FUNDING THE PROJECT

Starting new programs in financially tough times

Most library administrators and their staffs do not have to be told that revenues are down and belt tightening is needed. Thinking about any plans or service enhancements that require money is often difficult.

Some funds are available through foundation grants and government grants specifically designed to help nonprofit agencies, such as libraries provide computers for those populations that are being left behind technologically.

Although finding the right grant match for the library can be time-consuming, it can be profitable. The Funding Center at Michigan State University estimates that about 50,000 foundations give out more than $15 billion in grants every year to nonprofit institutions.

If your library is large enough to have a designated reference staff, recruit one to help identify local benevolent foundations whose mission statement matches that of the library's.

Local family and corporate trusts often are looking for worthy projects to endow since they like to see their money used to benefit their neighbors. The Funding Center lists useful search words when looking for money.

Prepare to answer tough questions

Grantmakers are not much different than the library's fiscal agent or board of directors. Their questions might be phrased more pointedly but basically funders want to know the answers to the following questions:

- What does the project entail?

- What is the price for the entire project?

- How much money, goods, or services does the library want from the foundation?

- Who is going to be helped by this project? How many people?

- How is doing this project going to make the community stronger?

- How will the library measure the results?

- Who else is going to help with this project?

- If awarded the grant, how does the library expect to maintain the project after funding is phased out?

- What will the library do if it does not receive the grant?

Invite the staff who will be looking for possible grants to the planning meeting, so they have the answers to these questions as they sift through possible sources.

Involving staff from other areas of the library when searching for dollars has the added perk of strengthening public service staff. As staff work with and read

The Funding Center at the University of Michigan offers a list of subject headings to use when seeking grant information, www.lib.msu.edu/harris23/grants/4fc_a.htm

more about the needs of special populations, they subliminally learn how they themselves can do more to help.

Ensure your application is noticed

Grantmakers are often deluged with applications that appear to have equal goals and outcomes. Review staff only know the applicant by the request and are relegated to only using the proposal. Following all the rules for submission is imperative; answer questions honestly as well as thoroughly. Composing a good cover letter helps, too.

What grantmakers look for

Depending on the organization, the grantmaker looks to fund projects that further the organization's vision and mission. Admittedly, in many situations this vision can be subjective. The Foundation Center, the respected authority on grantmaking, says grantmakers generally look to see if the proposal demonstrates the following:

- Clarity of purpose. Does a definable goal exist?

- Sensibility of process. Does the proposal include a logical pathway to the goal?

- Doability. Is the project doable in relation to the budget requested, library's resources, and community input?

- Leadership. Will identifiable and recognized leaders be involved with the project?

- Realistic aspirations. Do the dollars add up, or are they made up?

- Monitoring. What mechanism tracks the project? Who will track the progress and be accountable for the funds allocated.

The best advice that all grantmakers give is simply to follow the instructions. If told to use an 11-point sans serif font, do not use a 12-point serif font. Do not embellish on the application and do not use fancy folders.

Some small grants only require a simple request

Some grantmakers focus on small grants and do not require applicants to complete a long application. They require only a simple letter of request.

The Foundation Center offers a brief overview for composing a letter for a grant, which does not require a proposal.[1] The letter should:

- Begin with the reason you are writing and how much funding is required from the particular foundation.

- Describe the need. In an abbreviated manner, tell the funder what the need is for this project, piece of equipment, and so on.

- Explain what you will do. Just as you would in a fuller proposal, provide enough detail to pique the funder's interest. Describe precisely what will take place as a result of the grant.

- Provide agency data. Help the funder know more about your organization by including your mission statement, brief description of programs offered, number of people served, and staff, volunteer, and board data, if appropriate.

- Include appropriate budget data: Even a letter request may have a budget that is a half-page long. Decide if this information should be incorporated into the letter or in a separate attachment. Whichever course you choose, be sure to indicate the total cost of the project.

- Close. As with the longer proposal, a letter proposal needs a strong concluding statement.

Smaller grants can be used for printing of workbooks or flyers. Unless the library is fiscally healthy, no grant is too small.

