

Working with Foundations

The Four R's



Every foundation is different, and some of these tips may not be applicable to some foundations



RESEARCH

You may have heard the phrase “If you’ve seen one foundation, you’ve seen one foundation.” Foundations vary greatly in size, assets, structure and tax status, so it’s helpful to learn about the broad categories of foundations (family, community, corporate, etc.). Foundations often spend significant time learning about organizations to inform their funding decisions, so it makes sense to invest some time in researching them before reaching out with a request:

- Learn from foundation websites and annual reports.
- Sign up for foundation e-newsletters and follow foundations on social media.
- Keep your own website and social media current for when foundations want to learn more about you.
- Research your own project and demonstrate a robust understanding of the problem and solution.



REALISTIC

There are nearly 2 million nonprofits in the U.S., and the vast majority require external funding. Foundations can’t fund them all, so they typically adhere to established strategic plans and funding priorities. Some things to consider:

- Even if your organization doesn’t quite fit, there is still value in sharing its story and starting a relationship.
- Foundations set their budgets every year to fit funding priorities with available funds. There often isn’t a lot of easily accessible money just lying around – even for great causes and ideas.
- Patience is key. Foundations may operate on different timelines than your needs. In general, foundations do not operate to offer SOS type funding. They prefer to invest in long-term, system-based initiatives.



RELATIONSHIPS

Foundations value relationships with prospective grantees/partners and appreciate the opportunity to learn about organizations and how they fit into the bigger picture of systems change. Consider cultivating such a relationship before asking for money:

- Send a succinct but informative email describing your organization and its needs and ask for a virtual or in-person meeting to learn more about the foundation.
- If you don’t hear back right away, politely follow up.
- Recognize that many foundations offer more than just money, such as technical assistance, networking and learning opportunities, advice and feedback, and moral support. Take advantage of them!
- Thoughtful questions about funding parameters are appropriate, but avoid being argumentative. Foundations have policies and processes to follow.



RESPONSIVE

If a foundation responds to your request, always acknowledge its response. This is important if staff have spent time gathering tailored information for you. And if they ask for additional information from you, send it in a timely manner. Other things to keep in mind:

- If foundation staff makes a recommendation, let them know when you have followed up.
- Every grant you receive is an audition for the next grant. Avoid creating more work for the foundation by ignoring emails, grant report deadlines, etc. If you have questions or concerns, be positive and proactive.
- Always be ready to answer this question: In what specific ways can funding advance your mission and goals?

Resources for grant seekers

Free Will

<https://www.freewill.com/>

“For Nonprofits” in top bar menu, check out “Resources” or “Webinars” in drop down menu.

Philanthropy News Digest

<https://philanthropynewsdigest.org/>

Go to “RFPs” in top address bar menu, right hand side.

Chronicle for Philanthropy

<https://www.philanthropy.com/>

Check out “Advice” and “Opinion” in the top bar menu – Beware: the “Grants” section requires payment.

KSU Research and Extension

<https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/program-areas/supporting-communities/grant-support/>

This is the K-State Research and Extension Office of Community Vitality Grant Support website.

University of Kansas Center for Public Partnerships & Research

<https://cpr.ku.edu/grant-writing-assistance-kansas-non-profits>

Grant writing assistance for Kansas nonprofits.

30 Best Grant Writing Blogs and Websites

https://blog.feedspot.com/grant_writing_blogs/

Professional Grantwriter

<https://www.professionalgrantwriter.org/>

Check out “Blog” in top address bar, “Foundations” in drop down menu.

Candid

<https://candid.org/>

Get free access to part of Candid’s nationwide Foundation Directory. For full access, go to <https://candid.org/find-us> to locate a library or entity in Kansas that offers Candid and its full directory. You also can use Candid to get free access to GuideStar, the largest source of verified information on nonprofits.