

Making The Grant Process Simple

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Making The Grant Process Simple

Have you ever had a big project you needed to start, but didn't know what to do first? Perhaps it is something which required a lot of labor, like landscaping your yard or remodeling your house. When you undertake a project of this magnitude, it's not uncommon to feel overwhelmed and discouraged by the amount of work which needs to be done. But once you find a starting spot and get things going, it seems all to fall in place.

That's just the way you need to think about a grant proposal.

If you have ever considered applying for a grant but were intimidated by the rather lengthily and complicated procedure, then maybe you need a little help finding a place to start. Once you get your feet on the road, you'll find the journey much easier than you imagined.

Let's go back to the comparison between writing a grant proposal and remodeling your house. If you were going to remodel, lay down new carpet and reupholster the sofa-you wouldn't start by ripping up the old carpet. Nor would you begin by slapping a new coat of paint on the walls or tearing down the old drapes. In fact, you would probably begin the project by taking out your Yellow Pages and looking under Home Improvements. This would give you a good idea which stores offer the kind of price range of these goods will be. Once you have a clear idea of what is available, you can call each store to talk to the salespeople and see if they had what you were interested in. Only after making this initial contact would you take the effort to drive down to the store and make a purchase.

So, like that home improvement project, receiving a grant starts with a little research. First you'll want to determine what is available. Then you need to make initial contact with the agency or foundation and see if your need for money fits their guidelines. Once that's done, you will find it easier to complete your proposal and obtain a grant.

Begin by going to the Yellow Pages of grants: The Foundation Directory. You can find this book in the reference section of your local library or, if you live in a rural area, you may need to travel to a larger public library in the nearest major city. In this lengthily directory you will find descriptions of every private grant foundation in the United States. By reading through these listings you will find grants for every purpose you can imagine, from education to artistic projects, scientific research to projects to help the homeless. You will also learn what kind of funding the foundations provide to these projects-some will offer a few hundred dollars, while others will give thousands and

even millions of dollars a year.

There is another Yellow Pages for government money: The Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance. Like the Foundation Directory, The Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance lists every source of free money given away by the government, and the number of causes funded by private foundations is dwarfed by the scope of government grants.

While looking through these grant listings, jot down the addresses and phone numbers of any foundations or government agencies which look promising along with any other important information. Later, you will be able to access this list easily rather than having to go back through the entire book.

Now you have a list of initial contacts for your grant needs, much like you would have after glancing through the Yellow Pages for your remodeling needs. Next, you need to get a little more information about the foundations on the list just as you would about the hardware stores. But how do you do that? In the case of the home improvement stores, you would pick up the phone and call them. Unfortunately, you cannot make a phone call to most grant foundations and calling government agencies is an effort which is abortive as often as it is productive, but you can write a letter to them.

This letter, referred to as a "letter of inquiry," will be your first contact with the foundation. It is your way of reaching out and shaking hands with the foundation director and introducing yourself. In order to make a good impression, keep this letter brief and to the point. Being long winded or redundant will only start you off on a bad foot.

Many people are rather hesitant to compose this letter even though they stand to lose nothing and given thousands of dollars. Perhaps the reason is because they are not sure exactly what should be included in the letter. When putting your letter inquiry together, be sure to include:

- * Your name, address and phone number
- * A brief introduction and description of your project or need for money.
- * A Request for the foundation's annual report and grant application.
- * A request for a list of previous grant recipients, a sample grant proposal and the foundation's tax returns form the previous year.

The annual report is sort of a prospectus for the grant

foundation. Reading it, you will learn exactly what the foundation gives money away for, how extensive your proposal will need to be, how much money they give away to particular projects, and when the applicant deadline is. Although not all foundations make the information available, if you can obtain a list of past recipients and a sample successful proposal you will be ahead of the game because you will have concrete examples to guide you. Or, you can contact the past grantees and inquire what they did to set their proposal or project above the others. With this information, you can hardly go wrong when you begin to write your own proposal.

Once you have your letter ready, send it out to every grant foundation you feel you might be eligible for. By sending one letter to each foundation, you will assured of a large volume of responses.

Soon the material you requested from the foundations will begin appearing in your mail box. When you read through all of these papers, you will discover that some foundations are not what you thought they would be, while others do not fund projects exactly like yours. However, you may discover that some of them are willing to give money. In fact, it shouldn't be too long before you have a list of at least a dozen foundations that are likely grant givers. It is to these you must send your finished grant proposal.

LENDING A HELPING HAND

"But I don't qualify for any of these grants!" That's one of the most common complaints uttered by grant seekers when paging through the Foundation Directory or The Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance, and sometimes it's very valid. After all, most grants are very specialized, and many are not available to individuals. However, it's hard to imagine, with the huge variety of grants that are available, that someone is not eligible for any of them.

Most likely is the situation where, after receiving a grant, an individual might want to find another method to cash in on the process. It seems a shame to let all of that experience and research go to waste on a single grant.

