failure.

Repeat the following mantra every time you write a proposal: "Objectives must be measurable!" Objectives that are not specific will lead to vague evaluations.



(6) A reasonable amount of time is not allotted to develop a project idea and to write the proposal, resulting in a sloppy, incomplete document.

In most cases, reviewers can easily spot proposals that were written at the last minute. Items are missing, budgets are incomplete, and the proposal sounds choppy and “unfinished.” Never underestimate the time you need to invest upfront to develop a project idea before committing it to paper.

(7) An assumption is made that the reviewers are experts in the subject area and that they understand jargon and acronyms without explanation.

It is important to have command of the language of education and to be able to use some “buzzwords” appropriately, but make sure you explain what you mean to reviewers so there is clear understanding. Remember that a reviewer might not be an educator—he or she might be a proposal writer, bureaucrat, or company representative.

(8) The proposal is full of “buzzwords” and offers little or no substance.

Make sure there is substance to your proposal; don’t hide behind jargon or rely too much on buzzwords as a substitute for telling your own story (see No. 7).

(9) The writer ignores the instructions in the request for proposals (RFP) and violates the rules and directions it specifies.

If you want your proposal to be disqualified without being read, ignore the RFP and write the proposal according to your own rules!

(10) Funders are selected because they have money, not because there is a close fit between the project idea and the funders’ interests.

Funders publish their interests for a reason, and they will not change their areas of interest based on a good project idea. In fact, your proposal probably won’t be reviewed if it doesn’t match the funder’s guidelines. Make sure you do the research first, then write your proposal.



## Seven things every new grant writer should know

If you're new to grant writing, it can be an intimidating prospect. To help make the process a little easier, I've come up with a list of seven things every new grant proposal writer needs to know. These are...

(1) Grants are seed money for new projects or initiatives. Do not expect to find a large number of funders who want to give your district money to pay for ongoing teacher salaries, or the rising cost of gas for school buses. Education grants are given to fund projects that meet an identified need and have specific outcomes, often related to students and their academic achievement.

(2) Know the difference between “need” and “want.” Make sure your project meets a specific need that you have identified and that can be supported with documentation. Wanting new technology because the neighboring district just got some will not make a convincing needs statement in your proposal!

(3) The “dogs that eat homework” also eat proposal sections. Make sure you plan ahead, and give other people enough time to provide you with the information you will need for the sections of a proposal. Send them a memo outlining what you need and what they have agreed to supply—and give them a deadline. As the deadline approaches, gently remind them of their assignment.

(4) Be familiar with your district's policies and procedures about submitting proposals. Does your school board have to approve your proposal before it is submitted? Do teachers have to get prior approval before starting to put a proposal together? Does your superintendent want to see a preliminary summary of the project before you start putting the proposal together? Does your district have other policies or procedures? You should know the answers to each of these questions before you get started pursuing grant funding. If there are no policies or procedures in place, develop them.

(5) Always give your business office a “heads up” about proposal submissions.

Ask your business office to play a role in the proposal process by either helping to develop the project budget or reviewing the budget that you have developed. Provide a copy of the grantee requirements to your business office (these are usually stated in the Request for Proposals), so there are no surprises when you receive notification of your grant award.



(6) Spend the majority of your time conducting research, and hone your research skills. Unfortunately, there isn't one magic web site you can visit that lists all of the possible funders and funding opportunities available. You have to identify key web sites to visit (OK, here's one: eSchool News Online) and key eMail lists to join—and always keep your eyes and ears open for potential sources of funding.

(7) Create and maintain a large, impressive network. One of the keys to success in this field is having a network of proposal writing colleagues (who understand the frustrations of rejection and share the joy of getting an award), funders, program officers, legislators, and potential collaborative partners. Build this type of network quickly, and keep adding people to it as you go along—and you will reap many benefits in the months and years to come.



## Five ways to beat those grant deadlines—and boost your funding chances, too

Obviously, your chances of winning a grant are much greater if you have adequate time to prepare. With that in mind, here are five strategies for managing the grant-seeking process in order to minimize your stress—and maximize your earning potential.

(1) Stay on top of the most recent grant listings.

