

How Much? Five Factors to Consider When Choosing a Grant Request Size

It's a crucial but tough decision. Here are steps to lead the way.

By Karen Eber Davis

Good news! You found a grant source. Even better news, their interests and your needs match. Now you need to decide how much money to request.

Determining the size of a request can be tricky. If you ask for too much, you might get nothing, be perceived as greedy, and decrease your organization's credibility. If you request too little, your money is left on the table and your activities are underfunded.

Most people find it helpful to estimate a request size before they draft the proposal. If you can ask the funder for guidelines on a request amount, do so. For many reasons, however, people often

“For a first grant, consider a request close to or just less than the average.”

can't comfortably request this information. In this case, use these five steps to establish a request size:

1. Research the amounts given by the funder over the last few years. Use recent IRS reports, or look for clues on the Web sites of the grantor and of organizations it funded recently.

2. Calculate the average grant the funder awarded last year. For a first grant, request an amount just less than the average.

3. Consider the amounts other groups in your specialty area received. Modify the estimate you made in step 2, if necessary, to fit within this range. For instance, if arts groups received grants from \$8,000-\$10,000 and education groups received grants from \$5,000-\$7,000, adjust your estimate to fit into the range of your specialty.

4. Check whether there have been any recent changes to the funder's conditions. If so, adjust your estimate to reflect the impact of these conditions. Examples: A good or bad economy, announcements of a large multi-year grant, or news of a large bequest in the case of a community foundation are reasons that would affect your estimate of how much to request.

5. Once you're satisfied with your estimate, draft the proposal. Fine-tune your estimate to reflect money you can contribute to the project, such as earned income, matching funds, or the gifts of collaborative partners. Your goal is to establish a dollar amount that offers sufficient but economical resources to complete your activities, given the funder's budget. **S**

Putting the Five Steps to Use

Here's an example of the five steps applied to the Mythical Foundation:

- **The Mythical Foundation's funding last year** totaled \$422,500.
- **The foundation averaged \$15,809** for the 28 organizations it funded. Gifts ranged from \$2,700-\$25,000. You ballpark your request at \$14,500.
- **Of the 28 funded organizations**, children's groups received \$10,000-\$25,000, older adults \$3,000-\$10,000, and health organizations \$7,500-\$15,000. As an older-adult service organization, you adjust your estimate down to \$7,000.
- **An article in the newspaper states** that a Mythical family relative died two years ago and left all her assets to the Mythical Foundation. You revise your estimate up to \$11,000.
- **After writing the proposal, you conclude** that you need \$12,511 to economically complete the proposed activity. To make everyone's bookkeeping easier, you trim the budget to equal \$12,500. This is the amount you use on the proposal you submit.

Establishing an appropriate request range is an important part of a grant submission. As you can see, the final amount is determined by what you need and what the funder is able to do for you. By using the five steps, you can establish a request that's helpful to your organization and inviting to the funder.



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Note: This article provides a set of general guidelines. Funders' advice and your knowledge about specific grant programs will almost always override these general guidelines.

“Use recent IRS reports, or look for clues on Web sites.”

Garnering More Funds

For more on gleaning grants and other funding, see:

How to Answer the Dreaded Grant Question about Future Funding (Vol. 31, No. 1)

Think Out of the Box for Fundraising Gains (Vol. 29, No. 5)

The Challenge of Sustaining a Grant-Funded Program (Vol. 28, No. 6)

How to Measure Fundraising Success (Vol. 31, No. 2)

Focusing on Foundation Grants: The Powerful Reverse Needs Assessment (Vol. 12, No. 4)

Seven Deadly Grantwriting Sins (Vol. 27, No. 6)

These resources are available at NonprofitWorld.org/members. Also see Learning Institute programs on-line: Resource Development and O for Opportunity: Exploring New Revenue Opportunities for Nonprofits (NonprofitWorld.org/LearningInstitute).

CREATIVE FUNDRAISING IDEAS

Hold a Bucket Raffle

Place prizes on a table so that people can look closely at each item. Put a bucket near each prize. After buying raffle tickets, people can put their tickets into the buckets corresponding to items they want to win. Thus, each bucket becomes its own raffle.

People love bucket raffles because of the interaction between them and the raffle itself. You can sell the tickets in bulk at low prices (around a dollar each), thus encouraging people to buy a large number of tickets. Let people use as many tickets as they want to increase their odds of winning prizes.

Sell Something Useful

Never gather a group together without offering items for sale, advises Rudolph A. Rosen in *Money for the Cause: A Complete Guide to Event Fundraising* (Texas A & M University Press, tamupress.com). You're missing a great opportunity if you don't have something to sell.

While you can't operate like a for-profit company, it's perfectly acceptable to sell items to help market your organization. Examples include T-shirts, hats, coffee mugs, tote bags, umbrellas, welcome mats, and pens. Emblazen the items with your organization's name and logo. That way, whenever people use them, they'll be advertising your cause.



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