

HOW TO WIN K-12 TECHNOLOGY GRANTS:

Strategies for Success



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K-12 schools and districts face new budget shortfalls as demand increases for hardware, software, and infrastructure. As traditional sources of funding decrease, securing grants is a reasonable supplement to established funding although competition can be stiff. You can improve the odds of winning grants with these successful strategies and best practices.

By Annie Galvin Teich

Introduction

According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, most states now provide less support per student in K-12 districts than they did before the Great Recession of 2008-2009.¹ The Center's analysis reveals that approximately 46% of K-12 funding comes from state funds so the impact of a shortfall on local school funding can be severe at a time when helping students develop the technical and analytical skills necessary to be successful in college and career is a primary district objective. In recent years there has also been a decrease in federal funding. This has meant that many schools and districts have needed to augment their funding in order to meet their learning goals and objectives. Although the competition is significant, many schools and districts choose to apply for grants to supplement their funding. Frequently, grant money is used to fund technology—both hardware and software—in an effort to provide students the tools and learning experiences they need to be successful in the new economy.

¹ <https://www.cbpp.org/research/state-budget-and-tax/most-states-have-cut-school-funding-and-some-continue-cutting>

The competitive nature of grants in general and technology grants in particular means that grant applicants require precise targeting in choosing the right funder, matching the funding criteria, and articulating their vision for the funding. It is no longer enough to just address the technology. Grant applicants must tie the technology and the integration of technology to measurable learning outcomes.

School and district stakeholders often have different visions that come into conflict when focused on a particular grant opportunity. Incorporating the voices of all of the stakeholders, including students, is often the difference between success and failure. This guide to winning technology grants will explore the best practices of successful grant winners in choosing the right funder, matching the school's needs to the grant requirements, and successfully articulating the learning objectives that meet both the districts' and the funders' goals



SECTION 1 Identifying Grant Opportunities

Some districts are fortunate to have a grant coordinator on staff. Some districts even have an entire department dedicated to helping educators build partnerships and search for additional funding. *Read about Austin (TX) ISD in the [sidebar](#) for a good model.*

Before beginning the grant researching process, it is a good idea to find out if there is a district grants expert who might be helpful. If so, determine the best way to work with that person or department. Even if your district does not have a grants administrator or coordinator, there may be limitations on how many grant applications or funding opportunities the district can support. So the best first step is to assess the situation in your district.

Check local sources next. There are business and community foundation grants available in most localities. The local Chamber of Commerce will provide an overview of local grant opportunities. There are also national databases that catalog federal, state, community, corporate, and foundation

grants and their requirements. Understanding the different types of grants is useful in determining which grant opportunities make the most sense for your project's funding.

FEDERAL GRANTS. These are financial assistance grants that are available from specific agencies for activities that accomplish a public purpose. Federal grants awarded to K-12 schools and districts are usually “project” grants. These grants are often given to members of the science, education, and technology communities provided the applicants meet the prerequisite guidelines. Many of these grant awards are paid out over three years.² Two things to know in advance about federal project grants are that they involve a long application period and a lot of support material to maintain the grant over the three-year term.

EXAMPLE

Computers for Learning—This is an example of a federal agency grant.

Federal Executive Order 12999 encourages federal agencies to transfer excess computers and related peripheral equipment directly to K-12 schools and educational nonprofits. The Computers for Learning program wants to make computer technology an integral part of every classroom so that students have the opportunity to be educated.³

FORMULA GRANTS. The other type of federal grant available to K-12 schools is a “formula” grant. This is most familiar to schools and districts through their Title I monies. Applicants for a formula grant must meet all the eligibility requirements for the program. These are predetermined, not open to discretionary funding decisions, and are often administered by the state.

FOUNDATION GRANTS. Nonprofit grants are available from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), or a charitable trust, whose specific purpose is to make grants available to unrelated organizations or individuals usually for educational, scientific, cultural, religious, or community benefit.⁴ Foundations often award grants to public and/or private schools. However, some will only award grants to nonprofit groups. Some districts have formed a nonprofit educational association aligned with the district to meet this requirement.