To get advance notice of when U.S. Department of Education (ED) grants are expected to be announced, check ED's Grants Forecast web site ([www.ed.gov/fund/grant/find/edlite-forecast.html](http://www.ed.gov/fund/grant/find/edlite-forecast.html)). This site lists all of the expected discretionary grant programs (and their anticipated deadlines) for the current fiscal year, which runs from October 1 through September 30. To learn about other grant opportunities soon after they're announced, consider subscribing to a service like eSchool News' Grants & Funding ALERT, which lists the latest in school technology grant opportunities ([www.eschoolnews.com/funding](http://www.eschoolnews.com/funding)).

(2) Create a system for quickly disseminating grant information to the appropriate people.

If you don't have a system in your district for disseminating information about grant opportunities to the appropriate staff members within a day of receiving this information, consider putting such a structure in place. For example, place one person (a district grant writer, if you have one) in charge of disseminating this information, and identify which staff members should get which types of information. Curriculum-related grant opportunities that involve the use of technology could be sent your curriculum supervisor and IT director, for instance. Or send grants that relate to math to your math department head, science-related grants to your science department head, reading-related grants to your reading specialists, and so on.

In many cases, your staff will need every second that is available to them to polish a project idea and construct a well-written proposal. You can assist in the process by disseminating information about grant opportunities as quickly as possible—and by supporting the decision that it is too late to apply for a grant if the deadline is, indeed, too soon.

(3) Follow up on all new grant listings immediately.

Even if you don't have time to apply for the current funding cycle, you can still use this information to prepare for future competitions under the same program.





When you see a new grant program, do you check to see if the funder will fund the types of projects you'd like to implement in your district? If so, do you get in touch with the funder or check the web site right away to find out more about the program and what is required in a proposal? Most people who see an impending deadline will become discouraged and let this opportunity pass by. If no follow-up steps are taken immediately, in all likelihood this information is forgotten. However, you can turn this into a proactive situation by taking a few simple steps.

If the description of the grant program seems to fit with some projects you'd like to implement in your district, do the research as soon as you see the information. (Better yet, do the research as soon as you identify some project ideas!) Contact the funder and ask for the RFP (request for proposals) or giving guidelines, or find out if this information is on a web site. Ask if there is a mailing list that you can join to receive more information. For more information about private or corporate foundations, you can also check the Foundation Center database ([www.fdncenter.org](http://www.fdncenter.org)).

(4) Review the rules and consider carefully whether it is realistic to apply.

When you get the information about applying for a particular grant, review it and make a quick decision about whether it is worthwhile to apply for the upcoming competition, based on your answers to these questions:

- Do you meet the funder's eligibility requirements?
- What material must be included in the proposal—and is it readily available?
- What kind of time do your staff have within the time frame to actually work on the grant proposal? Can they get release time during the school day, or is it expected that they will do all of the work on their own time?

Don't let your decision be influenced by the amount of the grant award, because a poorly conceived project that is translated into a hastily written proposal is not likely to be funded anyway.

(5) If you don't apply, use the information you collected to prepare for next year's cycle.

If you decide not to pursue a grant opportunity this year, note when the competition was announced and put it on your calendar for next year. Make a list of all the items you'll need for the application package, and start collecting them at least a month before the anticipated deadline.

Design a simple database to include information about funders for easy reference in future years. Also, keep copies of funders' RFPs and guidelines on hand, so you can get a jump on the competition for the next year.

Using these steps to achieve proactive grant seeking should help reduce the stress of proposal writing and will lead to better applications that contain well-developed projects. Always strive to avoid the last-minute proposal whenever possible!





## How to know when to apply for a grant

If you have been reading RFPs for a while, you might have some clear indicators of what to look for when deciding whether to apply for a particular grant. If you are new to proposal writing, however, the following checklist in the book *The Grants Development Kit* by my colleague, Jacqueline Ferguson, should be helpful.

Ms. Ferguson suggests that you ask yourself the following questions when you discover a grant opportunity:

- (1) Are you eligible?
- (2) Does your project match the funder's purpose and priorities?
- (3) Do you have the necessary facilities and staff to conduct the project?
- (4) Do you have other resources to contribute to the project?
- (5) Does your staff have the expertise to develop and administer the project?
- (6) Who is the competition—and can you compete?
- (7) Are the financial terms of the grant acceptable?
- (8) What are the matching funds requirements, and can you meet them?
- (9) What are the funder's restrictions on the grant and the project?
- (10) Is long-term funding available?
- (11) How will you continue the project after the grant expires?
- (12) What are the costs of developing the proposal?
- (13) What are the chances of winning a grant?
- (14) Is the project feasible in terms of time, funding, allowable costs, expected outcome, evaluation requirements, and other requirements?