Ask for donations

Many of the library's new initiatives reflect the needs and the aspirations of the community, so the community will naturally want to be part of the process and will not want to see it fail for want of a few thousand dollars.

If the libraries funding regulations allow, ask for donations for printer paper from small business, printers and toner cartridges from the larger ones. Some businesses regularly upgrade their PCs and are looking for worthy programs to which to donate their older models. Sometimes, all you have to do is ask.

Community partners

With more organizations asking for money, grantmakers feel more comfortable giving money when they feel your agency is respected enough by the community to form a partnership. Grantors also feel that the project reaches more people with more than one entity asking for the money.

Community entities such as neighborhood schools and social service agencies can expand the list of granting resources. For example a grantor may be bound by a mission statement that rigidly adheres to the parochial definition of educational organization (such as grades K-12) and excludes libraries. But if a school and a library co-submit a grant to provide computer workstations after school, the grantor may see it as educational.

Choose partners wisely, being careful not to engage another agency solely for the caché it brings to the application. The agency should agree to help write the grant and, if the grant is received, help promote the program.

Who are the grantmakers?

Some corporations feel the obligation to return some of their profits to the community in which the money was made. They realize a community includes those people that need a little help.

Although they themselves do not want to develop programs, corporations often fund nonprofit agencies who are willing to develop and execute solid programs for the betterment of the community. Each corporation has its limits in terms of dollars, goods, and territories funded.

Inquire as to the charitable giving of the library's corporations (big and small). Some corporations may allow staff to volunteer at the library during work hours, which can be useful when teaching classes.

Family trusts also are wish granters and can be one of the first places the library consults when looking for money. Consult local directories to find appropriate trusts in the library's area.

Where are the funders?

The MSU Funding Center: a good starting place

The Michigan State University (MSU) Funding Center's website provides library staff links to foundations, corporations, government agencies, associations, and individuals who may be willing to give the library money or materials. The website is well-designed and is divided into grants by focus. Within the Grants for Nonprofits page is a link for grants for libraries, a link for grants focusing on the aging, a link for grants focusing on computers and technology, and so on.

LSTA funds

Library Service Technology Act (LSTA) funds are federal dollars allocated to all the states and administered through the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). These funds are intended to help libraries develop central roles as community builders.

In as much as the purpose of LSTA funds are to provide library service to those who have difficulty using a library, projects designed to extend computer services to the populations addressed in this work are good candidates for awards. Contact the state library or archives (or agency acting as federal resource center) for details as to submission requirements.

Unique funding sources

The listing highlights a few organizations that donate computers or money to nonprofit organizations. Many are directed at services for people with disabilities or the aged. This list is only a starting point and is offered with the caveat: here today, gone tomorrow.

National Christina Foundation (NCF)

National Christina Foundation (NCF) encourages corporations and individuals to donate surplus and used computers, software, peripherals, and related business technology. NCF directs those donations to training and educational organizations. NCF participates in building community-based solutions to benefit the millions of people with disabilities, people who are

economically disadvantaged, and students at risk. A seven-page grant application must be completed.

Computers for Learning (CFL)

Computers for Learning (CFL) provides schools and educational nonprofit organizations with a universal registration form for requesting excess computer equipment. A technology tutorial is provided online that includes examples of how to create an overall plan for addressing computer needs and how to assess the suitability of available computer equipment based on school or educational nonprofit organization needs.

The website also includes information on how to find assistance if computers require upgrading and how to contact volunteers with technical computer knowledge.

Share the Technology

Share the Technology is a nonprofit all-volunteer organization dedicated salvaging recently retired computers while they are still useful, preventing their premature destruction and giving them to schools, people with disabilities, and nonprofit organizations.

The effort is facilitated by a searchable database that contains donation offers and requests from people throughout the country. The organization's hope is that the database serves to match excess computers to schools, nonprofits, and people with disabilities in need. Searching for equipment or posting a need is easy and not time-consuming.

