

Relationship Cultivation and Outreach to Program Officers

Prepared for Temple University

Grantwriting Workshop



Effective Foundation Grantseeking

Effective foundation grantseeking relies on a “three legged stool” consisting of:

- *Good relationships*
- *Strong Programs*
- *Impeccable proposals*

Forming and maintaining relationships with foundation funders is imperative. Without good relationships in place, most foundation grants will be declined.

Work With Your Corporate & Foundation Relations Office

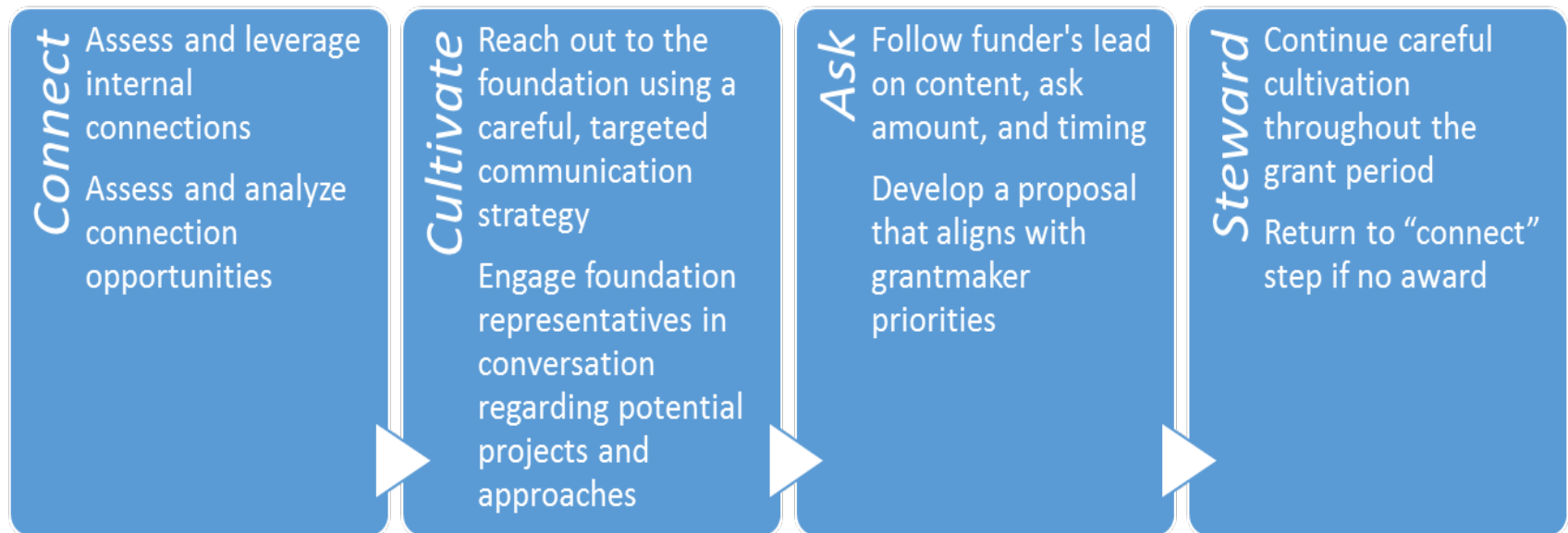
Successful foundation grantseeking requires a balance of formal grantseeking and traditional fundraising approaches.

- Grant writing is just one step in the process towards grant success
- Equally important are planning, research, and communication with funders



Foundation Grant Development Process

- Starting with carefully targeted prospects, Hanover recommends a **four-step model** of foundation grant development to solicit grants in the context of a long-term relationship-building strategy.



Corporate and Foundation Relations

[CFR](#) manages relationships between the University and corporate and foundation partners. CFR can assist faculty by:

- Identifying funding opportunities
- Advising faculty and administration on how to make a strong case for support
- Reviewing, revising, and editing proposals prior to submission
- Contacting CFR partners on behalf of faculty and staff

Communication with Funders: Contacting a Program Officer

Evidence suggests that the majority of funded proposals involved contact with the program officers at the funding agency

Program staff influence and guide decisions

- In the business of making investments
- Can guide applicants to more suitable funding opportunity or agency
- Can be incredible resources both in terms of information but also proposal review and award management

Contacting the program officer/building the relationship

- [“Can We Talk? Contacting Program Officers”](#)
- [“What to Say—and Not Say—to Program Officers”](#)
- [“Communicating with Funders and Program Officers”](#)

Why Make Contact?

- Pre-proposal communication helps to establish a relationship with the sponsor.
- The program officer's immediate response to a project is a good predictor (although not a guarantee) of success/denial. Confirming if a proposed idea fits with the program's objective is especially important. Many proposals are rejected because they don't align with program objectives.