Some of these questions seem very simple, and the answers are either “yes” or

“no.” However, for some of the questions, a “no” can present other options. For example, if your district is not eligible, but a higher-education institution is, could you partner with a local college or university in order to apply?



Carefully answer question No. 8 after reading the RFP. Some funders allow matching funds to be a combination of cash and in-kind contributions. If you cannot meet the matching requirement with cash, consider using in-kind contributions if they are allowed. Also, do not overlook the possible in-kind contributions you'll receive if you have partners in your project.

Questions 10 and 11 are concerns shared by many funders who are cautious about being the sole source of funding for a project. Funders rarely want to see a project come to an end when their funding comes to an end. Remember that grants, for the most part, are to be used as seed money to start a project.

Question No. 13 is not a trick question, but it gets to the issue of how many grant awards are going to be distributed and how many first-time grantees there will be. Some competitions only give out one to three awards, and if you are a first-time applicant, your chances of winning an award are probably slim. Some grant programs tend to award funds to applicants they have worked with and funded in the past. The program officer should be able to answer these kinds of questions.

I would recommend that you spend some time asking these questions when an opportunity arises, so that you move forward in the proposal development and writing processes feeling secure about your decision to apply. If you cannot answer the majority of the questions from a strong position, pass up the current opportunity and seek out others that are likely more worth your efforts.



## Follow this sample timeline for grant-seeking success

I've been asked if there is a timeline I use to help structure and streamline the grant-writing process. Here is a sample timeline I follow that would cover a three-month period before the deadline. You can use this sample timeline to develop your own schedule based on the deadline and the amount of time you have available to put your own proposal together.

As you write more proposals, many of these steps will become automatic, and you will develop a sense for the amount of time you'll need to complete the process. If you are new to the grant-writing process, I would highly recommend allotting more time than you think you might need.

### ***Step 1: Three months before the deadline***

- Read the request for proposals (RFP) or giving guidelines carefully and make note of the eligibility and proposal requirements. If collaborative partners are needed, contact and meet with them to discuss your project idea and to determine their interest in participating.
  - Meet with all staff who will be a part of the project and the proposal-writing process, and determine a regular meeting schedule for the next three months.
  - Attend the RFP workshop if one is scheduled, or contact the program officer to discuss your project briefly.
  - Determine whether there is sufficient data to substantiate the need for your project. If there isn't, determine what needs to be collected and start developing and distributing surveys, interviewing stakeholders, or conducting research to substantiate the need.
  - Begin the process of designing and refining your project idea based on its goal(s) and objectives. Discuss staff requirements for the project, as well as training requirements and equipment needs, if applicable.
  - Decide whether you will use an external evaluator. If so, contact this individual to discuss your project and to confirm his or her participation.

### ***Step 2: Two months before the deadline***

- Continue developing your project, filling in specific details such as the activities to be carried out and a timeline for completion.



- Develop a budget based on the methodology of your project. Secure cost estimates if needed. Determine whether in-kind contributions will be supplied by partners. Review the allowable indirect-cost rate published in the RFP.
- Design an evaluation plan based on the project's goal(s) and objectives.
- Ask partners for letters of commitment and provide sample verbiage if needed.

### ***Step 3: One month before the deadline***

- Review the proposal format requirements and type the first draft of your proposal. Spell-check and grammar-check your proposal's narrative. Give the draft to staff and partners for their review and input. Develop and review additional drafts as needed until the final draft is approved.
- Make sure all letters of commitment have been received and contain complete information.
- Review the narrative requirements and make sure each section provides the required information.

### ***Step 4: One week before the deadline***

- Develop the table of contents for your proposal.
- Spell-check and grammar-check your proposal narrative again.
- Submit the budget to your business office for review. Double-check all budget numbers. Compare the budget to your narrative, and make sure all items listed in the budget correspond to activities discussed in the narrative.
- Assemble your proposal and include required attachments in the appendix.
- Submit your proposal.

Following such a timeline is sure to put you on the path to success. Best of luck!