2 <http://www.federalgrantswire.com/what-are-federal-grants.html#.WWzST8aZP64>

3 All grant examples, with the exception of Digital Wish, were sourced from GetEdFunding.com, a free database of education grants.

4 <http://grantspace.org/tools/knowledge-base/Funding-Resources/Foundations/what-is-a-foundation>

EXAMPLE

KIND Foundation. This grant is an example of a non-corporate foundation grant. This nonprofit foundation makes monthly grants to socially impactful projects that address specific needs, such as underserved students. Previous grants have been awarded for academic mentorship, math tutoring, app coding, job readiness, weekend meals, and the purchase of science, technology, engineering, and math products such as touch-screen computers and tablets to support students with autism. Awards of \$10,000 are made monthly.

COMMUNITY GRANTS. These grants are often a subset of foundation grants in that they are offered by local nonprofit organizations that award grants to individuals and organizations for projects that are based in the community and primarily benefit the community.

EXAMPLE

Community Foundation for the Alleghenies. The mission of this foundation is to serve the interests of local donors and their philanthropic interest in financially supporting the community. Past grants have been awarded for youth leadership, STEM programs, technology, financial literacy skills, and more. Awards typically range from \$500 to \$5,000.

CORPORATE GRANTS. There are two different types of corporate grants. The first comes from a corporate foundation, which is the “nonprofit” arm of a for profit corporation. This allows the corporation to fund efforts of particular interest. For example, an energy company might offer STEM grants to high schools and college students in order to spur interest in energy careers. Another type of corporate grant is more directly product related. A company would help an individual or organization to write a grant to purchase the corporation's products.

EXAMPLE

American Honda Foundation. STEM grants, technology, the environment, job training, and literacy are the focus of this corporate foundation grant. The American Honda Foundation issues grants to organizations, including public schools that reflect the beliefs and philosophies of Honda companies. They're looking for proposals from programs that are innovative, have a high potential for success, dedication to improving the human condition, and are stable and strong financially and administratively. Awards range from \$20,000 to \$75,000 over a year period.

Understanding the different types of grants is useful for determining which grant opportunities make the most sense for your project's funding.

EXAMPLE

Turning Technologies. Each year this company awards ten \$3,300 classroom technology packages comprised of their products. K-12 teachers may apply for the grant. There are no entry fees and no purchase is required. The award must be used in a specific accredited, nonprofit, K-12 classroom. The building principal or administrator must support the implementation of the award in the designated classroom. While recipients do not pay for the equipment, they must pay for the shipping and handling costs.

CROWDSOURCED GRANTS. Crowdsourcing grants began to appear approximately ten years ago. They are often focused on providing support for individual classrooms. The best known of these are [Donors Choose](#) and [Adopt-a-Classroom](#). These organizations accept small donations from a large number of people who are interested in supporting individual classrooms, teachers, or schools. Donors Choose allows teachers to post requests for funding and Adopt-a-Classroom donors can target a specific school or the organization will partner the donor with a classroom. In both organizations, reports are sent to the donor detailing exactly what the money was used for.

EXAMPLE

Digital Wish. This crowdsourcing grant program bills itself as “solving technology shortfalls one classroom at a time.” Digital Wish has tools and promotions that empower teachers to get new technology for their classrooms. Since 2009, Digital Wish has granted over 24,000 technology wishes and delivered over \$10 million in technology products to U.S. classrooms.

TECHNOLOGY GRANTS. Sometimes technology grants are specifically written to allow technology purchases. In addition, all of the grant types listed above have been used to fund school technology purchases. Previously, the emphasis has been on funding acquisition of devices. There is now a shift away from just the provision of devices and infrastructure to the support of specific learning outcomes using technology with an emphasis on STEM-related or 21st Century skills such as critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration, and communication.

