

# Where to Begin the Search for Funding

## What Grantseekers Need to Know

By Houkje Ross

Closing the Gap, Funding • April/May 2001

The Office of Minority Health Resource Center (OMHRC) should be the first stop on your quest to identify sources of funding. OMHRC provides the public and health professionals with the most current grantmaking opportunities available from Federal, private and corporate grantmakers, non-profits and grantmaking public charities. “If you’re a community-based organization looking for money, we’re just a telephone call away,” said LaJoy Mosby, deputy director for OMHRC. Contacting OMHRC first can significantly reduce the initial legwork—saving you time and valuable resources, Mosby added.

OMHRC consults a variety of reference tools when conducting a tailored funding search. Readily accessible are a variety of directories, online and electronic databases, and related tools to customize a search and identify funding opportunities in nearly all areas. From grants specifically geared toward minorities, or research, social service, biomedical and health care funding guides to listings of residency and fellowship programs and detailed information on foundations, corporate and private philanthropic organizations—information specialists are standing by to help you navigate through the funding maze.

OMHRC receives a large number of calls each month related to funding. “About 40 percent of the calls I get are from individuals who work for CBOs that are looking for money to start a new program,” said Charlene Williamson, an information specialist with OMHRC. “Many times, all the caller knows is that they want to do something to help their community,” said Williamson. The majority of callers are looking for funding to assist with programs related to youth, HIV/AIDS, teen pregnancy, substance abuse and violence prevention, said Williamson.

Not knowing exactly where to start a search is a problem for many grantseekers. According to the 2001 Foundation Center’s *Foundation Giving Trends* report, the percent of grant dollars given to health care ranks second, right after education. The Foundation Center, which has offices in Atlanta, Cleveland, New York, San Francisco and Washington, D.C., supports institutional philanthropy by promoting public understanding of the field and helping grantseekers succeed. With millions of dollars available for health funding, and thousands of private foundations, corporate grantmakers and public charities giving, it pays to know how to begin a search for funding.

### Start Locally

Stephanie Singleton, a former information specialist with OMHRC said, “starting in your own backyard is the best place to begin a search for funding.” Malcolm Williams, program associate at *Grantmakers In Health* (a non-profit organization located in Washington, D.C., working to help foundations and corporate giving programs) agrees. Often grantseekers make the mistake of going after the big or well-known foundations, without exploring other opportunities, said Williams. “Grantseekers are less likely to receive funding from large

foundations, which are also less likely to accept unsolicited proposals,” noted Williams.

There are thousands of smaller foundations that can be more helpful and more receptive to CBOs that are looking for money, said Singleton. Regional Associations of Grantmakers (RAGS) such as the Donors Forum of Ohio or the Southeastern Council of Foundations, provide current listings of foundations in a specific geographic area. RAGS often provide CBOs and other organizations with free training or consulting services. For example, the Delaware Valley Grantmakers provide training classes and publications that can help an organization write a grant proposal or learn about the foundations in the area. One of the Washington Regional Associations of Grantmaker’s (WRAG) functions is to facilitate a mutual understanding between grantmakers and grantseekers. WRAG and many other RAGS also provide grantseekers with resources like the Common Grant Application Form.

Once a grantseeker has found the nearest RAG in their area, narrowing the pool of possible foundations is the next step, according to Grantsdirect.com, an online directory of foundations and other grantmakers in Maryland and the District of Columbia. Before applying for funding, organizations need to find out as much as possible about a foundation by reviewing its profile and any other published materials that are available. Some basic questions to ask include:

- What is the size of the foundation?
- What kinds of revenues, expenses and total contributions does it have?
- What is its capacity to support your organization’s project?

This information will most likely be found in a foundation’s annual report, which is often available via the foundation’s web site. Annual reports reflect the personality, style and interests of a foundation, according to the Foundation Center. Reports can also show whether a foundation is in the process of changing direction or considering new funding initiatives.

### Try to Match Missions

A good way for organizations to keep a funding search focused is to learn the mission of each foundation. Williams says that many foundations grant money based on whether or not a proposed program fits with its own mission. The Annie E. Casey Foundation, for example, funds initiatives that have significant potential to demonstrate innovative policy, service delivery and community support for children and families. A grantseeker looking for money to build a community program for the support of the elderly would be better off looking to another foundation.

“Organizations need to find a good fit,” said Margaret K. O’Byron, President and CEO of the Consumer

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Health Foundation, a Washington, D.C.-based foundation that gives grants to improve access to health care. “Just as each organization has a mission, foundations have a mission and vision for their community. It benefits everyone when an organization takes the time to research what a foundation seeks to accomplish,” said O’Byron.

Williams recommends learning the types of programs or organizations a foundation has funded in the past. This involves doing a fair amount of background research and developing a relationship with the foundation. Sitting down and talking with a representative from a foundation can also build an organization’s reputation. “Foundations want to know that they are more than just a financial resource,” said Williams.

“I love it when a representative from an organization comes to talk to me,” said O’Byron. “It shows a certain amount of commitment.” Talking with a foundation can also be a great way for an organization to learn about other foundations that may be willing to fund its project, O’Byron added. “We’re all here trying to make a difference,” O’Byron said of foundations and organizations. Organizations should think of foundations as active partners, she added.

The *Foundation Center* has available an online orientation to the grantseeking process. It is available at <http://fdncenter.org/learn/orient/intro1.html>, or call toll-free (800) 424-9836.

*For more information about Grantmakers in Health, contact Mary Buckley, (202) 452-8331. To contact the Office of Minority Health Resource Center for a funding search, call (800) 444-6472. ❖*