## Read copies of funded proposals to enhance your grant-seeking success

Serving as a grant reviewer is a terrific way to get the “inside scoop” on a particular program’s funding priorities, thus boosting your own chances of applying successfully the following year. Another strategy I have found to be extremely beneficial is referring to copies of successful proposals from the previous funding year.

How can you get copies of funded proposals? For federal and state grants, these are a matter of public record. In fact, many funders post copies of funded proposals on their web sites.

You also could call funders directly and ask them to provide you with copies of one or two funded proposals from the last competition. Frankly, however, this might not get you very far. Program officers are very busy people, and—depending on the support staff they have available to them—they often don’t have the time to make copies and mail them out.

A faster way, and one that can be even more beneficial, is to contact grantees from the most recent program year. Ask for a copy of their funded proposal, and use the opportunity to find out more information from the grantee. For example, I have asked grantees what the reviewers had to say about their proposal—both the strengths they noted and the suggestions they made. This kind of information is extremely helpful as you’re reading the proposal.

In the case of a private funder, I also ask about the process that occurred before the school district submitted its proposal. Did the grant writers meet with program staff before submitting the proposal? Was there an individual in the district who had a connection to the funder and who took part in the process? Did the program staff make any specific suggestions (or, in some cases, requests) as district officials were discussing their project idea? If you are very lucky, a grantee might volunteer to read over your proposal and give you some feedback before it is submitted.

Funded proposals can provide information in terms of both content and format. Look closely at the type of language that was used in successful proposals. In most cases, it will be clear, easy to understand, and contain few acronyms or jargon. If the winning proposals are written in language that could only be understood by research scientists, you have a clue as to the level of writing that will be required!

Looking at the various sections of funded proposals can provide further insight and stimulate ideas for your own proposal. By studying the evaluation section, for example, you might



learn about evaluation tools that could be used to measure your own project's success, as well as who has expertise as an evaluator. The needs section might provide you with ideas for how to document needs in your own district, or it might alert you to important studies that you can use to support the need for your own project.

I also study funded proposals to see how they were “packaged.” In other words, did they use a bullet format in an interesting way? Did they convert a section full of statistics into a graph? Did they use a header or a footer throughout the proposal narrative that added to the visual appeal of the document? Did they use a budget format that makes sense to someone who doesn't understand numbers? I have saved copies of proposals over the years and borrowed some really great ideas to help make my proposals easier to read.



## Don't be afraid to call—or even visit— program officers

Program officers are responsible for providing information about the grant program they administer and giving technical assistance to potential applicants. The contact information for a grant's program officer can be found in its RFP.

Take advantage of this contact information, but don't abuse it. Don't be afraid to get in touch with program officers and draw upon their knowledge and expertise. I have found many program officers to be extremely helpful and receptive to answering my questions. In some cases, this has saved me from submitting a proposal that would not score high enough to be competitive.

I suggest that you contact program officers to do the following:

- Discuss your intended project before starting the proposal, especially if you are not clear whether there is a “tight fit” between your idea and the purpose of the grant program.
- Ask specific questions you might have related to your project, your proposal, or the grant program itself. Do not, however, pick up the phone and call a program officer if you haven't even read the RFP yet. Program officers are far too busy for these types of “fishing expedition” phone calls!
- Ask them to refer you to a prior grantee who might share some similarities with you in terms of project ideas or demographics.

Depending on your level of interest in federal grants and the travel funds available in your district's budget, it might be worth your while to schedule a trip to Washington, D.C., to visit with several program officers face to face. This is easy to do, because the various grant offices are located in close proximity to one another. I would encourage you to schedule these visits during “down” time (usually the summer), rather than at the height of the grants season. It is conceivable that spending a day or two in Washington could result in your seeing as many as 10 or more program officers.

Prepare in advance for your visit with the program officers. Review the RFPs for the grant programs you are interested in, and make a list of the questions that you have regarding the RFPs. Write brief abstracts of your proposed projects, so the program officers have something they can read and react to. Take careful notes of your discussion, so you have something you can refer to when you return. Ask the program officers if they will review a draft





of your proposal before final submission (yes, it's hard to believe, but some federal program officers in certain programs will do this!).

Remember, program officers want high-quality proposals—and they want to help you produce them. View them as important members of your grant-seeking team!



