



AFP Information Exchange

A Step-by-Step Primer on How to Obtain Large Government Grants for Nonprofits (Part 2)

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A Step-By-Step Primer On How To Obtain Large Government Grants For Nonprofits (Part 2)

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Obtaining Government Grants: Step 2 - Research

There are many steps to applying for large government grants. Each step is equally important to securing the funding your organization needs for growth.

Over the next several weeks, we will provide, step-by-step, the general process inherent in obtaining these grants. The hope is that other professionals advising or working within the NPO community will comment and offer their own suggestions or opinions.

This is the second part of this series: Research.

STEP 2. RESEARCH

As explained in the first part of this series on obtaining large government grants for nonprofits, there are many steps toward making a successful application. Step 1, [as previously described](#), requires showing proof of organizational capacity. This allows your organization to effectively demonstrate (on paper) that it is ready to ask the government to invest in your programs or services. Once that is done, it is time to focus on Step 2.

Step 2 is research. Research has many elements. While researching potential government funders on Grants.gov or the Federal Register is certainly one aspect, the research step discussed herein is more intricate. Particularly, you will need to research your community's need, demand, competition, and find out whether there are any collaborative partnerships within your area. This requires developing an understanding of (1) the community needs of your Federal, State and local government agencies and (2) how these agencies collaborate together to develop an effective

solution (e.g., program) to meet them. Below is a brief summary of ways to help develop this understanding effectively.

1) Identify Federal and State Representatives. Initial research requires knowing who your Federal and State representatives are. If you live in a small state, like Delaware, chances are you have met them in a variety of settings. If you live in a larger state, perhaps you know their key staff members in charge of the agency that you would like to apply to for grants. If you do not know who your Federal and State representatives are, there are plenty of places on the internet to find them.

At the federal level, the Federal [House](#) and [Senate](#) pages provide a searchable list of all Senators and Representatives, and these same names are available on other websites such as [OpenCongress.org](#).

Finding who your state, county, city or other local representatives are varies widely by state. In Delaware, the information is regularly aggregated and published online by the [League of Women Voters](#). The current list (subject to change in November 2014), is available at <http://lwvdelaware.org/Government.html> or [directly here](#). For other states, an internet search should provide this information.

Remember, you cannot apply for government grants successfully without the support of your representatives, and in many cases, you will need letters from them stating that your program is needed in the community and supports their consolidated plan.

2) Read CAPER Reports. Once you've identified your representatives, the next thing to research is the most recent Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report (CAPER). The Federal government requires a CAPER to be filed annually by each level of government that receives federal dollars. The CAPER covers local programs and services funded by federal entitlement programs and serves to identify progress on goals and objectives identified in the Five Year Consolidated Plan. CAPERs must be posted on the government website that is receiving funds.

CAPERs are helpful to nonprofits because they identify where the government is investing in the community. The CAPER will provide statistics and data that provide valuable insights into learning whether needs are being met in the community, if there are gaps in services, and if they need additional nonprofit partners to fill these gaps.

3) Meet the agency representative. With all fundraising, remember: people give to people. The best way to accomplish this is to be as professional as possible. To begin, call the agency representative for the funding you would like to obtain and schedule an appointment. Yes, they will meet with you. Why? It is their **job** to meet with you because one of their responsibilities is to explore viable partnerships within the community. Once that meeting is set, keep the following things in mind.

a) Establish credibility. Be credible and use common sense when setting up these meetings. Send any materials you discussed on the phone in advance of the meeting via email (preferably right after you schedule the meeting) or deliver a bound hard copy. You may also want to send a copy of the [materials previously discussed in Step 1 of our series](#). Confirm the meeting the day before. All of these little things are important to building credibility for you and your organization.

b) Be prepared. At the meeting, be prepared. Focus your prep on what program you would like to provide, how much money you will need, how many clients it will serve, and how your program will help meet that agency's goals to provide these services. Have your budget prepared in advance. Make sure make sure you distinguish program expenses and indirect costs. (A topic to be discussed another time).

