

Tip Sheet

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A series of guides for neighborhood leaders working to improve the quality of life in Michigan



**Neighborhood Associations
of Michigan**

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Accessing Funding in Your Community

Obtaining funds for social and community improvement projects is a challenge often faced by neighborhood and community groups. Although funding resources may appear difficult to access, there *are* opportunities available through many community foundations.

Neighborhood associations that are knowledgeable about how they gather, analyze, and present information will have a much better chance at receiving the funding they seek. Here are several tips and guidelines of value to groups seeking funds through a community foundation. Adhering to these key principles and the related tips will significantly increase the chance of obtaining funds.

KNOW YOUR CASE AND HOW TO MAKE IT!

- Ask yourself *why* a funder should invest in your organization, program or project as opposed to investing its dollars somewhere else. You will need a well-documented answer to this to support the basis of your entire request.

DO YOUR HOMEWORK:

- Learn as much as possible about the funder you intend to approach. The Internet is an excellent resource, and traditional library-type resources can be used as well. Information about all Michigan community foundations can be found on the website: <http://www.forgoodforever.org>
 - This site locates the community foundation nearest to you and provides the contact information for that foundation. If the foundation has a website, you can link to this and get specific information on the foundation; it's goals and mission, etc.
 - As you gather some background, answer the following questions:
 - 1.) What do they typically fund?
 - 2.) What don't they fund?
 - 3.) Do they have a particular geographic focus?
 - 4.) How much do they typically award?
 - 5.) What is involved in their application process?
 - 6.) Do they have regularly scheduled application deadlines or accept applications any time?
 - 7.) Do they typically require a match?

CONTACT THE FUNDER IF POSSIBLE:

- It is to your advantage and theirs to begin working together before you even begin to write your grant or apply for funds. Most funders will be happy to talk

with you about your proposal. It is in their interest to increase the chances that the proposals they review are viable. You can work together to do this.

- It's best to get a copy of the foundation's grantmaking guidelines. Every community foundation is required to produce such a document that can guide you through grant procedures and guidelines.
- You should also get a copy of the annual report. All community foundations are also required to produce and provide such a document, which can give you important information about the foundation itself and the projects it typically funds.
- Community foundations typically have a staff member in charge of grants – often the “Program Officer”. It is helpful to know this person, and realize that person is there to work with you as you develop the grant. If you know this person and are in contact with him/her from the beginning, it is more likely that you will proceed appropriately with the information necessary to obtain funding.
- Foundations typically can only fund organizations classified for tax purposes as 501(c)3 organizations. However, even if you are not classified as such, funding can still be obtained. If you have been working directly with the foundation the foundation may put you in contact with an appropriately classified partner organization, whose mission coincides with your group's goals.

FOLLOW THE RULES TO THE ‘T’:

- In applying for a grant, always keep in mind that requests for funding are extremely competitive. The first cut is often made on nothing more than whether or not you followed the rules, such as submitting a certain number of copies, or using paper clips instead of staples.
- Be consistent with the grantmaking guideline rules.
- Be an advocate for your grant project. If you are uncertain about a specification, ask questions! It is better to be assertive about checking on the accuracy of your procedures than to submit an error.

RESULTS MATTER!:

- All funders care about whether or not the money they award actually made a difference. Be creative in coming up with ways to actually measure the impact your grant will have.

- If there is a way to show tangible proof of the benefits realized from your project, it will be much easier to convince a funder to support you. It is easier to invest in something with definite and measurable benefits.

IMPORTANT TO KEEP IN MIND:

- Every county in Michigan has access to a local community foundation, with the same basic mission – improve the quality of life in the communities it serves.
- Community foundations pride themselves on fairness, objectivity, no hidden agendas or special allegiances, only the good of the community at heart.
- Applications usually go through several review processes (staff, board committee, community members, board).
- Turnaround time from application to funding decision is typically 6-8 weeks.
- You should always have more requests than the foundation can fund; it is a very competitive process. The more requests you make the better your chances for funding.
- Most community foundations have 2-4 grant deadlines/cycles per year. Know what these dates are, so you are aware of your timeline for completion.
- Give yourself enough time to know and work with the staff assigned to reviewing grants.
- Don't try to pull strings or make relationships work to your advantage.
- Find out who else in the community is doing something similar – avoid duplication of effort – if possible partner up with this similar effort to increase both groups' opportunities.
- A local Volunteer Action Center or Nonprofit Support Center can offer information on what projects are currently going on in your community.
- Be organized and knowledgeable.

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