Free Computers

Free Computers is a Rotary International project. The organization promotes the use of computers for lifelong education and to improve the quality of life for the elderly, the disabled, and the disadvantaged. Its goal is to establish a computer center in 529 Rotary districts throughout the world

Magic Johnson Foundation

The Magic Johnson Foundation Technology Initiative was created to provide technology access and education to inner-city communities. It works with program partners and sponsors to provide not only access but also education regarding information technology to the underserved urban population.

Technology Opportunities Program

The Department of Commerce's Technology Opportunities Program (TOP) promotes the widespread availability and use of digital network technologies in the public and nonprofit sectors. As part of the Department's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), TOP gives grants for model projects demonstrating innovative uses of network technologies.

TOP makes matching grants to state, local and tribal governments, health care providers, schools, libraries, police departments, and community-based nonprofit organizations. TOP awards are merit-based and competitive. The organization conducts workshops on applying for a grant.

Joseph P Kennedy, Jr. Foundation

The Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation only works in the area of intellectual disabilities. Libraries and other organization are invited to submit a two-page outline in letter form. If the project appears to appropriate and innovative, agencies are invited to submit an application. The foundation seeks programs that relate to themes of independence, productivity, and inclusion.

Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation (MEAF)

Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation (MEAF) calls itself a small foundation with a big mission, that is, "to help make changes for the better for the one-out-of-five Americans of student age who have physical, mental, or learning disabilities." Toward this goal, MEAF has supported a wide range of nonprofit organizations throughout the United States.

In addition to providing organizations with financial support, MEAF also encourages employees to volunteer with community agencies promoting programs that help children with disabilities.

Newman's Own Charitable Foundation

Paul Newman's Own Charitable Foundation offers grants to nonprofits, schools, hospitals, and other 501(c)(3) public benefit organizations. Eligible grant categories include programs involving children and youth, health, education, the elderly, environment, the handicapped, and literacy.

Real Network Grant

Real Networks donates a RealPlayer and RealOne Superpass to nonprofits organizations to achieve online progressive goals. The corporation also gives certificates to nonprofits to use for fundraising events.

Wal-Mart Foundation's Good Works Grants

A Wal-Mart is in virtually every library's backyard, yet few libraries take advantage of the small grants offered by the corporation. The grants can be used to subsidize an introductory computer program for older adults (during September, which is Grandparents Month).

Wal-Mart claims to be the largest employer of Hispanic people in the United States and may work with the library to promote a cyber-program for Spanish-speaking people with its matching grant fund. At the very least, stores should be glad to place informational program flyers in staff areas.

Other sources of getting help

Other funding methods include book sale drives, but don't rule out asking social service and community groups to make the library their fundraising focus. For instance, if the library is considering adding a computer terminal for patrons with visual impairments, the local National Federation of the Blind, or the American Council of the Blind may consider raising money to purchase one software program.

If the library decides to install a Spanish-dedicated workstation, local Latino cultural clubs could be asked to sponsor the station. A local group of seniors could be asked to contribute recipes for a fund-raising cookbook as they are taught word processing. Proceeds would be used to update equipment or to reimburse volunteer peer tutors for expenses incurred while helping in the computer class.

Be creative and say thank you

A little creativity can spawn big rewards. Libraries should not be hesitant about using nontraditional methods for fundraising, many nonprofits are encouraging planned giving.

Unfortunately tough financial times call for nontraditional methods of generating funds for needed technology and has created yet another task for today's library administrator. If your library is restricted from asking for private funds for a special program or project, then ask a partner to request the money or the help.

Always remember to thank the people who give you the funds, goods, or services. Encourage the students who became computer literate due to the underwriting to send an e-mail to appropriate personnel. Both the sender and the receiver gain valuable lessons from this exercise.

Note

[1]Foundation Center Proposal Writing Short Course. "Letter Proposal." http://fdncenter.org/learn/shortcourse/prop2.html.

Neil Squire Fundraising Resource Kit provides readers with a lot of ideas, www.neilsquire.ca/pdf/Fundraising%20Resource%20Kit.pdf.