## Turning a negative into a positive: How to learn from rejection

If you write grant proposals for a living, it's inevitable that you'll get a rejection notice at some point in your career.

When this happens, read over the reviewers' comments as objectively as possible and go back over your proposal carefully, with the goal of revising your proposal for the next submission. Learn from your mistakes, and you'll have a better chance of getting your proposal accepted the next time around.

Many reviewers take their scoring responsibilities very seriously and try to do their best to provide you with constructive comments that will help you resubmit a stronger proposal. Read over the comments carefully, and look for statements that are connected to the requirements listed in the RFP, as well as how the information you presented was interpreted. Pay close attention when one or more reviewers make the same types of comments about the same sections of your proposal; this usually means you need to go back and read over these sections again, taking their comments into consideration as you make revisions.

If you are puzzled by the readers' comments, you might want to contact the program officer and request a meeting to review your proposal. Some will do this, but not all. Keep in mind that in most—if not all—cases, the reviewers' comments and scores are considered final. Your final score will not be changed because you disagree with the scores the reviewers gave your proposal. It can help, however, to look at your proposal with a program officer and ask for suggestions to improve it—or, in some cases, to revise your project to make it more “fundable.”

I make it a practice to contact a program officer if a proposal is rejected without comments being provided. You will find that many private funders do not provide comments or use external reviewers or scoring sheets. To find out what the trustees of a private foundation had to say about your proposal, more than likely you'll have to speak to a program officer. Believe it or not, some trustees just need to see the same proposal a few times before they decide to fund your project!

When you call the program officer, try to make an appointment to meet face to face, if possible. If not, be prepared to ask your questions over the phone at that time or to schedule a phone conference in a few days.



Try not to ask questions such as, “Did we do something wrong?” Instead, have specific questions that relate to your proposed project and its components, such as:

- Ask the program officer if your proposed project was perceived as a close match with the funder’s interests. This is often a major reason why a proposal is not funded. Although the funding guidelines might state that the funder wants to fund projects that impact young children, perhaps it is really only interested in projects that provide child care for children up to the age of three. (Of course, keep in mind that doing the research before you submit your proposal should have uncovered this important piece of information!)
- Did the funder support a similar project—and, if so, what did the other project contain that yours did not? Did a similar project include collaborative partners that strengthened the project considerably?
- Was the funder governed by geographic considerations?
- Were your objectives considered to be reasonable or completely unrealistic for the project’s time frame?
- Did you propose to reach a large enough number of students and/or teachers?
- Did you request funds for items that the funder doesn’t support? For example, did you ask for funds for technology from a funder who has no interest in seeing dollars being used for equipment?

Having a list of questions that are somewhat specific will help you receive better guidance for resubmission. The answers to these questions should help you determine whether your proposed project can be strengthened in any way before you approach this funder again—or if you’re better served by moving on to other opportunities.

For a variety of reasons, you might decide not to resubmit a proposal that was rejected the first time. However, keep in mind that a rejection does not have to mean a definitive “no” in regard to your future chances of being funded.



## Use scoring rubrics to increase your funding chances

Grant seekers have many tools available to them that can be used to write winning proposals. One of the tools that doesn't receive a lot of attention is the scoring rubric.

If you have served as a grant reviewer, you will be familiar with scoring rubrics. These are the scoring checklists that reviewers use to score points for proposals. Having served as a reviewer for several grant competitions, I can tell you there are some very good scoring rubrics—and, unfortunately, there are some very bad ones.

As a savvy grant seeker, you should be familiar with them and use them as a tool to help you draft your grant proposal. Look carefully in the Requests for Proposals that you have in your files to see if any of them contain the scoring rubric for the grant review. You might be surprised to find the rubric “buried” in the back of the RFP among pages that you never looked through before you wrote your proposal!

How does a scoring rubric become an important tool to a grant writer? Scoring rubrics will give you several pieces of important information. First, by looking at the rubric, you will be able to see the different categories that will be scored when your proposal is reviewed. After you have written your proposal, but before you submit it, be sure that every category that is listed on the scoring rubric is found in your proposal.

Under each category, check to see what specific items will be addressed. For example, what will be scored under the Personnel section? Will reviewers be looking for the student/teacher ratio? Will the quality of the faculty be scored? Will reviewers be looking at the use of support staff?

