Choosing a Funding Source

How Selective Should I Be?

Although there might be many grants that your project could be eligible for, it is worth your time to be selective. You will be more likely to win a grant if you research your options and find the grant that is the best fit for your project and your organization's mission. There are many factors to consider when selecting a grant, and many places that you can look for possible grants. The material covered here is not exhaustive, but it will give you a good start.

When you find a grant that could be a good match for your project, keep the request for proposals (RFP) and study it closely. It will have important information such as requirements for the grant and deadlines for submitting the proposal, and it will help you make sure the funding term of the grant is an appropriate match to the expected timeline of your project. You will refer to the RFP throughout the process of deciding which grant to apply for and while writing the proposal.

Common Funding Sources

Depending on the scope of your project and its expected budget, there might be many appropriate funding sources. These can include government sources, foundations, businesses, or associations.

One place to start looking is federal government grants. There are many federal institutions that fund projects related to health librarianship and health literacy:

- Network of the National Library of Medicine
- National Library of Medicine
- Institute of Museum and Library Services

Be sure to look for funding opportunities from your state/territorial government and local government too.

Many foundations and private organizations also provide grants. Even if the available grants are not specifically aimed at libraries, many of these funders are interested in projects that support community health. Just be sure that your project aligns well with the goals of the specific grant you're applying for and the organization in general.

A few health-focused associations that provide grants:

- Alzheimer's Association Grant Program
- American Lung Association
- American Diabetes Association

If there is a specific health need in your community that your project will try to address, look for organizations that focus on that health need. A simple trick that sometimes works is to perform an internet search for _____ *Association*, filling in the health need you're interested in.

You can also look for state/territorial and local organizations that address this health need. They might offer grant opportunities, or they might direct you to other organizations that do.

The list of funding sources in the previous section is not at all exhaustive. Sometimes you can find local-level organizations that are working to address the same health need as your project. They might offer grant opportunities or know of other organizations that do.

Local funding sources can also be important to investigate, but it might require more effort to identify them. One advantage of applying for funds from a local organization is that there is often less competition than for a grant that seeks applicants nationwide. Some of these grants require that your project specifically benefit people living in the town, city, or county where the funder is located, so ensure that your project has the same geographic scope as the grant before applying.

There are a few databases you can start searching for local-level organizations:

- The Community Foundation Locator
- Tax-Exempt Organization Search
- GuideStar

Sometimes, the best way to find local funding sources is to ask people in your community who are already working on the need your project will address. If there are people or groups who have worked on similar projects or with similar populations, ask if they know of any local funding opportunities. A community business network, such as a chamber of commerce, might also have leads on local businesses or foundations that offer grants.

Investigating Possible Funding Sources

Once you identify a possible funding organization, there are several different sources you can use to investigate them to ensure they are the best possible fit for your grant. In particular, you want to find out as much as you can about why the grant is being offered and what the funder hopes to achieve with it. You also want to research the funding organization itself and how well its mission or activities align with your project idea. If the funder has a history of funding similar types of projects and working to address similar health needs, there is a better chance that they will be interested in your proposal.

You can start to collect this information from the following sources:

- The request for proposals (RFP). This will be your first stop, since it will tell you important information about the purpose of the grant, the goals that the organization wants to achieve by awarding it, and requirements for awardees of the grant. It will also

have logistical information about the grant proposal itself, such as deadlines and required materials.

- The funder's mission statement and values. When you get to the stage of writing your grant, it will be important to highlight how your project connects to the funding organization's own sense of purpose. The funder's website and newsletters can be good places to research this information.

- Previously funded projects. In addition to their websites and newsletters, funding organizations often discuss their awardees' work in annual reports. Annual reports from the last couple of years can give you a good sense of what sorts of projects the organization likes to fund. If the grant is specific to projects in your local community, you might also find information about previous projects in local news publications or websites.

- Contacting the funder directly. The above sources might not contain all information you need to make an informed decision about applying for the grant, or all the requirements that the proposal itself must adhere to. Expect to run into some questions that you can answer only by reaching out to the funder. The contact person for the grant should be listed in the RFP.

Contacting a Funder

Aside from seeking necessary information, contacting a funder is a way to show that you are serious about your project, the grant and the organization's mission. It is also a way to make a good first impression with the organization. Depending on the funder and the grant, you might have to submit a letter of interest (LOI) prior to submitting the full proposal. The LOI is your chance to make a first impression with your funder and let them know what sort of project you are interested in doing.

Typically, the RFP includes contact information for the person who can answer questions about the grant. If at all possible, you want to direct any communication to a specific person.

Before you contact the funder, have a list of questions that you're seeking answers to. Be able to succinctly explain what your project is and why you believe this funder is a good fit for it. You also need to show that you have done your research, understand everything in the RFP, and are familiar with the organization's mission and basic activities. Contacting the funder to ask basic questions about these topics can make you seem unprepared.

Some common topics to ask the funder about directly include:

- The funder's process for evaluating grant proposals.

- Reporting requirements, such as how frequently you would be required to update the funder about your progress with the project, or what information they require in these

reports.

- Restrictions on how funding can be used, such as expenses that aren't allowed or maximum amounts for certain allowed expenses.

- Formatting details for the proposal, including limits on the word count or page count.

Whether contacting the funder by phone, email, or a written letter, follow all standards for professional etiquette. Additionally, respect the person's time, particularly if you have several questions. Give them a reasonable amount of time to reply, or request an appointment to discuss your questions at greater length.

If you decide that the grant is not right for your project after having contacted the funder, follow up with them again and explain why you decided not to apply for this grant. This professional courtesy can help keep future doors open with this funder.

Institutional Restrictions

We have talked about the requirements that funders might place on a grant, but these are not the only things to think about as you are selecting a grant to apply for. Your institution may also have requirements or restrictions around the application process for grants.

For example, if your institution is affiliated with a college or university, you might have to get approval from the university's development office. They might place limits on the type of grants you can apply for or how much money you can request through them. Your institution might also have an office specifically in charge of overseeing grants and proposals.

In situations like this, ensure that you have adequate time for all stakeholders to weigh in on the project and review the grant application. In particular, make sure everyone who would need to sign the final grant contract is involved in the grant-writing process early on. Communicating with these stakeholders from the start will help you shape your project and grant proposal in a way that satisfies everyone, and it reduces the chance that major revisions to your proposal will be needed after it is drafted.

In addition, be sure to discuss the grant with your supervisor. Writing a grant proposal requires a lot of time and effort from multiple people in your organization, so it is helpful to discuss with your supervisor how to prioritize work on the grant proposal among your department's other work duties.

Funding Sources Mentioned and Beyond

Federal Institutions

- Network of the National Library of Medicine
- National Library of Medicine
- Grants.gov
- Institute of Museum and Library Services

Health-focused Associations

3 examples mentioned in the lesson, there are many more! Medlineplus.gov includes a selective list of health organizations.

- Alzheimer's Association Grant Program
- American Lung Association
- American Diabetes Association
- An internet search for _____ *Association*, filling in the health need you're interested in

Databases for Local-level Organizations

- Candid.org (formerly The Foundation Center)
- Grantmakers in Health
- The Community Foundation Locator
- Tax-Exempt Organization Search
- GuideStar

Finding more sources of funding

- State/territorial government and local government
- Local organizations