GRANTS DATABASES. Fortunately, most grants databases are available online. Some require registration but are free to use. Others require a

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membership. Most provide the organization's history of awards as well as the current requirements and timetable for application. Places to start research include the following:

- [Grants.gov](#)
- [The Foundation Center](#)
- [Funds Net Services](#)
- [Get Ed Funding](#)
- [Grant Gopher](#)

SECTION 2 Understanding the Process

Nearly all grant experts report that the most important factor in winning grants is to find the right match between the applicant and the funder. Before you can find the right match, you have to develop the project and then search for the best funder to fund the project. Experts agree that it is much more difficult to write a grant proposal when you don't have a clear plan in mind and know exactly what you want to do and how you will measure the results. It is much easier to develop the project first and then find the funding to match.

Dr. Jeremiah Frink, former grants administrator for a New York educational service agency and now an education strategist for Dell EMC, described when his New York colleagues wanted to create a mobile science lab that was scenario-based to travel from school to school, they looked for grants to fund the project after they developed the scope of the project. In the mobile science lab, students would be given a scenario and propose hypotheses; support with data; and collaborate and compare information with other students to determine the answers. First, the inter-departmental team developed the project idea; then they sought funding. Because they had clearly articulated the project's scope and purpose, they were able to target specific grants to support their instructional aims. They were eventually funded for four years by three different grant programs.

TIP

When searching for a funder that best matches your need, Dr. Jeremiah Frink— former grants administrator for a New York educational service agency and now an Education Strategist for Dell EMC—suggests breaking down the project into multiple components that match specific grant criteria for at least part of the funding. For example, separate the various technology components— science lab equipment, connectivity, or the ability to Skype interviews from the field—to match different grant criteria within one grant proposal or put together several funders to support the project.

Michelle Wallis, executive director for the Office of Innovation and Development at Austin (TX) ISD, and her team encourage their schools to develop a project idea and then bring it to her office for feedback, consultation in developing the proposal, and writing support. “Our office is a hub for partnership in the district,” Wallis explains. “We work with schools to take a broader perspective than just the technology required for the project. We help them think through the outcome of the learning process they’re targeting through using the technology.” When that process is completed, Wallis’ team works with external partners to develop partnerships and find funding. These partners can be corporations, foundations, or service organizations such as Girlstart. Wallis’ team has a lot of experience with matching projects to funding and offers schools in their district the benefits of their knowledge.

Edtech specialist Robin Smith, in Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania, recommends securing permission for the project from the principal or the superintendent before beginning the search for a funder. “Many grants for more than a few thousand dollars require a senior officer’s signature to agree to implement the grant within the school system,” Smith said. She also advises to solidify the details of the project before looking for the funder by putting together a written account of the project that includes:

- **Need statement.** Document the need for the project with demographics, test results, and anecdotal evidence.
- **Mission statement.** Identify the project’s potential outcome.
- **Goals & objectives.** Be sure these are specific and measurable.
- **Timeline.** Tie a timeline to each stage of the project.
- **Planned assessment.** Include specifics about how and when the assessment will be accomplished.
- **Materials.** Detail a summary of supplies and personnel.
- **Total cost.** Make it comprehensive and complete.⁵

Smith believes that having this information in hand prior to the search for appropriate funding sources will make it easier to complete the grant applications when the time comes.

⁵ Linda Starr, “Show Me the Money: Tips and Resources for Successful Grant Writing,” EducationWorld.com

PRELIMINARY APPLICATION STEPS

It is common for funders to request prerequisite steps before accepting a grant proposal. Once you have identified a good match for your funding request, you will often see that the funders request either a Letter of Intent or a Letter of Interest. There is a difference between these. According to [The Grantsmanship Center](#), many government grant programs require the **Letter of Intent** in order to gauge the number of proposals to expect and to organize for that review process. They advise that this letter is seldom responded to and should not delay the development of your grant proposal.

