

Funding Your Dropout Prevention Program

FACTS ON DROPOUT PREVENTION

The world of funding can be daunting to novice grantseekers. This fact sheet aims to serve as a guide to help teachers, counselors, and other dropout prevention advocates navigate the myriad of resources available. A working relationship with funders or staffers for funding organization is needed. Thus, the ongoing process of cultivating relationships with potential funders is critical to getting “your foot in the door.” While cultivating relationships, grantseekers may also research opportunities.

Where do I start?

Researching Potential Funders

According to Ilene Mack, Senior Program Officer at the William Randolph Foundation, the first step of grantwriting is research. “The very first step and one that is most important prior to writing anything is doing research on the foundation you wish to approach. The buzzword is homework. Do it well and thoroughly,” advises Mack.¹

So where do you begin to conduct research on foundations? A good place to start is the Foundation Center Directory at: www.foundationcenter.org. Established in 1956, the Foundation Center can be a valuable source for information on available grants. There is a basic

foundation finder on the website. A subscription to the foundation



directory is also available. The Central Arkansas Library houses a hard copy of the Founda-



tion Center Directory at the Main library and free access to an online directory. Another good place to begin your research is www.grants.gov.

a searchable database accessible from any computer.

Letters of Inquiry Power of Impression

There may be a potential funder that has not posted a request for proposals (RFP). It is often acceptable to submit a letter of inquiry. This letter is an introduction of your dropout prevention program that includes an explanation of how your program coincides with the funder’s goals. It is important that your letter makes a good first impression on a your potential grants review committee.

*Sample Letter of Inquiry

Dear Potential Funder,

I am an 8th grade English teacher at XYZ Middle School, a 1,500 student public school serving a student body in which 85% of the students are at-risk for high school dropout based on early warning indicators for dropout. These indicators include low reading levels, truancy, and lack of family involvement. I am writing to inquire about your interest in considering a proposal to expand our afterschool tutoring program for students with low level reading.

...

Our major goal is to improve the reading skills of our students so that they can begin preparing for the ninth grade, which is a pivotal school year in their academic lives. We believe our chances of accomplishing this would be improved by providing stipends to teachers who volunteer to help students with their reading afterschool. Based on extensive research conducted by the Arkansas Safe Schools Association, we have discovered a dropout prevention program that has a curriculum we may use for our afterschool reading program.

***Adapted from: www.npguides.org/guide/inquiry_letter.htm**

Other sites to consider: <http://www.grantproposal.com/inquiry.html>, <http://literacy.kent.edu/Oasis/grants/samplefoundation.html>

Four Ways to Think About Funding

One way to generate funding ideas for dropout prevention programs is to conduct research within the 15 Effective Strategies developed by the National Center for Dropout Prevention (NCDP). These strategies, grouped into four clusters, may provide a solid framework for your grant research.

Cluster One:

The Basic Core Strategies

There are four activities identified by NCDP as basic strategies: mentoring/tutoring, service learning, alternative schooling, and after-school opportunities.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP)

ojjdp.ncjrs.org

OJJDP is one potential source of federal funding to support the development of mentoring programs.

Youth Service America

ysa.org

One potential source to consider for funding a different element of the basic core strategies is Youth Service America. The organization

proactively funds service-learning projects across the nation and promotes a Global Youth Service Day held annually each April.

Afterschool Alliance

afterschoolalliance.org

The Afterschool Alliance provides funds to likely partners through programs such as its Lights On After School Ambassadors program. A visit to the alliance's web site will yield information on this program and a wide array of other funding opportunities, including information on Title I funds available for after school programming.

Cluster Two:

Early Interventions

NCDP lists four strategies as "early interventions," including: early childhood education, family engagement, and early literacy development. Research areas may also correspond with these strategies.

Target Foundation

target.com/grants

The Target Foundation offers early childhood reading grants to support after-school reading programs for children from birth to nine years of age. Schools, libraries, or pub-

lic agencies may apply to receive grants of up to \$3,000.

Parent Teacher Association

pta.org/636.asp

Another funding source for early interventions projects may be the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA), which awards funds to schools for local PTAs. As a child advocacy organization, the awards available from PTA may be one avenue to garner funds for family engagement. For instance, one award,

PTA®
everychild.onevoice.®

the Take
Your Family
School Week
Award offers

up to 2,000 for schools to promote *Take Your Family to School Week*, held each February. The PTA also distributes family-school partnership awards to recognize schools best implementing the national standards for family-school collaboration.

Cluster Three:

Making Most of Instruction

Within the "Making the Most of Instruction" cluster are four of the 15 strategies: professional development, active learning, educational technology, and individualized

Success Sectioning

Your letter of inquiry has been received and approved. The granting organization has invited you to submit a proposal for funding. Now what? You're ready to write your proposal, right? Not quite. There is one crucial step to be completed before you begin drafting—organization.

Most funders already have a formula for organization in mind. Thus, an important preplanning step is to review the application requirements. Grant reviewers are often responsible for reviewing hundreds of proposals. More than likely, they have determined a systematic process that helps expedite review. This system will often include reporting information in sections outlined in the application. Adherence to this system is as equally as important as the content itself. One way to ensure that your grant is read is to comply with the foundation's organization requests. And, of course, getting your proposal noticed and reviewed is one way to increase your chances of success.

instruction. By writing grants to support educational technology in their libraries, school librarians may help implement the “educational technology” strategy.

