



Information Brief

A Guide to Foundation Funding: Creating a Successful Proposal

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Mission:

To increase employment opportunities for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders with disabilities nationwide.

Based at:

University of Hawaii
at Manoa, Center on
Disability Studies

In collaboration with:

Hawaii Centers for
Independent Living

Hawaii Vocational
Rehabilitation and
Services for the Blind
Division

Funded by:

U.S. Department of
Education
Rehabilitation Services
Administration

Introduction

Providing services for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) with disabilities presents numerous challenges due to their diversity of ethnicity, generation, language, dialect, culture, and socioeconomic status (Pi, 2001). Within AAPI cultures, many believe disabilities may be caused by something an individual did wrong in the past, or because of bad luck or misfortune. Fate, in these cases, is accepted, and individuals with disabilities in the AAPI community depend on the care and assistance of their immediate families (Kim-Rupnow, 2001). Many AAPI individuals with disabilities are reluctant to participate in broader communities because of fear and mistrust of individuals and authorities outside the AAPI community (Kim-Rupnow, 2001). AAPIs are also sometimes victims of another interesting phenomena described as the “model minority myth” (Lee, 1998; Hampton, 2000). This is a prevalent, stereotypical view of AAPIs as successful and affluent, which can lead to exclusion from entitlement and social service programs designed for U.S. minorities (Lee, 1998).

The National Technical Assistance Center to Increase Employment Opportunities for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders with Disabilities, at the Center on Disability Studies, University of Hawaii at Manoa, provides technical assistance to state Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies, Centers for Independent Living (CILs), Job Placement Agencies (JPAs), and other organizations and individuals across the nation, to add to the number of AAPIs with disabilities obtaining employment.

The cultural issues mentioned above require Vocational Rehabilitation agencies, CILs, JPAs, and other employment assistance agents to seek creative ways to fund programs specifically tailored to provide services to AAPIs with disabilities.

Foundations are an available, yet relatively, unknown source of funding.

Steps to Getting a Grant from a Foundation

Foundations are non-profit organizations created for a specific purpose, for example, improving health care for individuals with disabilities, or increasing the ability of women to operate a business. There are over 67,000 founda-

tions in the United States. Many foundations provide assistance to people and businesses for a wide variety of purposes including: scholarships, travel, internships, residencies, arts, cultural projects, scientific research, general welfare, and more.

Every foundation must have and make public their mission. No two foundations are exactly alike. Differences include, but are not limited to, operational expenses, populations eligible for foundation programs, or geographic locations served.

Each particular foundation has its own special field of interest, and if you qualify in that area of interest, you might receive funding. As with government grants, foundations require you, as a business or an individual, to show why you need a particular sum of money, how you will use it, and whether the money will be used toward a goal you and the foundation share.

Obtaining funding from foundations generally follows a pattern, such as: 1) knowing your mission, goals, and needs; 2) researching foundations; 3) contacting the foundation; 4) applying for funds from the foundation; and 5) following up. Each of these parts of the process are explained in the following paragraphs.

Prior to applying for funding of any kind, an organization or individual (called the fundseeker in the remainder of this brief) serves themselves best if they know their own, or their organization's mission, goals, and specific needs. A mistake fundseekers sometimes make is trying to fit their mission into that of a funder. The problem with this is if the funder and the organization have different missions and goals, no matter how much money is available, it will not facilitate the organization's mission. So, it is imperative to seek funds from a foundation that has similar goals to your own mandate.

Once the fundseeker is clear about their mission, goals, and needs, it is time to research foundations to see what might be available. In an insert for this brief, there is a list of potential funders who award money to individuals with disabilities and businesses that assist individuals with disabilities. You can look up each of these foundations on the web by typing their name into any major search engine. As you peruse the listings, note eligibility requirements, and eliminate any for which you definitely do not qualify. Be sure to note contact information for foundations you qualify for, since you will need that information next. Another valuable online resource is The Foundation Center (<http://fdncenter.org>), which offers general tips on fundraising, including newsletters and other publications, information on physical sites where research on funders and other resources might be located, and a variety of other resources about the foundation fundraising process.

One of the primary reasons to research foundations is to narrow the possibilities of who to approach. This will be accomplished, at least in part, by ensuring the foundation you approach has a mission similar to that of the fundseeker, serves the same geographic location you do, wants to serve the same population(s) your organization does, and offers an amount of money in their funding programs that matches your needs. The closer a match between a fundseeker's objectives and that of a funder, the better the chances will be to obtain funding.

Once a foundation, or foundations, to consider are selected, it is a good idea to contact them. This leads to several advantages: 1. you may have a contact at the foundation for future communications; 2. any out-of-date information can be corrected by the foundation's spokesperson; and 3. it gives a foundation representative a chance to ask questions and find out about your organization and mission, which may lead to enthusiasm on their part for your goals. After the initial contact is made, if it is still appropriate, most foundations will send the fundseeker an application packet. At this time, any questions, or information, you do not find answered in the application packet may be clarified. For example, you may want to know:

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- 1) Can I get a list of people who have been awarded grants in the past?
 - 2) How many grants were awarded the previous year, out of how many applications?
 - 3) Are there any limitations on how much is awarded?
 - 4) When are applications due?
 - 5) When are awards made?

(Tip: Send the foundation a thank you note after you call, if possible. Establishing a good relationship with the funding agency can go a long way!)

After receiving the application packet, someone needs to fill out the application, write a proposal, or whatever is asked for from the foundation in the application packet. Doing this is like taking some tests: one of the most important aspects of the process is following directions. For example, if there is a specific date to submit an inquiry about your project, prior to submitting the entire application, this must be done. Not following instructions, or making a small error or miscalculation, may immediately disqualify your application.

Foundations generally are as interested in learning about your organization as they are in hearing about the project for which you desire funding. They may require your organization to be recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as a 501(c)(3), tax-exempt non-profit organization. If so, they will request copies of documentation to prove this is the case. They may also require documentation of your organizational structure, such as a listing of Board of Directors and an organizational flow chart. Foundations also frequently want to see the most recent audit of your organization's bookkeeping, and some funders require documentation from specific time periods.

Once the foundation's criteria for organizational documentation has been met, they are then likely to look for a budget to determine if the fundseeker is prepared to use foundation money effectively. The budget should include not only personnel costs, but all possible needs, such as office supplies, office space, equipment, utility bills, and travel expenses. Be aware, though, many foundations will only provide money for specific needs, for example, some foundations will not fund personnel costs and others will not fund operating expenses. This is something you want to be aware of from your research about the foundation, so you know what you can and cannot request.

After ensuring the organizational documentation and budget data are the best you can do, you will want to offer the goals and objectives of your project in as clear and concise language as you possibly can. Make it as easy as possible for the funder to like and support your project.

Finally, keep in touch with the foundation after you have submitted all the necessary paperwork. Allow a week or two to pass and call the foundation to make sure your application package arrived, and ask if any additional information is needed from you. If you do not know the timeline for the application process, it is a good idea to inquire when you might contact the foundation again to check on the status of your application.

Receiving grant money from foundations requires effort on your part, but in the end, the results may well be worth it. Many organizations and agencies providing services for individuals with disabilities are rarely successful without some sort of outside funding, and foundations are one of the best resources to use.

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