On the other hand, many private funders such as foundations and corporations, request a **Letter of Inquiry** (LOI), which is used as a preliminary screening tool. The Letter of Inquiry is like a mini proposal. The funder will specify the exact information required in the LOI. If they are interested in reviewing a full proposal, they will ask the applicant to submit one. But you must be invited to do so.

If a funding organization issues a request for proposal (RFP), it generally indicates an open invitation to submit grant proposals without the interim step of filing either a letter of intent or a letter of inquiry. To ensure serious consideration, applicants are encouraged to match the grant criteria as closely as possible. With some RFPs, Frink cautions, it may seem that the funder has already decided whom they want to fund by the criteria they have selected. But this is usually not the case. He recommends doing the research to understand the projects the organization has funded in the past and use it to inform your grant proposal.

BUILDING THE BUDGET

A comprehensive budget is a critical element of any grant proposal. The cost for each stage of the project should be estimated as closely as possible. In addition to direct costs for equipment and supplies, it is important to anticipate staff assistance and its associated personnel costs. It is advisable to present your budget in a spreadsheet with clear, well-organized section heads that are directly tied to specific sections of the written proposal.

A comprehensive budget is a critical element of any grant proposal.

TIP

Dr. Frink advises grant writers not to force what you want to do into the grant criteria if it's not a good fit. You might get the money but end up doing something different so you don't achieve the benefit you were seeking for your program.

Listed below are sample expenditures for integrating technology into the curriculum:

- Mobile devices, computer stations, and software
- Connectivity expenses
- Installation expenses
- Classroom equipment for videoconferencing, collaboration, or virtual field trips
- Interactive whiteboards, projectors, and projection options
- Robotics
- Makerspace equipment, such as a 3D printer
- Video production equipment, digital document cameras, digital microscopes,⁶ or other science lab equipment
- Professional development

GRANT REVIEW RUBRIC

One part of the proposal process that is often invisible to applicants is the review of the grant applications after they've been filed. Grants are very competitive, so it pays to have as much information as possible about the funding organization as you develop a proposal. In addition to researching the types of projects that have previously won funding, it helps to know that funders usually have a rubric or set of criteria they use to score a proposal so that it can be compared to other grant proposals—often with a four-point scale to indicate how well the application meets various criteria. The scoring criteria that follows is from the Oklahoma Educational Technology Trust, but most organizations will have something similar.⁷

Matching the grant criteria as closely as possible with your proposal will improve the likelihood of success. Applying to grants is not a cut and paste activity. Each one needs to be customized to the funding organization. Follow instructions to the letter, organize your thinking, and clearly state the need, and benefits to your project implementation, and you improve your chances of making it to a final review.

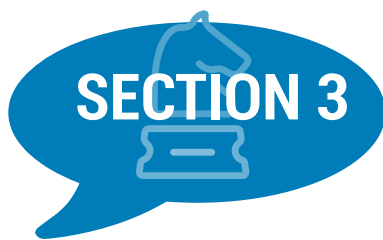
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⁶ Grants to Schools, Revised Application Guidelines FY 17. Oklahoma Educational Technology Trust.
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CRITERIA	DESCRIPTION	SCORE
Structures	Communication, input, and information flow with the timeline	
Technology	Has a purpose and supports student learning	
Assessment	Guides decisions and provides feedback for improvement	
Research	Cites research or outside expertise for guidance	
Staff Development	Included to support implementation	
Leadership & Service	Guides the project and serves a common good	
Grant Narrative	Supports project rationale with integrity	
Budget	Provides adequate details and aligns with the grant narrative	
Systemic Support	Broad stakeholder support for successful implementation	

This is what a sample rubric might look like. Scored 1–4 on each attribute:

- 1 = Missing from the proposal
- 2 = Needs improvement
- 3 = Adequate
- 4 = Excellent



SECTION 3 Best Practices, Strategies for Success

Many grant experts believe that the goals and objectives section of the proposal determine the strength of your application. They advise focusing on what you want to accomplish and clearly state the specific results or outcomes you plan to achieve with your project.

