

Advanced Grant Research: How to Use Highly Targeted Research to Reach the Most Suitable Funders

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Due diligence is the key to making sure that your grant applications and proposals go to the most suitable funders. You would not send a job application for a waiter/waitress position to an engineering firm, or an engineer's resume to a restaurant! So too it is with grants. Highly targeted research will enhance your municipality's chances for success in winning a grant. Untargeted applications are a waste of your time.

Here are some practical tips.

Review thoroughly the background of every potential grant funder to make sure that your mission and project have a tight "fit" with all of the funder's mission and giving strategies, grant making history, funding parameters, grant guidelines and eligibility requirements.

No matter how attractive the funder might seem, or how worthy your project, if the "fit" isn't absolutely perfect move on to another prospect. Apply only to funders whose goals precisely match your own.

Go beyond the basic descriptions of grant opportunities and grant sources that you might find in general announcements. Find the true "sweet spot" of your potential grant funder. You can find such information through grant resource centers and libraries (online and otherwise); such as GrantStation.com, the Foundation Center and Grants.gov. Also, Guidestar.com is a free resource that lets you review a Foundation's "990's" (federal income tax returns) listing all of the grants awarded by that Foundation during a given tax year.

You should also review the grant funder's individual website and published materials. Look for news releases or other clues by running an internet search on the grant funder and its Boards of Directors. You should of course feel free to call the potential grant funder directly and ask questions about how your project might (or might not) fit within the funder's goals and criteria. The deeper you dig, the more you will learn.

This will help you in two ways: 1) it will help you determine the "fit" between your grant request and the funder's goals, and 2) if there is a fit, the information will help you craft your proposal in such a way that you can better express your needs in the grant funder's own "language". If you have several programs or proposals in mind, a grant funder might even be able to guide you in selecting which ones are the most appropriate for an application.

A highly targeted grant prospect will be one that fits your grant proposal's:

- geographic location and scope
- funding type (e.g. capital grant, program grant, general operating grant)
- mission type (e.g. education, culture, social services, health, community development)
- target population (e.g. youth, seniors, socially or economically disadvantaged, women, minorities, other)
- funding amount size (i.e. dollars needed vs. typical dollars awarded by this funder)
- legal structure (i.e. municipality vs. charitable 501(c)3 organization)
- timeline (i.e. funding cycles, application deadlines and turnaround time vs. your project's timing needs)
- supporting documentation availability and requirements.

Highly targeted grant "prospecting" will narrow considerably the myriad of choices to a manageable list of potential grant sources. This list can change over time but it will give you a great head start.

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