A very helpful scoring rubric will give you the various points that are available and, under each point value, tell you the kind of information that needs to be present in order to score that number of points. You should read these point value determinations very carefully, because they might give you enough information to determine what you need to score a “4” versus scoring a “3,” with four being the highest number available.

You might be surprised to see that the minimum that is recommended in the RFP in terms of the number of students served or the number of trainings held each year might only earn you an average score. Going beyond the minimum levels may be required in order to get the highest score.



Checking the point value determinations under the methodology section might give you a better idea of the types of project activities that reviewers will be looking for. A close inspection could yield clues as to the degree of vision and innovation that will score highly, the types of learning styles that will score high points, and the types of assessments that will yield the highest score.

Looking at the budget category of the scoring rubric might give you an idea of the number of partners that will earn you the highest score, as well as the weight of in-kind contributions in the review process. This will enable you to assess the possible score for your project budget, which could lead you to look more closely at the budget you have developed.

If you do not see a scoring rubric in the RFP, contact program staff and ask them if it is possible to get a copy. In some cases, rubrics will only be shared with grant reviewers, so your only option will be to contact former reviewers and ask them for some helpful pointers. Do not overlook this important tool in your quest for writing better proposals that get funded!



## Supplement your grant-seeking efforts with school foundation support

If you're serious about raising school funds, you might be thinking of starting an educational foundation in your district, or maybe you already have such an organization. An educational foundation can significantly expand the scope of your fund-raising efforts, but make sure you coordinate your grant-seeking efforts with the foundation's work.

While the role of an educational foundation differs from that of grant writers, its overall mission is similar. Grant seeking is a form of fund raising that pursues support from government and foundation sources to fund needs. An educational foundation is also a form of fund raising that usually focuses efforts on raising support from individuals. Typically, grant-seeking efforts and the fund-raising efforts of the educational foundation will overlap in the areas of foundation and corporate support.

It is essential that you coordinate your grant-seeking and foundation efforts so you don't duplicate efforts. For example, private funders should not receive duplicate proposals from the same district; clear communication between grant-seeking and foundation staff is essential before proposals are sent to private funders.

Keep in mind that district grant writers and staff from the educational foundation are representing the same cause. Both are representing the district, and both should be on the same page with regard to the district's needs, priorities, and possible projects. Both should share the same funding goals and should share information about sources of support. It's probably a good idea to have your grant-writing staff and the educational foundation staff meet at least quarterly. Certainly, there should be regular phone contact between the two.

Collaboration between the grants staff and the educational foundation staff also can strengthen your fund-raising efforts. Both can share information about funding opportunities and the research that has been conducted about these opportunities. In addition, both can share office equipment and secretarial support.

Gifts secured by the educational foundation might be counted as matching funds for grant projects. For example, if the educational foundation is able to secure a gift of scanners from a business in the community, the scanners could be used in a grant-funded project and could be counted as matching support.



Clearly, the need for coordination between the two staffs is critical to maximize the fund-raising efforts taking place in your district. You might want to consider holding an annual event that recognizes the fund-raising efforts of both the grants staff and the educational foundation.

If you are planning to start an educational foundation or your foundation is in its infancy, make it a priority to coordinate its efforts with those of your grant writers. Schedule meetings so that foundation staff members can identify the needs of the district, and develop a plan that will enable both teams to work together throughout the year. Encourage them to discuss fund-raising objectives and share problems, with the goal of coming up with the best solutions.

Promote the idea that although the grants staff and the foundation staff might be in different physical locations and might have different bosses, ultimately they are a part of the same team and should not be working completely independently of each other. Maximizing your fund-raising efforts through the careful coordination of grant-seeking and foundation staff will bring more resources to the table to help you achieve your district's goals.





## How to win private foundation grants

Many school districts are finding that private foundations are a viable source of funding for classroom or schoolwide projects. Here are some tips for seeking grants from these foundations.

Private or independent foundations are usually established by a contribution from a single source, such as a family, individual, bequest, or group of individuals. Grant decisions are made by a board of trustees, who often include the donors or members of the donors' families. In most cases, private foundations restrict their giving to certain geographic regions and tend to fund only the program interests of the donors.

Start by identifying the private foundations that are in your immediate community. Chances are greater that you will receive support from a foundation in your own backyard.

