



Guide to Winning Small Grants from Community Sources

As a math or science leader in your school or district, you have a vision for the improvements you need to help your students achieve and provide your teachers with the skills they need to lead students to that goal. Sometimes, funding is the catalyst that will help you move toward your vision. A foundation or company that invests in your local community may be the best resource for those funds.

To win grant funding from any foundation or corporate giving source, your proposal must be carefully planned, complete, compliant, and persuasive. When it comes to local community giving sources, you should also focus on the benefits your proposed program has for the community, and how you will include community resources to make the project sustainable.

Step 1: Define your Need

Foundations and corporate giving sources fund projects to solve problems or address clearly defined needs and issues in your community. Most granting organizations look for a program that has a strategic impact and sustainability beyond the life of the grant.

If you have a small need, you should frame it as part of a larger need with a vision of success for your students and community. An example of such a project would be to revamp 7th and 8th grade mathematics curricula to increase the percentage of students who successfully pass algebra 1. As part of that project, you will integrate graphing technology into instruction and provide extensive professional development to the mathematics teachers. Additional components of such a program could include developing an after-school tutoring program in conjunction with the Boys & Girls Club, and evaluating the program at various points during the year. You may only ask the community organization for money to fund a portion of this entire program, but providing the full scope of your vision will show the organization that you are serious, organized and likely to be successful.

The first step in creating a proposal is defining your need. This is the most important step, and you should start by asking some key questions:

- Why are you requesting funds? (This will become your need statement.)
- How will this funding improve your school and community? (This will become your mission/goal.)
- What will it take to reach this goal? (This will drive the budget and the identification of your partners.)
- What will the community look like when this need is addressed? (This will become your vision.)
- Who else in the community supports addressing this need? (These people and organizations will become your partners.)

Step 2: Seek the Support of Your School or District

Once you have conceptualized your project, you may want or need to get the support of your school or district leadership to apply for a grant. Begin by discussing your idea for a project with your department chair and/or your principal. Your district may have an Office of Grants and Development that could assist you in identifying potential funding sources and helping you write your proposal.

Step 3: Identify Potential Funding Sources and Gather Information about Them

The list below provides you with foundation and corporate giving sources in your region that may be interested in supporting science and mathematics grants for your school. Use your local library and school district to identify other sources. Once you have developed your list of potential funders, contact them to request their annual reports (this will give you a list of the kinds of programs the organization tends to fund), grant guidelines, and application forms.

Foundations and corporate giving sources may provide you with very detailed information about themselves and their proposal requirements, or they may simply tell you to submit a short written request for funds. After you have studied the available information, ask yourself the following questions:

- Does the organization give grants in my geographic area?
- Does the organization support science and mathematics projects in secondary schools?
- Does the organization provide direct support for projects, as opposed to other funding mechanisms such as loans, matching funds, or scholarships?
- Based on the organization's funding patterns, is my proposal likely to be competitive?

Step 4: Organize to Win

Once you have completed your research and chosen which grant(s) to pursue, organize to win. This will involve the following activities:

- Receiving formal permission from your school or district, if necessary.
- Developing a schedule for your proposal development so that you can submit a complete, compliant, and persuasive proposal by the deadline.
- Identifying your partners and the information and support they will need to provide you.
- Outlining the entire application from the cover letter through the appendices.

Step 5: Develop Your Proposal

As you put together your application, you may, depending upon the proposal requirements, need to undertake up to three kinds of overlapping activities: (1) completing the required forms, which will require the signatures of school officials; (2) writing the narrative proposal; and (3) developing the appendices. Funding organizations will ask you to submit either a letter of inquiry or a full proposal. A letter of inquiry helps the organization determine whether it is interested in reviewing your proposal and will save you the time and energy of developing a proposal if the organization is not interested in funding your project.

There are no guidelines for letters of inquiry. Below is a sample of a one-page letter of inquiry.

Sample Letter of Inquiry

August 10, 2005

[Heading]

Dear Mr. Jones:

I am writing this letter of inquiry to determine whether or not the Jones Foundation would be interested in accepting a grant proposal to improve the teaching of Algebra I courses in Hometown's three high schools.

For the last four years, standardized test scores in Algebra I courses have fallen an average of 17 percent at all of Hometown's three high schools. This drop in test scores means that many of Tioga's students will not succeed in mathematics, for without a strong foundation in basic Algebra they are likely to do poorly in Geometry and Advanced Algebra.

The Hometown School District has just purchased Texas Instruments TI-84 Silver Edition Graphing Calculators for the students and teachers in each high school. These calculators are an excellent tool for helping students to understand algebra and graphing concepts in a new and powerful way, for all of our Algebra I students. Teachers, however, do not know how to use the calculator effectively, and they need to redesign their curricula to incorporate the new technology into their day-to-day lessons. To accomplish this, the Hometown School District would like to host a two-week summer institute with follow-up activities for its 10 high school mathematics teachers to (1) learn to use the Calculator; and (2) begin jointly developing new lesson plans. We are confident that the combination of new technology and improved lesson plans will lead to greater success in Algebra I for our students.

We estimate that the two-week summer institute and fall follow-up activities would cost approximately \$7,500.00. Would the Jones Foundation be interested in considering this kind of application?

Thank you very much for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Many foundations and corporate giving sources have specific application guidelines. Some, however, do not. If you receive no guidelines, you may want to include the following information in your proposal narrative, which should not exceed five pages:

- Measurable, time-framed goals and outcomes.
- Detailed description of proposed project.
- Evaluation plan—this may be as much to meet your own school and district needs as the granting organization's needs.
- Plan for sustainability.

- Management of project and brief descriptions of key personnel.
- Organizational/School District background or overview.

In your appendices, you should attach a budget that includes the following categories: (1) personnel; (2) fringe benefits; (3) supplies; (4) equipment; (5) other expenses. The appendices also should include resumes of key personnel and a letter of support from your principal or superintendent.

Despite their variety, winning grant proposals usually answer the following questions clearly, concisely, and persuasively:

- What is the problem you are addressing?
- What is your solution?
- Does your project description answer the classic questions: Who? What? Where? How? Why?
- Why is it likely to be a sound and cost-effective solution?
- Why are you qualified to do it?
- How will you sustain your project?
- How will you measure outcomes and success?

Step 6: Have your Proposal reviewed by a Third Party

The most effective way to improve your proposal is to have a fellow teacher or administrator review it who has not been involved in the proposal process. The reviewer should provide line-by-line comments and changes and should focus on the following questions:

- Is the proposal well organized and easy to follow?
- Is the information clearly presented and factually correct?
- Is the proposal fully responsive to the grant guidelines?
- Does the proposal demonstrate a superior understanding of the needs and problems?
- Is the proposed approach sound? Does it offer realistic solutions?
- Are there any problems? If so, how would you fix them?

Step 7: Revise, Finalize, Submit, and Create Documentary File

Use the reviewer's comments to revise and finalize your application. Make sure that you have addressed all the requirements and that the application is complete, neat, easy to read, and free of typographical and other errors. After you submit your proposal, immediately create a file for it that includes all electronic documents and paper copies of the proposal.