

# Grants:

## A Primer for Getting Started

As a provider of disability services, you know that a gap exists between the needs of students on your campus and your ability to pay for the variety of services they require to attain their educational goals. At a time when resources, especially human resources, are stretched to their limits, a common directive on campus is “get a grant” to pay for interpreters, notetakers, and CART or C-Print<sup>®</sup> transcriptionists.

How do you find funding sources? Will funding agencies support the kinds of activities you need? Aren't grants difficult to write? Aren't the odds against you? Do you have the time and internal resources to write a grant proposal or to manage the grant activities and do the final reporting? Read on!

### What are grants?

Grant makers (funding agencies or sponsors) are concerned about specific problems, injustices, or inequities. They see the gaps that exist and are willing to commit their money to close these gaps. “Grants” (as opposed to “gifts” from charitable foundations or individuals) tend to be for specific projects, for a finite period of time, with given deliverables expected at the end of the grant period. Stringent measures of accountability for these funds must be met by you and your institution, and your institution often is required to cost share on the project.

### What will grants fund?

Generally, grants will cover personnel costs, benefits, student workers, travel, equipment, consultants, participant costs at workshops, materials development (books, brochures, handouts), curriculum development, development of Web sites, workshops or conferences, and evaluation and dissemination of materials or information about the project. To find the kinds of activities a given sponsor will support, read the program solicitation (application guidelines) carefully, and call a program officer (see below).

### What won't grants fund?

Sustained program support is very difficult to obtain from sponsors. They tend not to fund construction, renovation, strictly local programs, operating expenses, and probably not support services such as interpreters, notetakers, or real-time transcriptionists. It may be worth your effort to read through the sponsor's Web site and then contact a program officer at the Student Support Services Program, U.S. Department of Education, one of the Federal TRIO Programs, to explore their reception to proposals requesting funding for your specific needs. (See their Web site URL under the **Resources** section.)

### How do I find sources of funding?

- Contact your office of sponsored research. Each major college or university will have an office (variously called “Sponsored Research,” “Sponsored Programs,” or “Grants and Contracts”) that will help you find sources of funding for your projects and will help you develop and submit proposals to these sponsors. There should also be a development office, where you can obtain information about private sponsors (foundations, corporations, or individuals). At smaller colleges, these offices may be combined.
- Browse the WWW. Funding agencies, such as the U.S. Department of Education, the National Science Foundation, and even private sponsors, all have Web sites and information about what they will or will not fund – and how to apply.
- Subscribe to listservs, such as *EdInfo* from the U.S. Department of Education, and the *Federal Register*. These sources will keep you informed about funding from a number of federal agencies.
- Ask for help at your institution's library. Reference librarians can help you perform a literature search to determine whether other institutions have similar problems, and how they have solved those problems. Reference librarians also can assist you in searching their collections for materials on grants, grant-writing, and funding sources. Minimally, they probably will have a copy of the *Foundation Directory* and can help you access some of the resources listed below.
- Visit your public library. Major public libraries often are repositories for Foundation Center publications, and will have staff to assist you in searching these materials.

### How do I start?

- Planning and writing proposals takes time, as does managing the project and meeting the requirements of the funding agency (e.g., annual reports, final reports, financial reports). Discuss the time commitment with your supervisor to be sure the return is worth the cost of your time on this endeavor.
- Talk with individuals in your office of sponsored research to develop a plan for proposal submission and to find out about your institution's requirements for internal approvals and submission.

- Attend professional meetings and talk to individuals from other institutions who have similar needs – and perhaps solutions.
- Find a mentor. There should be someone at your institution with grant-writing experience who will help you develop a proposal. It could be a faculty member who has received funding for various projects or pre-award specialists in your office of sponsored research.
- Begin a clipping file. This file should include copies of articles from journals in your field that address your needs, contact information for colleagues at other institutions, information about funding agencies, ideas about your project that can be folded into a proposal, notes about evaluation and dissemination, etc. If everything is in one place, it will be available when you need to meet a proposal deadline.
- Become a program reviewer. One of the very best ways to find out how to write a strong grant proposal is to become a reviewer at a funding agency. Federal programs, especially, always are looking for reviewers, and this knowledge of the internal review process will give you a competitive edge when you start to write your own proposal. Again, your office of sponsored research can put you in touch with agencies who are looking for reviewers.
- Read program guidelines and announcements. Often when a program competition is announced, there are only a few weeks to develop and submit a full proposal. Reading guidelines from former competitions will help you think through and structure a proposal before the new competition guidelines appear. The agency's Web site or your office of sponsored research can help you find old guidelines.

### Are the odds against me?

Funding agencies often receive hundreds of proposals for each of their programs and are able to fund only a few. Although not receiving funding is discouraging, you need to remember that grant-writing is an iterative process. You need to learn from your mistakes and keep trying. Ask the program officer for reviewers' comments on your proposal, take their suggestions to heart, discuss your project with others (including the program officer), and submit again.

### Resources

- Bowman, J.P., & Branchaw, B.P. (1992). *How to write proposals that produce*. Phoenix: Oryx Press.
- *Directory of education grants: A reference directory identifying educational grants available to nonprofit organizations*. (1996). Loxahatchee, FL: Research Grant Guides.
- *Directory of grants for organizations serving people with disabilities*. (2000). 10<sup>th</sup> ed. Loxahatchee, FL: Research Grant Guides.
- *The Foundation Directory* (published annually). New York: The Foundation Center.
- Miner, L.E., Miner, J.T., & Griffith, J. (2002). *Proposal planning & writing*. 3d ed. Westport, CT: Oryx Press. (This is one of the best "how to" books about grants.)
- Worth, M.J. (1993). *Educational fund raising: Principles and practice*. Westport, CT: Oryx Press. (part of the American Council on Education's Series on Higher Education; sponsored by Council for Advancement and Support of Education).

### Online Resources:

- *EdInfo* listserv - For information about programs, activities, and funding at the U.S. Department of Education. To subscribe, send an email to [listproc@inet.ed.gov](mailto:listproc@inet.ed.gov), and type SUBSCRIBE EDINFO YOURFIRSTNAME YOURLASTNAME in the message.
- *Forecast of Funding Opportunities Under the Department of Education Discretionary Grant Programs for Fiscal Year 2003*: <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OCFO/grants/forecast.html>
- National Science Foundation: <http://www.nsf.gov/home/menus/funding.htm>
- U.S. Department of Education, Federal Trio Programs: (<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OPE/HEP/trio/studsupp.html>)
- U.S. Government Printing Office, *Federal Register*: FEDREGTOC-L list. To subscribe, go to <http://listserv.access.gpo.gov/>, select Online mailing list archives, and follow the instructions.

For more information, contact:

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