

Success with School Foundation Grants



Across America teachers spend an average of \$853 on classroom materials. About 40% of that amount comes from the school and/or district, with the other 60% coming from the teacher's own pocket. This means that teachers spend over \$500 of their own money each year on classroom materials. These were the findings of Quality Education Data (QED), a leading education marketing research and database firm that conducted a study to gauge the purchasing habits and attitudes among K-8 teachers. Since there are roughly two million K-8 teachers in the U.S., QED estimates that teachers spend approximately \$1.79 billion on classroom materials, over \$1 billion of which is their own money.

One important trend across the country is the formation of school foundations, sometimes referred to as education foundations. Typically, a group of community volunteers and parents in collaboration with a school district form a non-profit organization. The National School Foundation Association reports that school foundations solicit funds through golf tournaments, galas, endowments and other fundraising efforts to provide student scholarships and grants to teachers for innovative classroom ideas. (<http://www.schoolfoundations.org>)

Officially, education foundations are defined as “privately operated, nonprofit organizations established to assist public schools” and who qualify as charitable organizations, “different from school districts, public institutions or local governments” (Clay, Hughes, Seely & Thayer, 1985). A public school foundation “is designed to augment, supplement, or complement programs and activities currently being provided by the district” (McCormick, Baver & Ferguson, 2001). Currently in the U.S. there are over 4,800 school foundations in 16,000 school districts (McCormick et al., 2001). They have their own board of directors and their own staff, both paid and volunteer. Most school foundations operate as “an independent entity, with no formal, legal relationship to the school district” (De Luna, 1995, p.8).

How can you find out if your school has a foundation?

Successful school foundations typically advertise their activities throughout the school and community. Many school foundations are listed by the National School Foundation Association: http://www.schoolfoundations.org/en/list_of_foundations_by_state/ Check your district's website or ask school administrators if there is a foundation that offers teacher grants.

How can you write a successful grant to your local foundation?

Most foundations providing grants to teachers want to fund innovative ideas. The board of directors develops the guidelines for the teacher grants which must be followed carefully.

Here are a few steps to follow if your school district has a school foundation which provides teacher grants:

1. **Gather information** about the foundation. This includes the mission, the types of grants offered in the past, the amount of grants typically funded, etc.
2. **Communicate** with the Executive Director of the foundation, board members, and teachers who were recipients of the grant to fully understand what types of projects are funded. If possible, talk to the Executive Director of the foundation to see if your idea is one that would be of interest to the decision makers.
3. **Analyze** your classroom or school needs and determine what kind of project you would like to do that fits with the school foundation mission. Determine if collaboration with other teachers would strengthen your idea. Get quotes on any materials you would like to buy and make sure when you write the grant to describe these as part of a project to benefit students not just a “wish list” of materials.
4. **Write the grant** according to the grant guidelines. Check to see if the foundation offers a grant seminar to help teachers understand the guidelines and attend this. A unique title will catch the grant reviewer’s interest and help them remember your project.
5. **Follow up** with the foundation. Thank them for allowing you to submit. If you are funded, give credit to the foundation wherever possible for the grant and show the positive impact on your school or classroom. If not funded, ask for suggestions to strengthen your proposal and re-submit the next grant cycle. At times there are excess funds that the foundation needs to award and your project may be chosen for funding.

Resources from NSFA:

- Clay, K., Hughes, K.S., Seely, J.G., & Thayer A.N.(1989). *Public school foundations: Their organization and operation*. Arlington, VA: Educational Research Service.
- The Fullerton School District Educational Foundation
http://www.fsd.k12.ca.us/menus/foundation/foundation_web_page.html
Retrieved 10/23/02
- Simi Valley Education Foundation
<http://www.svef.org/>
- Muro, J.J. (1995). *Creating and funding educational foundations: A guide for local school districts*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

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