An excellent resource is your local community foundation, if you have one. These types of foundations are growing at a phenomenal rate. Community foundations receive contributions from multiple sources, including individual donors, corporations, and other foundations. Usually, grant-making decisions are made by a committee of local community representatives.

If you don't know whether you have a community foundation, check with local nonprofit organizations, call your United Way, or log onto the Foundation Center web site (<http://www.fdncenter.org>) and look at the Community Foundations list.

Your next step is to identify private foundations that are located in your state. To find out about these foundations, go to your local library and check if there is a state foundation directory available in the reference section. You should learn how to use this directory.

In the front of the directory, there should be a listing of the "areas of interest" or "fields of interest." Grants given by foundations are typically organized by these topics. Locate the areas that connect to your project idea to identify potential foundations in the directory. Some examples include Education, Environment, Youth Development, and Science and Technology.

Most directories will provide the following information for each foundation:

- Application deadlines;
- Types of support (i.e. general purposes, grants to individuals, special projects);
- Sample grant awards;



- Assets of the foundation and the dollar range of awards;
- Trustees and officers of the foundation; and
- Contact information.

Many national foundations have web sites that contain the information found in a directory. You should also check with your telecommunications providers and technology vendors to see if they have a foundation available that makes grants to education.

Develop a list of foundations for further investigation, and contact them either by phone or by mail. Request a copy of the current giving guidelines and, if available, ask for an annual report from the latest fiscal year.

After reviewing these pieces from various foundations, it should be possible for you to narrow the list of potential foundations down to those that seem most appropriate to pursue and most likely to fund your particular project. To make this list even more definitive, contact program officers at the foundation and discuss your project idea. They will tell you whether it is worthwhile for you to submit a proposal to them, or if your time would be better spent pursuing a different foundation.



## Local grant resources might be closer than you think

I recently conducted a grants workshop during which the issue of local grant resources was raised. One of the participants assured me that he was from a very small, rural town that had no foundations, no corporations—in short, no resources to look to for grant possibilities. However, upon closer examination, he conceded that maybe there were resources he could check into! This article will look at some of the local resources that educators might have in their communities without even realizing they exist.

One of your first steps should be to check your state's foundation directory, if you haven't already done so. A few months ago I purchased a state directory of Utah foundations, and I was amazed at the number of private funders in the state. You might think you don't have any local foundations to pursue, but don't make this assumption without checking your state's directory.

Go to the Foundation Center's national web site and look for the Foundation Center libraries in your state. Visit one and check to see if your state directory is available. Or, use the Foundation Center's database to search for foundations in your state that fund education. Many state directories are available for purchasing online; however, you might want to look at one first before deciding to make a purchase.

I find that a book called "Giving by Industry," from Aspen Publishers, gives me a great starting point when looking at a community and trying to uncover all of the possible sources of funding that might be available there.

Check with the banks in your community to see if they have local funds to distribute or if they are part of a national chain that has a larger foundation. Also, check with your local utility companies: gas, electric, and telecommunications providers. Again, you might find that your local electric company or cooperative is part of a much larger one that has a foundation. Your gas company might serve a large region of your state and provide grants to each local community where it has a presence. Your local telecommunications provider might be affiliated with a much larger provider that offers grants to the communities it serves.

Don't assume that your local businesses, if they are small to mid-size, will not give funds to support education. Some of these companies might be divisions or subdivisions of larger corporations that are not headquartered in your community; they could be halfway across



the United States. However, because you have a local subsidiary in your community, you do have a direct connection to the larger corporation and might be eligible for grants.

Small to mid-size businesses in your community also have a vested interest in having a local “pool” of potential employees to draw from. Keep this in mind as you identify the skills your students need to improve upon and as you design projects to address these skills.



## Four ways to broaden your search for tech grants

I'm often asked to name the grant opportunities available to fund technology. While I can name several off the top of my head, in fact there are numerous grants that will fund technology. Don't make the mistake of searching only for the grants with the word "technology" in the title—for if you do, you'll be missing out on several other opportunities.

First, a word of caution. If you are looking for money to purchase technology, but you have no idea how to use the technology in the classroom to benefit students, then your search will be a short one. There are very few funders willing to give you dollars to purchase equipment so you can figure out how best to use it. Funders typically will want you to discuss a project idea that will have a direct and measurable impact on teaching and learning. You will be allowed to ask for funds to cover the cost of technology, as long as you can show that it is an integral tool for carrying out the project to achieve the desired results.