Goals are big and broad. Use visionary words in your goals such as decrease, deliver, develop, establish, improve, increase, produce, and provide.

Objectives are the steps needed to accomplish the goals. Beverly Browning, author of *Grant Writing for Dummies*, recommends using the SMART approach to writing your objectives: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Time-bound.⁸

Some other recommended best practices include:

- 1. Do the research** by reviewing the organizations that have been funded over multiple years. Look beyond the grant criteria to the direction the organization is moving. Anticipate where they are headed with how you articulate your goals and objectives.
- 2. Know your own story** and tell your story in a compelling, articulate way. A grant submission may be technically correct, but could lose out to a more articulate or passionate vision.
- 3. Include part of a person's salary** to manage grant administration duties so that the instructional folks can focus on the actual work of the project to keep it aligned to its original purpose.
- 4. The budget will be a focus of funders' attention**, so ensure that it is realistic and includes all costs to run the project successfully.
- 5. Include documentation** that supports your proposal such as research or any studies that support the effectiveness of technology use in the classroom. If possible, tie your project to specific learning standards.

Sometimes, it's as important to know what not to do as it is what to do. Here are some of the reasons grant proposals are turned down. The proposal:

- Did not include the passion for the need
- Had a lack of sufficient background to make the case
- Was not a good funding match—the goals were not aligned
- Had problems with the budget
- Was hard to understand
- Had a lack of clarity and focus⁹

Michelle Wallis says that schools and districts can improve their chances of success by remaining focused on how what they are proposing will support student learning. "Step back and take a broader perspective and think through how the technology will facilitate the desired learning outcomes for students."

TIP

Be as specific with metrics as possible, even when there is doubt about long-term outcomes. For example, when applying for a three-year grant, you cannot know what will happen in year three when you're writing the grant application. But you can say something similar to "we will use the results of year one and year two to determine our procedures for year three."

⁸ Fritz, Joanne. "How to Write SMART Objectives." *The Balance*. May 21, 2017.

⁹ Paisner, Susan R. "Writing a Winning Grant Proposal: Tips to Follow...Mistakes to Avoid."

Austin ISD Leverages Resources to Win Grants

For its 130 schools, 83,000 students, and 12,000 staff, the Austin ISD Office of Innovation and Development (OID) operates as a hub for partnership in the district. When schools have a particular initiative or project they need help funding, the office helps align internal and external financial partners and volunteer resources to support Austin students. The department's [website](#) provides grants information, resources, guidance, fundraising strategies, frequently requested documents, templates for grant proposals, and tips for grant success. They also host their own grants database.

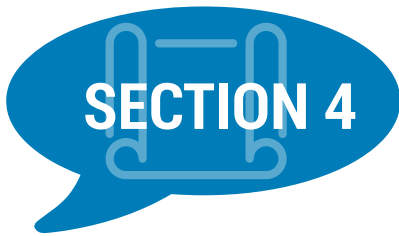
In addition to competitive grants, the department supports schools with crowdfunding projects with resources such as crowdfunding guidelines and FAQs. The district is utilizing [Edbacker](#), an online fundraising and donor management platform developed specifically for schools, includes reporting and communication tools. Each of Austin's 130 schools has a unique crowdfunding page and can run campaigns independently. The department also supports schools using other crowdfunding platforms such as Donors Choose or Adopt-a-Classroom.

According to Michelle Wallis, OID executive director, some foundation grants can only be paid out to nonprofit entities. So Austin, like many districts across the country, has established an educational foundation to manage and distribute these types of funds. The foundation supports Austin schools by investing in projects that promote classroom excellence. The [Austin Ed Fund](#) disperses funds through a competitive grants process to Austin public campuses and classrooms. The fund makes innovation grants available to individual teachers for up to \$2,000 and teams of teachers for up to \$10,000. It also provides grants of up to \$10,000 to support educational opportunities for low-income students through its Student Opportunity Fund.

