



HUNTING AND GATHERING: TIPS FOR USING THE WEB TO FIND FUNDING SOURCES

With the vast amount of information available on the Internet today, mentoring programs have many tools to hunt for new funding sources and gather valuable information on prospective funders and community partners. This training supplement offers tips on using electronic tools and resources to search for state and local funding, and identify potential community partners.

Google searches and “alerts”

Searching for funding sources on the Internet can be as frustrating as trying to find a needle in a haystack. Targeted searching, however, can yield positive results if done regularly and if you develop some concise search terms to target what you are looking for. The most popular search engines and portals—Google, Yahoo, and MSN are at the top of the list, though there are many others; each have detailed instructions and tips on how to set up an effective search. A simple search for “youth mentoring funding” is likely to give you thousands of pages, including those that are years old. Be sure to go to “advanced search” to specify such limiters as a date range and geographic information.

If you don’t have a lot of time to spend searching the Internet for new funding opportunities in your area, try setting up a “Google Alert” that will help keep you informed about funding sources (<http://www.google.com/alerts/faq.html?hl=en>). Google Alerts are e-mails automatically sent to you when there are new Google results for search terms you set. You can set up several different Alerts and see which ones yield the best results. You can even get these in a daily digest so they don’t clutter up your inbox. The trick is getting the right search terms to give you the results you want.

When setting up your search parameters, take a little time to think about what you are really

looking for. Your results are only going to be useful if you have an idea of what you want to know up front. For example, you might use a Google Alert to:

- ❖ See what funding other mentoring programs around the country are finding
- ❖ Learn about local funding for all types of youth-serving organizations
- ❖ Learn about national funding sources that you can apply for
- ❖ Get general news about mentoring issues
- ❖ Find out what other kinds of youth-serving organizations are helping kids in your community

Next, if you are not an expert Web surfer, take some time to read through Google’s tips for conducting searches (<http://www.google.com/intl/en/help/basics.html>). Coming up with the best search terms can be tricky, and you will likely get results that are not so helpful mixed in with those that are. You can play around with searches on the main Google search page or in “advanced search” until you get some interesting and potentially useful results and then use those search terms when you set up the Google Alert. Try starting with a fairly broad set of terms (such as “youth mentoring funding” or “grants youth mentoring”).

Google Alerts also let you choose if you want only news items or if you want results from all possible online sources. Setting up these alerts can be fun for someone who enjoys working with Internet searches. See if you can find some interested high school students to take on this project!



Once your Alerts are set up, browse through the results every day. You might find that there's a new foundation in your state, or that recent mentoring research has been published. You might get a new fundraising idea or a tip for marketing your program. Keep an electronic file folder of the good ideas and share them with your advisory board, board of directors, fundraising committee, and others working on your sustainability plan.

State government Web sites

Your state departments of education, human resources, health, justice, or child welfare are important sources of information about funding opportunities, federal pass-through dollars, new and ongoing statewide initiatives, and the way services (and dollars) are delivered to local communities. Spend some time browsing each of these departments' sites. Each state has widely differing structures and different ways of providing information online. Sometimes the governor's office also lists grant opportunities and other information about state initiatives.

Often the procurements or "contracts" section of these sites will not have the information you are looking for, as these sections often only list funds for delivering unrelated goods and services such as maintenance, equipment and supplies, or administrative services. So take the time to browse program and "initiative" sections of these sites as well, as that is where you will often learn about a new opportunity. As you find useful pages, bookmark them so you can check back regularly.

Your state department of education is a particularly important agency to get to know. Most of them are recipients of numerous federal funding streams that are passed through to districts and local programs. For example, 21st Century Community Learning Center funding provides afterschool program services that are geared to helping kids achieve higher educational outcomes. These funds are given to each state to administer and are quite flexible in what they will fund, but the method by which that fund-

ing is distributed to providers will differ from state to state. You will need to know who your state contact person is, who is currently receiving those funds in your local area, and how you can get involved with future funding competitions. If you can't find the information you need on your state Web site, the U.S. Department of Education's site has a list of all the state contact people for 21st Century Community Learning Centers: <http://www.ed.gov/programs/21stcccl/contacts.html#state>.

The information you discover at these state sites may not help you find new grant opportunities right away (though if you find the right links and check back regularly you may get lucky). But they may get you thinking about new partnerships you could forge or provide you with a broader understanding of how funding is distributed to meet human services needs. Mentoring programs are now partnering with health and prevention programs, youth development and recreation providers, and other diverse agencies working with young people. These partnerships tap new funding sources for your program while enhancing the services you offer.

Local government and public agency Web sites

These also vary widely depending on where you live. You will first want to determine which city or county governments and agencies are involved in providing services to your citizens, such as health and human services, child welfare and safety, education, recreation, and so on. Your city and county government Web sites should give you a good introduction to this information.

City and county government Web sites also post meeting notices of various committees, commissioner meetings, board meetings, and other public meetings. These are also usually posted in local newspapers. Pay attention to these and check agendas to find if any of the topics include planning for services to children and youth, new initiatives, funding decisions, or other relevant information. Attending these

meetings now and then will increase your familiarity with the processes that your local government uses to make funding decisions and will also help you become more comfortable with the idea of making a presentation to your local city or county commission on the benefits of mentoring!

