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Chapter One: What Do They Want?

If you really want your grant to be funded, whether it is a \$500 mini-grant to fund software for your kindergarten classroom or a \$10,000 federal technology grant to fund laptops for a high school program, you need the right perspective. You see, teachers and those who work in programs for children and youth seem to be operating with a flawed belief system. They believe that the grantors are interested in giving grant dollars for what teachers want, or even for what children and youth need. That is not exactly the case.

Funding sources, whether they are **public** or **private***, have a funding agenda. They have a plan and priorities for funding. That is why they send out an **RFP*** (request for proposals).

Question: Is there a difference between private and public funding sources?

Answer: Definitely. Read the definition for public and private funding in the glossary.

Question: One of my friends teaches at a low-income school that got a grant that they didn't even have to write! It was some kind of federal money. What was she referring to?

Answer: It was probably a **formula grant***. There is a detailed definition in the glossary, but suffice it to say that public money can come down to schools via formula or **competitive*** grants. Formula grants are distributed to schools according to an established percentage or per-diem (by the day) rate and you simply fill out forms to request them. Competitive awards require a formal proposal that earns points to compete against other proposals.

Funding sources want to fund programs that closely resemble what they (the grantors) want to accomplish. Every organization that gives grant dollars has a mission and a vision. They have a set of beliefs about what is important and choose to use their resources, whether they are dividends from a healthy private business, a community allocation of dollars, or a large federal tax-driven program, to bring those beliefs to life.

Author's Note: Throughout this book, terms that appear in boldface and with an asterisk are defined in the Glossary of Terms beginning on page 152.

Over the years, I have found that teachers spend too little time researching the available funding sources. Certainly, they dig up sources who declare that they provide grants for schools, education, children and youth, or at-risk populations, but they stop short of finding out essential details about the source.

- ✓ What does the organization say about preferred projects?
- ✓ What is the history of funding schools or programs similar to your own?
- ✓ Does the funder have **limitations*** to funding, such as geography or kinds of grants that it will consider?
- ✓ Is there a list of previously funded programs that you can peruse to see how closely they match your idea?
- ✓ Does the organization's website offer a sample grant or at least a list of "Dos and Don'ts" for their grants?

For inexperienced grant writers, it is tempting to view every RFP as a done deal. Novices are naïve in their belief that any grant that seems creative or that will do something positive for students will receive equal attention from a funding source. Such an attitude will only lead to disappointment.

Further, I have found that grant grantors appear to engage in a process of elimination as soon as they close the due date for the RFP. They gather in all the submissions and check for the following:

- ✓ Applications that are incomplete
- ✓ Applications that are too long or that include **addenda*** that are not allowed
- ✓ Applications from a part of the country that is not included in this round of funding
- ✓ Applications from communities in which there is no **corporate presence***
- ✓ Applications that do not match the vision of the organization
- ✓ Applications that include a budget that requests items that are not funded by the organization

(See **Red Flags for Funding** on the following page.)

"With nearly 40,000 foundations in the U.S. (7,000 of which provide more than 90% of foundation support), you can probably find one or two that will help your group."

Andy Robinson, *Grassroots Grants*

But finding those organizations isn't enough. You must go a step further and identify not only what they *want to fund*, but also what they *do not* and *will not* fund!

Hot Topics in Grants

The journey toward funding begins with a good match between the grant writer and the funder. One of the elements of attraction in a match is a hot topic, one that grantors are eager to place their bets on. Here are some current hot topics and the reasons for their popularity.

Topic	Rationale	Tips for Grant Writers
After-school tutoring programs and homework centers	Funding for these programs is a federal priority. See the U.S. Department of Education website at www.ed.gov	Target large groups of underserved children.
Arts education	Private sources of funding by media and performing artists are hot right now. There is research linking higher SAT scores with participation in the arts.	Show the link between participation in the arts and reduction of high-risk behaviors.
Early childhood/Early intervention	Brain research is compelling. The 0-3 developmental period is when intervention works best and has the most lasting results.	Focus on early literacy, parenting, socio-emotional development, and family intervention.
Family literacy/Early literacy	Research suggests that the earlier and more intense a child's exposure to books and language, the more likely he or she is to become a competent reader.	Think multi-generational in your reading program. Grantors love projects in which seniors and little children are matched for literacy.
High school retention and graduation	With close to 50% of American students failing to graduate from high school, this topic has become one of the absolute priorities of many foundations.	Use data and quotes from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation reports on high schools that work.