How can you broaden your search for grants to fund the project you have in mind? Obviously, you'll want to look for funders who list "education" as a field of interest. However, you should also examine your project idea closely and use some creative thinking to come up with a longer list of potential funders. Here are four questions to ask that will help you broaden the scope of your search:

**1. What is the subject matter of your intended project?** Are you planning to do a science-related project, for example, or maybe it's a project that is related to school reform? Using the subject matter as a guide, you can find funders who support these types of projects.

**2. Who are the participants in your project?** By identifying the types of students who will be involved in the project, you can discover funders who are interested in specific target groups. You might be planning a project that will help girls choose professions that typically are dominated by men, or a project designed to assist low-income students in affording the cost of postsecondary education. I have seen many funders who have identified target groups of individuals as their field of interest.

**3. Who are the partners in your project?** Ask your partners for a list of their common sources of grant funds, and search them for potential funders. Or, use the type of partner as a guide to identify funders. For example, if you're working with a local museum, identify funders who support museums and see if your project might be of interest to them.



(Recognize that in this situation, the partner might have to be the lead applicant, rather than the school district.)

**4. Where is your project taking place?** Geographic location often can be a means of identifying funders, especially private ones such as foundations and corporations. Most of these private funders restrict their giving to certain communities, a specific state, or communities where a plant is located. Use your location as another way to identify potential funders.



## A strong budget narrative can help sell your proposal

If you've written a significant number of grant proposals, you might have noticed there are two narratives that funders often request as a part of an application. The first is the narrative that contains your statement of need, your goals and objects, your methodology for carrying out the project, and your description of the staff members who will be responsible for doing this. The second narrative accompanies the budget for your proposal and is called the "budget narrative."

We typically think of budgets as numbers, so the request for a "budget narrative" might seem unusual. However, the budget narrative gives an applicant the chance to explain in words how the numbers were derived. Budget figures often are the result of mathematical equations, and it's important for reviewers to understand these calculations. If you think about it, just providing reviewers with a budget full of numbers doesn't explain how these figures were chosen—and can leave reviewers wondering if they were just pulled from thin air.

Budget narratives should explain every line item that appears on the budget form that contains a dollar figure. Salary and benefit line items, for example, should explain the annual salary for the position(s) of the people working on the project, their required experience or education, the percentage of their time they will spend on the project, and the percentage of fringe benefits that corresponds to the salary amount requested. To illustrate, here is a sample personnel segment of a budget narrative from the Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools on the ed.gov web site:

Project Director (1.0 FTE)	\$50,000
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*The project director will have oversight of the program and provide supervision, recruitment, and training of the program liaisons. At a minimum, this position requires a master's degree with an emphasis in social work or other related field.*

Program Liaisons (2 @ 1.0 FTE)	(2 x \$35,000) = \$70,000
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*Two program liaisons will be responsible for day-to-day school/community outreach activities. At a minimum, staff will hold a bachelor's degree (or equivalent) in the social services field. It is anticipated that each liaison will be responsible for 25 annual events.*





Staff Assistant (1.0 FTE)

\$25,000

*The staff assistant will perform all clerical duties for the project staff. This position requires a high school diploma or equivalent.*

Here is the sample fringe benefits section from the same proposal:

*Happy Days pays 100% medical, dental, vision, life, and disability for full-time employees, and is calculated at .25% of annual salary. The calculations are as follows:*

Program Director (\$50,000 x .25)	\$12,500
(2) Program Liaisons (\$70,000 x .25)	\$17,500
Staff Assistant (\$25,000 x .25)	\$6,250

If you are including matching funds in the budget for your grant proposal, you should also include them in the budget narrative. List the matching funds amount with the corresponding budget line item, and indicate the source of the matching funds.

If you are purchasing equipment, it is helpful to indicate where the cost for the equipment originated. This might be a web site, for example, or from a vendor quote. Again, let the reviewers know that these numbers are actual numbers provided by a reputable source.

Remember that a budget narrative is another source of information for reviewers as they look at your budget to determine if the amount you are requesting is reasonable. There are many samples of budget narratives on the internet that can help you create a narrative that's easy to understand and supports a credible budget request.

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