Preparedness also means being able to explain, concisely and precisely, how your program will help meet the goals for the government agency in the fiscal year in which you are applying. Make sure that your goals consistent with their objectives.

In short, being prepared helps make your Federal, State, City and County investor's job easy. Document your budget, goals, objectives, expected outcomes and evaluation methods before your meeting. Make reporting for them a breeze, by providing data, statistics and information on the program, outcomes and performance measures a part of your commitment.

4) Think outside the box. It should not come as a surprise that research also requires critical and creative thinking throughout the process. One option to consider as part of your research is calling other non-profit agencies that are currently delivering services in the area similar to the grant funding you would like to seek. Find out whether they need assistance or whether they are looking for partners. Ask yourself whether you provide similar services, but serve a distinct market from theirs.

Collaborations are important. Offer your services, meet with executives. Foundations, corporations and the government are on the lookout for collaborative partnership that maximize the distribution of the leanest Federal budget we have seen in decades.

5) Be aware of news and trends. You don't want to miss the boat if and when an RFP (request for proposal) is announced. How do you ensure to get notice of these opportunities?

a) Email. Make sure your non-profit is on every email list of your representatives to receive emails when RFPs are posted. Many Federal grants, such as Community Development Block Grants and Grant-in-Aid are distributed by the local jurisdiction, insuring that the community needs are met. They are required to post notices.

b) Meetings. Watch for meeting notices that discuss the distribution of Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), and also explore your City and County website for information and applications. Every county or incorporated city in the United States receives community development block grants from the Federal government for programs. They are required to post an RFP for these programs.

c) Learn from rejection. Do not be discouraged if you are rejected the first time you apply for CDBG funding, because these grants are highly competitive. However, jurisdictions are always looking for innovative solutions and partnerships. If you are rejected, contact the agency and ask how you can improve your application for the next funding year.

d) Other Federal funding opportunities. Each State receives Grant-in-Aid funding from the Federal government. These funds are distributed by the State's legislature through competitive RFPs. Talk to your local State Senator and House Representative about the grants, and be sure to ask for their support. Explore your state website and look for the applications online.

6) Is it true that some grants have "pre-determined" recipients? There is no evidence that certain RFPs are designated for certain non-profits, however, established non-profits with reputations for excellence do receive more grants. Even if your application is unsuccessful, do not despair. You may have a brilliant, non-traditional solution to a community problem which

someone else (like a venture capital group, other foundation or corporation) may be interested in.

Conclusion. Never give up! Government programs are established over a long period of time with clearly defined goals to serve distinct populations. Meet with the staff and get their advice; let them guide you on how to qualify for funds. Remember also, whenever there is a change in administration, there is a change in community goals. Thus, whenever there is a change in a political party, a new governor, mayor or President, that may be an opportune time to demonstrate to the new officials that your organization has the capacity and excellence needed to meet their objectives.

Don't miss our next article: Step 3 – Preparing Your Case Statement

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About Cathy D. Cessna, RDH, MPA, CFRE: Senior level private and public sector decision maker; fundraiser, marketing lead, advertising sales, medical software sales; affordable housing development. Eleven years of experience - Adjunct Professor; Marketing, Fundraising, Finance, and Non-profit Legal Issues. Non-profit consultant/public sector: Volunteer: Wilmington Montessori School, Junior League of Wilmington, RHD Howell, Delaware Military Academy, Wellness Center Delaware, Westminster Presbyterian Church, Tower Hill School, Delaware Dental Hygiene Assn.

About Charlie Vincent, Esq.: Charlie has almost 15 years of marketing and business experience across different sectors in Delaware and Pennsylvania, including strategic business planning and marketing, event planning, and fundraising for non-profits, small businesses, and entrepreneurs. As an attorney, Charlie developed a unique understanding and perspective of how different clients think in terms of time, budget, and results. These legal experiences, combined with his marketing and business background, enabled him early in his legal career to help two of largest legal non-profits in Delaware with the planning and execution of multiple successful fundraising events. Charlie formed Innovincent LLC in 2014 to help other non-profits, businesses, and individuals with strategic planning, marketing, event planning, and fundraising needs.

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