

Laying a Foundation for Funding

by Melissa Mannon

Historical Records repositories often look for grant support. What many organizations do not realize is that they need to build a foundation for funding. Seeking outside monies without any preparation will likely lead to dead-ends and headaches. Organizations are most successful when they seek support for projects designed to further their current goals and activities. Organizations are much less successful when they hope to get money to bolster their general objectives without being able to articulate exactly how the money will be used to benefit them.

When I have questions about getting money for projects, I turn to my friend Sarah Brophy. I suggest that you do the same because Sarah is the most

knowledgeable person I know about the subject of funding. (This is on top of being a super nice human being.) Her book, *Is Your Museum Grant Ready?: Assessing Your Organization's Potential for Funding* (American Association for State and Local History Book Series. AltaMira Press: 2005) is indispensable. It even answers questions with answers that seem like they should be obvious to you, but have floated on in the back of your brain nonetheless. These are the questions that you didn't know where to inquire for an answer or if you should be embarrassed to even ask the question. For example, is it better to contact a potential funder by phone before submitting your proposal and if you do, what should you say to them? The cause for which you seek money may be

exceptionally worthy of support, but grant makers want to see that you will use the money wisely and that you will use it to gain momentum for your organization. Sarah's book addresses in detail what funding institutions want to see in your proposal and in your project ideas.

The area of preparing for grants that interests me most and the subject I am most qualified to address is laying a foundation that shows potential funders that you are ready to use money in sound and innovative ways to tackle new projects. Your ability to organize your vision and sustain momentum to reach goals is key to your success. Those who have money to give want to see how professionally you conduct yourself. Your

organization must have some financial stability and the ability to manage money. It must have a strong steady team to implement goals. It must have a good public face and some ability to network with the community. It must have already planned for its future.

As a consultant, I am generally called in to assist organizations with this planning phase, but the organizations that will garner the most success have already created mission statements, goals, and long range plans before I arrive. They have considered in detail how they want to use my expertise help them. I consider my successful projects those that have been able to continue on when I leave. The organizations that I can assist well have a good staff

FUNDING AVAILABLE TO MASSACHUSETTS AND NEW HAMPSHIRE CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS

(See the Foundation Directory for a comprehensive list of organizations offering grants <http://fconline.fdncenter.org/>. Don't forget to seek local entities aiming to support local organizations in addition to national grant sources.)

Essex National Heritage Commission	http://essexheritage.org/partnershipgrants/index.shtml
Institute of Museum and Library Services	http://www.ims.gov/applicants/institution.shtm
Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners—LSTA grants	http://mblc.state.ma.us/grants/grants/index.php
Massachusetts Cultural Council	http://www.massculturalcouncil.org
Massachusetts Historical Commission	http://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc/mhchpp/Surveyandplanning.htm
National Historical Publications and Records Commission	http://www.archives.gov/nhprc/announcement

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(professional or volunteer) and they have drive and focus to implement plans. They have a good idea of who they are, how they fit into the community, and how additional funds will help them achieve goals. These organizations hire me to come in to fill a specific need — for example: to survey their records and make recommendations for processing or collection development; to tweak long range goals and mission statements; to make recommendations for such things as staffing, building management, and outreach. I am sometimes

brought in to facilitate collaboration among organizations within a town. There is always someone on staff who deeply cares about the project. For better or worse, a funded project's success usually hinges on this one person.

If you don't have a strong person or people to carry out goals, you are not ready to apply for a grant. If you think that you can't get your archives management program off the ground because you don't have money to implement a full program, you are not ready

to apply for a grant. If you are not sure exactly what you will do with money once you get it, you are not ready to apply for a grant. In short, you must be driven and prepared. There is a lot of competition for funds out there, but there is money available if you plan wisely. The grantors are looking for the right fit and want to give to the right people. They want to find a collaborator who fits their vision. Show that you are prepared to wisely manage your programs and your funds and the right funding organization will gladly provide you with support.



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Tips for Maintaining Records

The more you have documented about yourself, the better off you are with all of your goals. The more organized you are, the better you can understand where you need to go and explain it to others. Historical records repositories are sometimes so focused on caring for the existing records in their collections that they forget to make their own records. All of these administrative documents should be kept together and should be referred to continually to help you reach your goals. They will also help show that you are organized and prepared to receive monetary support from funding organizations.

The following is a list of administrative and planning documents that should be in order to help you prepare for grant writing and for general archives management:

- 501C3 filing
- Financial/tax records, budgets, annual reports
- Brief written history of your organization
- Information about your community and how you fit within it including a description of your audience—an outreach plan is best if you have one—gather quotes from people affected by your past programs or services
- Mission statement with goals and objectives
- Long range plan discussing your goals and objectives over the next 5 years
- Summary of your collections—a full archival survey and assessment is helpful, but if you haven't yet done this, discuss what you know you have and how you will find out about the rest
- List of past projects or events in which you participated including press releases, news articles, brochures, flyers or any other publicity
- List of staffing needs and who is fulfilling functions--organizational chart if appropriate
- List of and information about past grants