If you are lucky, your city or county Web sites will have funding opportunities posted indicating when they become available, or you may be able to sign up to receive e-mail notices when such opportunities open.

Online databases for foundation searches

While many foundations have a national focus, you may find that you have your best successes with smaller, local foundations that are often set up by families who are heavily invested in their community. There are a number of online search engines and databases to help guide grantseekers to funding resources. Some offer free searches, but may be limited in the number of foundations they include in their database or may offer only a simple search format. Others may charge a monthly or annual subscription fee or may have an introductory trial membership. These offer a much more powerful set of search tools and may provide more in-depth information.

Some of the most popular sites and search tools for grantseekers are:

Fundsnet Services Online has a free, searchable database of hundreds of public, private, and corporate foundations and links to other fundraising information and opportunities. You can search by keyword or browse lists by funding category, but the database only contains a small fraction of the 80,000+ foundations currently operating in the United States.
<http://www.fundsnetervices.com/>

The **Council on Foundations** has an excellent free searchable database of local community foundations. If you aren't aware of the commu-

nity foundations in your area, this is one way to find them quickly.

<http://www.cof.org/Locator/index.cfm?menuContainerID=34&crumb=2>

The **Foundation Center** has several options, including a free basic search option and a variety of subscription choices. The Center's "find funders" search engine allows you to search by foundation name or by location, so you can get a list of foundations in, for example, Topeka, Kansas. Once you have that list, you will need to check out each foundation by going to its Web site or calling to get information about its funding priorities.

<http://foundationcenter.org>

Foundation Directory Online, a subscription-based service, can search up to 80,000 separate foundations depending on the type of subscription you purchase. Subscriptions currently start at \$19.95 a month. Other options include the CD-ROM version and a printed foundation directory. Take a guided tour of the online directory at: <http://fconline.fdncenter.org>.

For a good list of Web resources for finding funding and other sustainability help, go to the Mentoring Resource Center Web site at:
http://www.edmentoring.org/online_res10.html.

The Corporation for National and Community Service Senior Tech Center also lists useful sites for grantseekers:
http://www.seniortechcenter.org/web/corp_foundations.php.

You may be able to find some of these fee-based databases and search tools **for free at your local public or university library**. For example, the Foundation Directory Web site lists libraries in each state where the public can access online or CD-ROM versions of their directory.

When searching these online databases for grant opportunities start with a broad search term and then narrow it down as you start to

get promising results. For example, searching for “mentoring” may not yield many results, but adding “children” or “youth” will provide lots of choices.

The Power of E-Newsletters and Listservs

Any time you can get something relevant and useful delivered to your inbox for free, it’s a good idea to sign up. E-newsletters and funding-related listservs from sources like the federal government’s Grants.gov site may not always have something to offer your program, but if one in a hundred yields a grant opportunity you can use, then it’s worth reading them all.

The Foundation Center has several free e-newsletters, including the Philanthropy News Digest and the RFP Bulletin. The latter is particularly helpful because it lists a variety of grant opportunities at both a national and local level. Subscribe to any or all for free at:

<http://foundationcenter.org/newsletters/>

Some e-newsletters that charge a subscription fee, such as the SchoolGrants Biweekly Newsletter, which, for \$45 a year, offers a comprehensive rundown of current funding opportunities that schools and school-based programs can apply for. You can subscribe to the newsletter at:

<http://www.k12grants.org/newsletter2.htm>

The newsletters of other local youth service providers and K-12 educational agencies may also prove instructive. These can be a great way of keeping up-to-date on new services that could use a mentoring component and trends in the funding of local service providers. Make sure you’re “in the know” about what’s happening for youth in your community.

If you want to keep track of federal funding that you might be able to apply for yourself or jointly with local organizations, you can sign up for an e-mail alert based on your own criteria at:

http://www.grants.gov/applicants/email_subscription.jsp

Final tips for “hunting and gathering”:

- ❖ Set up searches that are broad enough to capture sources you might not otherwise think of. You can always refine your search terms if you are getting too much useless information.
- ❖ Let others do your work for you by finding sites that will send you regular updates, such as grants.gov and free e-newsletters.
- ❖ Stay organized! Bookmark your favorite pages and visit them frequently for updates. Set up e-mail folders where you can put your e-newsletters or other information for future reference.
- ❖ Get others involved, including students, interns, or volunteers who may love the challenge and rewards of an Internet treasure hunt.
- ❖ Follow up on leads that seem to be most relevant, and discard those that are either beyond your scope or have unrealistic timeframes.
- ❖ Sometimes you can use online information to improve your ability to respond to opportunities you unearth. Many government and foundation Web sites offer the ability to read successful proposals from previous funding rounds. Take the time to see what got funded and how they presented their services in their application.
- ❖ Use the information you discover about local and state funding to talk with others in your community. Remember: a lot of the information you glean will not be about immediate funding but rather about new ideas for future ventures and partnerships.

The next training supplement in this series covers how to assess the many assets available in your local community and how to follow up on the information all your technology searches gather.