According to the American Association of School Librarians, “The school library of yesterday has given way to a new and exciting place... Today’s school library media program plays an integral role in educating children for the future” The AASL recognizes exemplary school library media programs that are fully integrated into the school’s curriculum with the **National School Library Media Program** of the Year (NSLMPY) Award each year.



The award honors school library media with a \$10,000 prize. With this “new and exciting” place assuming a critical role in education, it makes the school librarian a likely partner for acquiring funds for your dropout prevention program. School librarians and media specialists may be a good group of grantseekers to help launch dropout prevention programs.

There are numerous foundations providing funds to pilot and established programs incorporating technology into education. Researching grant opportunities in this area could yield an array of opportunities from which to choose. To give an example of such opportunities, three are listed below:

Corning Foundation, Inc.

corning.com/about_us/corporate_citizenship/community/corning_foundation.aspx

Stay Informed About Funding

The National Dropout Prevention Center has an e-newsletter that lists helpful strategies and funding resources for dropout prevention. Email: ndpc@clemson.edu to subscribe.

For information on federal grant opportunities, **Grants.gov** provides an email subscription service. Subscribers may elect to receive notices about all federal opportunities or opportunities listed by funding opportunity number.

Get on the List!

ing_foundation.aspx

The Corning Foundation awards grants in the areas of community service programs for students, curriculum enrichment, student scholarships, facility improvement and instructional technology projects for the classroom.

Best Buy Teach Awards

bbycommunications.com/crnew/teach.asp

Best Buy awards grants in the areas of technology and service. Teachers and administrators may want to draft programs for computers in the classroom. A database of programs using the funds is also available on the site. Reviewing these programs may yield ideas for new programs.



HP Technology for Teaching

hp.com/hpinfo/grants/us/hpiie.html

HP invites proposals from school districts that are committed to exploring the innovations that are possible at the intersection of teaching, learning, and technology. Grant recipients are part of a long-term development program.

Cluster Four: School & Community Perspective

Dropout Prevention strategies within this cluster include systemic renewal, school-community collaboration, career and technical education, and safe schools. There are a number of foundations with funds set aside to support programs surrounding these strategies.

MetLife Foundation

metlife.com/about/corporate-profile/citizenship/metlife-foundation

The MetLife Foundation funds education projects in the following areas: teachers and principal leadership; school community connections; and access to higher education, with a focus on community colleges.

Approaching your funding research with systemic renewal may begin at the school administrative levels such as principal and teacher leadership and encourage you to apply for funds such as those available with MetLife. A second funding interest, school community connections, would also be an avenue for applying for funding.

Arkansas Foundations

Blue & You Foundation

blueandyoufoundationarkansas.org

The Blue & You Foundation for a Healthier Arkansas anticipates awarding approximately \$1 million in grants annually to non-profit or governmental organizations and programs that positively affect the health of Arkansans.



Particular emphasis will be given to projects affecting health-care delivery, health-care policy and health-care economics. Projects must demonstrate strong community, regional or statewide support, such as co-funding by other community, regional, or statewide organizations or groups. Projects should also demonstrate operational and financial viability that will survive and continue after funding from the Foundation ends.

Idea from past grantee

The Monticello School District received funding from the Blue & You Foundation for its “Fit for Fun” project. Fit for Fun serves students grades 3-8 in the Monticello School District and their parents. The project provides after-school physical and nutritional education programming for students.

Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation (WRF)

wrfoundation.org

Applications are accepted and reviewed on an ongoing basis. An

initial review by WRF program staff determines fit with the proposed activity and the Foundation’s vision, mission, and funding priorities. The review and selection process takes an average of three to six months from the time the completed application and related documents are received. Grant-



seekers are encouraged to begin the application process at least six months before the proposed activity starting date.

Walton Family Foundation

wffhome.com

The Walton Family Foundation has four funding initiatives: public charter school, school choice, school district improvement, and Arkansas Education. The Arkan-

sas Education Initiative seeks to raise the performance of Arkansas schools and prepare students for post-secondary education and careers in industry. Thus, it may be a good source of funding for a career and technical education program.

Because the Foundation accepts only solicited proposals, those interested in applying for a grant need first to send a brief letter of inquiry. The letter should succinctly describe the organization and the proposed project, specify and briefly explain its relevance to a particular Walton Family Foundation funding area and initiative, and provide an estimate of the funds that would be requested. Letters of inquiry should be addressed to:

The Walton Family Foundation
ATTN: Letter of Inquiry
P.O. Box 2030
Bentonville, AR 72712

*Grant writing tips

Consider these questions when composing a grant narrative:

- What’s the problem?
- Who else is addressing it?
- What are the gaps in how it is being addressed?
- How are we proposing to address the problem?
- How will the problem be solved or improved when we are done?
- How will we measure success?
- What do we need in order to try to solve the problem?
- What resources do we already have?
- What are the qualifications and experience that make your program the right one to take on this work?
- Are there problems or barriers that we can foresee?
- How will you overcome them?
- Who will we turn to for help?

*Adapted from: <http://www.k12grants.org/tips.htm>