Where to Find Contact Information for the Program Officer

Foundations – search their websites or other listings

Most Federal Agencies – Program Opportunity listings and program websites

TIP: Foundations may or may not have a Program Officer or contact person listed. Respect the wishes of the foundation if they ask not to be contacted.

All federal grant-making agencies have a Program Officer, some have specific Program Officer for each grant funding program/initiative.

FOUNDATION GRANTSEEKING

Differences between Office of CFR and OVPR

CFR focuses on securing philanthropic funding by building relationships with private foundations, corporate foundations, and other businesses to support Temple's priorities, including student and faculty initiatives, innovative programming, and capital improvements. CFR works in collaboration with the [Office of the Vice President for Research](#) (OVPR) to assist faculty and staff seeking external funding. [The Pre Award Management Division](#) of the OVPR is responsible for submitting all proposals for grants and contracts for research to public agencies, private non-profit research organizations, and business partners (agreements and contracts).

Faculty and program directors may not apply for or receive grants directly from external organizations without receiving university approval. This ensures that applications comply with university regulations regarding budget approval, cost-sharing, space and equipment, research regulatory approvals, conflict of interest, etc.

Getting to Know Foundation Funders

- Research first!
 - Carefully review guidelines on the website, if available
 - Cross-check with guidelines on 990s (i.e. [Guidestar](#))
 - Prepare your questions / Concept Paper in advance
- If necessary, contact to verify guidelines
- Follow-up communication
 - Call to confirm receipt and review process
 - Update communication if a significant event happens:
 - New financial information (i.e., grants for the project have been awarded)
 - Leadership changes in the organization
- Board communication
 - If you have a personal contact, use it!
 - Be careful not to bypass paid foundation staff or established processes

Getting to Know Foundation Funders

- If awarded: stewarding the partnership
 - Be sure to thank the foundation if a grant is awarded!
 - Meet all progress reports!
 - Invite to major events
 - Anticipate renewal opportunity
- If declined:
 - Most foundations fund only 5-10% of proposals received
 - Most foundations will be open to reviewing a resubmission in the future
 - Contact them to ask for feedback and next steps

Earning “Brownie” Points with Foundations

Remember to include incentives for foundations in your project planning and be sure to emphasize these incentives during your conversation with foundation staff.

- Incentives for foundations may include:
 - Return on Investment (ROI)
 - Model replication
 - Opportunities for volunteer engagement and/or recognition

Be sure to name drop if you have a personal contact or know someone with strong connections to foundation staff or Board Members.

When in doubt, request the assistance of your colleagues in Institutional Advancement, Corporate and Foundation Relations by completing a [CFR Support Request Form](#).

MAKING CONTACT

Using Analysis to Prepare to Contact the PO

Thoroughly understanding an organization/agency, its mission, programs, investment portfolio is important before contacting a program officer

- Knowing the funder before contacting one of its representatives is crucial
- You want to have a good context for project research and development to inform questions and conversations

Understanding the particular funding mechanism or opportunity within the context of that larger mission is essential

- The information is essential to determining project fit
- Making good/lasting/impressionable contact on the program officer
 - Getting the PO to remember your proposal in the post-review decision-making process can be a differentiator

Before Speaking With the Program Officer

Be sure that you:

1. Read the agency's and funding program's web pages, the RFP (more than once), any FAQs or supporting documentation.
2. Prepare a brief, one-page concept paper, or your overview section, or your list of specific aims or research questions.
3. Do not cold call. Send an email first.
4. Will be brief and direct. (Be ready to state the goal of your project and give an elevator pitch).
5. Have questions prepared.
6. Are ready to LISTEN to the program officer (especially for any information that does not appear in the RFP and particularly in regards to objectives or priorities).
7. Show passion for your project

Potential Questions for the Program Officer:

- ***Does the proposed project match the sponsor's/program's current priorities?***
If it does not, ask for suggestions to alter the project or about other programs that might make a better fit.
- ***What can be done to improve the chances of a favorable review?*** The program officer knows this is why you are calling, so there is no reason to be shy about asking.
- ***What are the most common reasons a proposal is rejected?*** This question might help you understand some of the underlying considerations of a review panel. However, sometimes they publish this information online, so look for it on the agency website first.
- ***Are there any emerging interests within the program?*** Again, this can help get at some underlying considerations that do not appear in print materials.
- ***Is the award amount expected to change compared to the previous year?***
What is the anticipated success ratio for the grant cycle?

Be careful that these questions are not already answered online!