So, rather than worrying about the fact that you have used up all your time and energy on one grant just for yourself, perhaps you should look into becoming a grant broker. Working as a grant broker, you will be acting as a middleman for nonprofit agencies looking for funding, and for government and/or private grant sources which have money to give away.

There is a common misconception about nonprofit companies: Most people seem to think that they cannot engage in any activity

which brings in cash. In reality, the nonprofit status simply means that the company cannot disperse its profit as bonuses among its employees. They can make money, pay regular salaries to their employees, advertise, and reinvest their profits by putting them back into the corporation.

The first thing to understand about being a grant broker is how to make money. Many first-time grant seekers imagine that a grant broker would do well charging a commission, or a percentage of the total grant awarded. This is true. So true, in fact, that it is illegal for grant brokers to collect a commission. Instead, they must charge a set fee for their services and collect only that amount. While this may seem somewhat limiting, it has one advantage: You will be paid whether or not you secure a grant for your nonprofit company.

You already know about your grant sources, so you'll need to research the other half of the equation: the nonprofit organizations in your area. There are two basic types of nonprofit groups which you will be able to help with your grant-seeking efforts—charities and social action organizations. Charities are any group whose main goal is to help human beings (the homeless, the poor, the handicapped) with their efforts. Social action organizations are groups involved with issues like animal rights, political decisions, the environment, etc.

As a grant broker, you must contact several of the nonprofit groups in your area and convince them that you can assist them in efforts by securing grant funds for them. The first contact can be made by simply using your free money letter; they will send you information about the organization and you will be able to determine if you are interested in finding financing for them. Or, if you are more confident about your grant-winning ability, you can introduce yourself and your service in the letter.

Once you have attracted the interest of the nonprofit group, you can either collect a small "finder's fee" for giving them a list of grants that they are eligible for and let them apply for the money themselves, or you can charge a bit more and write the grant proposal for the group yourself. Many nonprofit groups will insist on you doing this.

Remember, when approaching the nonprofit group, your grant experience is your resume. If you have secured a grant for yourself, tell them about it. If not, tell them that you have spent time researching grant sources and the application process. Once you have successfully secured grants for a few nonprofit groups, you will find that others will be much more receptive to your brokerage business. Some may actually seek you out and treat you very obsequiously. Your knowledge and experience are very important to them.

ONE FINAL WORD OF ADVICE

If traditional sources of grant money haven't been working out, a final possibility might be corporations. Large companies often give money for public projects. Many of these companies already have their own foundations (i.e. the Ford Foundation), but others may have programs which are not specifically mentioned in the Foundation Directory.

If you think you have a project which might interest a corporate philanthropic program, consider all the major companies in your area. Many corporate programs are geographic in nature, that is, they may apply mainly to the region in which the company has a major base of operations. Unfold a map of your area and draw a 25-mile radius circle around your house. Then consider all the major industries which fall into all circle and start writing. If none of these attempts pan out, you can start trying other companies at progressively farther distances away. As a last resort, try large companies out of state. Exhaust all possibilities, and always remember that the money may not be where you think it is.

Once you compose your letter of introduction, you may be wondering who to send it to. Here is a brief list of grant foundations to which you can mail your letter. If you'd like more information, check The Foundation Directory in your local or The Secrets Of Getting Free Money by Tim Darth

FORD FOUNDATION

320 East 43rd St.,
New York, NY 10017
Contact: Barron M. Tenny

Information: Money given for projects associated with research, training and other activities related to urban poverty, human rights, rural poverty, education and culture, public policy and international affairs.

THE BABY FOUNDATION FOR THE MUSICAL ARTS

501 Fifth Ave.,
New York, NY 10017
Contact: Eleanor C. Mark

Information: Grants given for musical study based on need and talent.

GATLING GRANT

North Carolina State University
P.O. Box 7302
Raleigh, NC 27695-7302
Contact: Financial Aid Office

Information: If your last name is Gatling and you want to attend this university, you qualify for this grant. There is \$1.2 million available in this fund.

CARNATION COMPANY SCHOLARSHIP FOUNDATION
5045 Wilshire Boulevard
Los Angeles, CA 90036
Contact: Board of Advisors

Information: Scholarships for higher education to relatives of Carnation Company employees on the basis of academic merit and financial need.

NEW HORIZONS FOUNDATION
700 South Flower St., Ste 1122
Los Angeles, CA 90017
Contact: G. Grant Gilford

Information: Financial assistance to needy Christian Scientists who are at least 65 years old and reside in Los Angeles, County, Calif.

THE CLARK FOUNDATION
30 Wall Street
New York, NY 10005
Contact: Edward W. Stack

Information: Grants for convalescent and medical care for needy individuals in the area of Upstate New York and New York City.

THE VERO BEACH FOUNDATION FOUNDATION FOR THE ELDERLY
c/o First National Bank
225 South County Road
Palm Beach, FL 33480
Contact: Program Director

Information: Relief assistance only to indigent residents of Vero Beach, Fla.