

Finding Foundation Funders: The Art of Successful Research

1. Be prepared to do research continuously. There are over 35,000 foundations in the United States, and this number does not include donor-advised funds, grant-making charities, and other institutions which provide grant support. Decide how much time you can afford to devote to research and use it wisely.
2. Basics: Start with a clear mission, vision and program logic model.
3. Budget: Decide how much funding you need overall and how much for each program area.
4. Service Area: Define what keyword descriptions match the work for which you seek funding.
5. Relationship-based Research
 - a. Audit your Development records and reapply to all previous funding sources. This may seem obvious, but in older organizations this step can often be overlooked during Development and Executive staff transitions, etc.
 - b. Ask past grant funders if they know of any other grant funders who might be interested in your program.
 - c. Ask your Board of Directors if they know of any foundations which might support your program.
 - d. Ask your corporate funders if they know of any foundations which might support your program.
6. Online Research: Work with an online database of funders, such as Foundation Search Online, to search for those which match your organization's needs. Be sure you are comfortable and capable of using the database; classes are available and often free.
 - a. Subscribe to a service you can use remotely.
 - b. Funders limit their grants by:
 - i. Whether they accept unsolicited proposals
 - ii. Geographic location
 - iii. Type of organization
 - iv. Type of support (many do not fund events, debt reduction, etc).
 - v. Amount
7. Direct Approach: Unless a funder states they do not take calls, pick up the phone and ask to talk to a program officer. Be ready to pitch your program and ask if they think it would be worth submitting a letter of inquiry or full proposal.
8. Always document your research clearly so that others within your organization and its future do not have to duplicate your efforts. Share file locations, explain formats, don't use complicated or unclear abbreviations.

© Troy Arnold, 2009

For permission to copy and distribute contact troy@resource-solutions.org