Wallis suggests that being open to public-private partnerships allows Austin to accomplish more for students than they could do on their own. "If you're open to partnerships, know that it takes capacity to support them," she says. "Our district has made a substantive commitment to partnerships and we have a staff of eight to manage them and support the schools in their funding objectives."

Dell EMC has been a tremendous partner for Austin ISD. Headquartered in Round Rock, TX, Dell EMC has been helping to develop a more robust jobs pipeline by working with the district to drive curriculum for the local jobs market. The district has also partnered with Dell EMC around cybersecurity issues.

"Do your best by all your partners," Wallis advises. "Even if they don't require a lot of documentation, make sure you communicate with them regularly so that they feel good about their investment in your district."



SECTION 4 **Blueprint for Success**

Use the preceding checklist to ensure that you have customized your grant application to the funding criteria specified by individual funders. The closer the alignment between the grant provider’s goals and your project, the more likely it is that your proposal will receive a favorable hearing. Remember that it’s not just about the technology.

GENERAL CRITERIA CHECKLIST	YES	NO
Is your idea for the grant significant, compelling, and actionable?		
Does your funding proposal contain a sense of urgency?		
Do you clearly understand the mission of the funder?		
Is this the best organizational match for your funding request?		
Does your application include a clear summary that articulates your vision for the project and need for the money?		
Are there specific, measurable goals and objectives?		
Is there alignment of your needs, goals, and objectives?		
Does the proposal tie into the school's overall plan?		
Does your proposal reflect best practices for instruction and learning?		
Have you included research data or statistics to support your project?		
Have you defined success and how you will measure the effectiveness of the project throughout the duration of the grant?		
Do you have stakeholder buy-in?		
Have you conveyed what the impact will be on your school or district if you are successful?		
Have you matched your answers to the grant’s selection criteria?		
Have you allocated staff time to manage the project?		
Is there a detailed budget for your proposal?		
Have you outlined the contributions of the people associated with the application and how their expertise is critical to the project's success?		
Has the timeline been cross-checked against the budget?		
Do you have a plan in place to submit progress reports as required by the grant?		
What about sustainability after the funds are spent? How will the needs of the community be met moving forward?		

TECHNOLOGY-SPECIFIC CHECKLIST	YES	NO
Have you defined the technology required for each part of the proposal?		
How will the technology assist in implementing the grant goals?		
Will the technology be used to develop effective strategies for authentic learning?		
How will the technology be used to improve student achievement or staff development?		
Have you tied the technology expenses to the proposed budget?		

SUMMARY

Applying for grants is a competitive process. There are always multiple applicants for each grant on offer. To ensure that your application or proposal gets a fair hearing, follow the best practices shared in this guide. Successful grant winners advise that matching the project to the right funder is the first crucial step. Then, do your homework on each funding organization to determine the kinds of grants that have been awarded in the past. Understand the process and follow funder directions exactly.

For technology grants in particular, remember that it's not just about the technology. You want to paint the broader picture of student learning outcomes that will be facilitated by the technology. When you match the funder's requirements and clearly articulate the learning objectives you hope to achieve, you will increase your chances of consideration.

ABOUT DELL EMC

Dell EMC, a part of Dell Technologies, is committed to helping students develop the knowledge and skills they need to learn and succeed in an increasingly digital world and a globally competitive workforce. As a top provider of technology and services to schools, Dell EMC listens to and works with students, educators, administrators, parents and community members to deliver innovative technology and services. Whether it is solutions designed to enhance teaching and learning or the underlying technology infrastructure critical for keeping the learning environment secure and reliable, we are a comprehensive partner for all elements of the education enterprise. To learn more about Dell EMC solutions for education, visit: Dell.com/K12

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