After the Call

Follow up with an email thanking the PO for their time and summarizing the key points you took away from the call.

In any future communication about this opportunity, reference your call. Change the subject line of your email to reflect the purpose and urgency of the request.

What NOT to Do

- Don't speak disparagingly of your colleagues or competitors.
- Don't speak disparagingly of projects previously funded by the sponsor.
- Don't try to force-fit your interests to the grant program objectives.
- Don't try to tell the program officer what you think they should be funding.
- Don't focus overmuch on yourself or your past/future accomplishments.
- Don't overwhelm the program officer with papers and materials.
- Don't deliver a lengthy monologue/presentation about the project.
- Don't ask questions for which they had already published answers in guides or online.

CONTACTING A FEDERAL PROGRAM OFFICER

When to Contact a Federal Program Officer

Valid reasons to contact a program officer:

- To confirm if a project idea fits with the sponsor's and the program's objectives.
- To obtain guidance about a project's design, collaboration, budget, and timeline (The feedback that federal program officers are allowed to provide is limited immediately before and once the Program Solicitation has been issued. Be sure to contact the program officer well in advance of the anticipated release of the RFP).
- To discover underlying considerations, methodology trends, preferences, dislikes, and shifting priorities that do not appear in published material.
- To ask for clarification of stated guidelines or an RFP.
- To discuss ways to strengthen the project if a prior application was not successful (i.e. to discuss a resubmission).

Program Officers are busy! Be prepared when you sit down to make the call.

Concept Papers: A Conversation Starter

Begin by sharing a well-written concept paper for a well-design project with program officers for feedback, strategic insight, and to build rapport

- Successful PIs report gaining invaluable insights into subject and process from connecting with program officers

Program officers are looking for projects to invest in and are willing to help

- NSF's tag line is "*Ask early, ask often!*"

Make an appointment to meet with a Program Officer well in advance of anticipated travel. Capitalize upon the opportunity to meet face-to-face

- Be sure to have a viable project for discussion
- Do not make an appointment to talk about the weather!

Example Email

Subject: Request for call to discuss XXX due on DATE

Dear Dr. X:

I am interested in submitting a proposal for RFA #XXX “RFA Title” and would like to schedule a call with you to discuss whether my project/research is appropriate for this opportunity. [If your request is urgent, indicate that here and explain why.]

Attached please find a brief concept paper for your review that describes my project, its goals, and anticipated outcomes. I believe the project aligns with [list funding agency and relevant goal/priority]. I selected RFA #XXX due to [describe why you think your project is a good fit for this specific funding mechanism/ discuss alignment with RFA] .

[If you have specific questions that you want the PO to consider, include them here.]

[Provide possible days/times *or* indicate that you can be available at the PO’s convenience.]

Thank you in advance for your assistance. I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Contact Info



HIGHER EDUCATION

Foundation

vs

Federal

- Can guide projects and programs through direct feedback to prospective applicants that is intended to impact project design
- May restrict applicants and can say “no”
- Are not likely to suggest alternative funding sources
- Feedback is often direct

- Can advise you on how to submit a stronger application (timelines apply)
- May *suggest* alternate project ideas or funding sources
- Are not allowed to say “no” to prospective grantees. All eligible grantees may submit an application by law
- Response is often nuanced due to federal rules for public funding. Listen carefully and read between the lines!

In Summary – Grantseeking is an Iterative Process

Reality

- Extramural funding is very competitive
- Average federal funding rate hovers at around 25%, which can increase or decrease depending on agency, program, and federal budget
- It is estimated that foundations fund at a slightly higher rate (38%), but that figure is skewed towards a large number of smaller sized awards

Implications

- Start early, develop good concepts, research funders, develop your initial assets
- Work with colleagues to help inform and refine the core of your project logic
- Contact funders and seek and use their input to refine your project before you embark on the proposal
- Start early on proposals to ensure adequate time to develop and refine and work through the organizational process
- Stay the course, continually refine your ideas, prepare to resubmit and/or implement, all while continuously improving your direction



QUESTIONS?



GRANT DEVELOPMENT CENTER

Jacklyn Sutcivni

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Jackie's career as a grant writer spans a broad range of disciplines. Since 2000, she has helped institutions of higher education, healthcare agencies, not-for-profit organizations, and governmental entities obtain more than \$50 million in grant funding. A former research assistant, healthcare professional, public administrator, staff grant writer for higher education, and small business owner, Jackie brings a range of skills and experience to every engagement. Specializing in federal grant submissions, her expertise in federal grant program design, implementation, and management are immediately evident. She is especially skilled in advancing initiatives through the development of multi-partner and consortium grant proposals and balancing faculty and administrative perspectives.



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