

How to Find a Private Foundation or Corporate Funder(s) for Your Project Adventure Program

It is important to remember, particularly when seeking private funding, that finding and researching funders is as important (if not more so) than writing a proposal. This piece is not intended to be exhaustive, but to help PA clients get started.

1. Before you begin finding a funder: a) know what programming the grant will be used to deliver, b) roughly how much money you'll need to deliver this programming and c) find out what status your organization has with the IRS, for profit or non-profit—it is typically much more difficult to find funding for a for profit organization.
2. Where will your programming happen? Will it be national? Will it be statewide? Will it be local? Most programs are local. Most private funders target specific geographies, which is why you need to know.
3. Who will your program help and how will it help them? Will it help 150 5th graders be more physically active and develop lifelong fitness habits, for example?
4. To help you put these ideas together, it may be helpful to write a proposal knowing that you'll put in more specifics when you have a better understanding of the funder's goals. (See PA's website for templates for writing proposals for using PA programming.)

Thoughts on pulling your program together with smaller pots of money... Once you know what you will be asking for, you can begin trying to find a suitable funder. Do not tie your organization to an all or nothing strategy. If, for example, your local bank is willing to give your school \$8,000 toward your goal of \$30,000 for a challenge course, take it! Although you might still be in process with raising the remaining \$22,000, that is \$8,000 you don't have to raise and it will make it easier to attract other funders.

Think about your program incrementally... Sometimes starting small works towards your long-term goals. For example, your long-term goal is a high and low challenge course with 15 staff ready to use it to meet health goals. Perhaps this year you can only find funding for a PACK box and training for five. That is a good start and may help you build some momentum for and get some help with fundraising. Continue to seek the funding you need for a Challenge Course. Now, however, your program is running and you may have successes you can point to that will help you attract more money. So, when you discuss your program goals with your PA consultant, you may want to get proposals for a range of options.

Don't forget...

- People in your community with whom you work or are friendly. Do they sit on a foundation board? Are they decision-makers in a business with a giving arm? Make a polite inquiry regarding whether or not they think their foundation or corporation would fund your program. If they will consider your proposal, great what is the next step? If they won't consider your proposal, too bad, but do they know anyone who might help you find funding? Personal contacts are vital in raising funds.
- Lions Club, Kiwanis and the like. These groups typically make smaller gifts, but they can help you piece together the funds you need.

- Your organization's grants or development office. 1) They can be an invaluable resource in finding appropriate matches to funders. 2) They can be invaluable resources for writing your grant. 3) They can coordinate your submission with others (It makes your organization seem disorganized and/or lacking focus if the foundation/corporation receives multiple requests for funding from your organization. Which, therefore, makes it likely that neither request will be funded.)
- Your organization's procedures for finding a grant. (This is a little obvious, but may not be something you think of in the excitement of pursuing your first grant. If you fail to go through your organization's proper procedures, you may alienate some folks. These people will be less likely to buy into and support your program if it is funded.)

Find a Funder...

Armed with the above:

- Follow your leads first.
- Search for foundations on-line beginning with a simple search. If you plug in foundation and the name of your state/town/city into a search engine, you might get some hits. Your best bet is some of the subscription on-line search services. These allow you to search with specific criteria in mind, age, income, program intent, etc. *This is a good place to start <http://fdncenter.org/>. Definitely not the only good place, just one.*
- If you'd rather put your hands on paper and not spend money, your local library may have some materials. Also check to see if there is a Grantmakers Library near you; simply do a search for grantmaker on the web. You can go to one of their libraries for free and research funders. *Grantmakers and other organizations typically have grant writing workshops that are very helpful.*
- Once you've found some potential funders, research them. Visit their websites. Download their annual report from their website if they have it there. A funder's annual report will tell you who they gave to, typically (but not always) how much they gave to a particular organization and the names of the board of directors. The board of directors usually makes all funding decisions. So, connections count.
- You can do more research by looking at their tax returns. These are called 990s. Most of them can be found, for free, at <http://www.guidestar.org/>. (*The tax returns of a non-profit are public record because of their tax-exempt status.*) Needless to say, it is a tax return and you'll have to wade through a lot of information to find some helpful things. Some of the valuable information you'll find is: their assets; the total dollar amount of grants given; grantee's name and dollar amount; board members' names; staff names. Occasionally you'll find a discrepancy between a funder's stated priorities and procedures and what you find in their 990. For example, a funder may state that they do not make grants higher than \$50,000, but their tax returns show that they gave \$100,000 to your local university. This is just another piece of information to help you move forward or not. You may want to find out how the university received such a high grant. Occasionally you'll find, through the 990, that while a foundation, for example, says they will fund new organizations, they've only given money to the local Boys and Girls Club for the past three years. This may be a case where you may decide your efforts are better spent elsewhere. (Unless you have a personal contact, in the foundation, urging you to go for it.)
- If your potential funder is a business, they do not typically have their own website. The giving arm is usually found in the company's website under about us and/or _____ & the community. They will typically have guidelines posted there and tell you all about the

- programs they are funding. Businesses want everyone to know what good corporate citizens they are, so they don't typically hide their good works.
- You'll need guidelines, if you haven't found them at their web site or page, you'll need to call for them. If you do call be prepared to talk about your organization and what you will propose. They probably won't ask you anything, but they might and a good impression is important.

First Contact...

So you've done your research and it is time to make your first contact. Often a funder will use this first contact to weed out proposals in which they are not interested. So, from this contact, you will be invited to give them a full proposal if they like your organization and its plans. It is important to follow the instructions of their guidelines.

Phone Contact: This is generally not the most requested form of initial inquiry. You or an eloquent and persuasive colleague will need to make this inquiry. First, you need to find out the name of the appropriate contact for such an inquiry. (There is no point pitching to a receptionist, for example, who can't give you the approval for submitting a full proposal.) Whoever makes the call should have rehearsed and/or written a script to prevent rambling and providing too many unnecessary, at this point, details.

Letter of Inquiry: This is a short letter—typically one page, but use their guidelines. The letter should be addressed to a name or names, as opposed to staff or board of directors. In the first line, you should say how much you want and for what. For example, The ABC Middle School is seeking \$50,000 to train teachers to implement a comprehensive behavior management system that will teach our young people responsibility, build community and diminish disciplinary problems. You should spend approximately one paragraph each on: what your program will accomplish; who it will help, why this group needs help and how vital your organization is to the community.

Full Proposal: So they aren't doing any weeding. Use their guidelines and go for it. The proposal templates found on the PA website may also be helpful.

You may be rejected at this point despite all your research that indicates these funders are a good lead.

- 1) Rejection is part of the process of finding funding.
- 2) Just because one potential funder doesn't want to fund you right now, doesn't mean you don't have a good program.
- 3) You may have been rejected for a number of reasons having nothing to do with the quality of your program—they've reached their quota for funding organizations like yours this year, their funding priorities recently changed, etc.
- 4) Being rejected at the initial inquiry can save you the work of preparing a full proposal that wasn't going to get funded.
- 5) If they still look like a promising prospect contact them again in their next funding cycle – unless their guidelines say otherwise.

GOOD LUCK—remember perseverance is more than half the battle!

