



# BASIC PRINCIPLES OF FUNDRAISING

Successful fundraising utilizes the strengths of an organization and thrives on the energies of its staff. ROR is a national, evidence-based and inexpensive program: it has a proven record of success. It is also an incredibly simple program that is easy to describe and unique among other literacy interventions. Donors like innovation and ROR is incredibly innovative.

- **Fundraising is a continuous effort and one that calls for patience and persistence.**  
Think of fundraising as ‘friend – raising’.
- **Foundations and Corporations do not make quick decisions. Individuals are far more flexible.**  
Most foundations take an average of three to six months to review a proposal. Most corporations take an average of six week to five months. Be sure to apply for on-going funding before your current funding is close to exhausted.
- **When approaching foundations or corporations, seek out a board member who has a personal contact and let that person present the program for consideration.**
- **Prepare yourself for inevitable rejection.**  
Even if program officers can’t fund your program, they may be willing to offer constructive criticism and advice. Never dismiss a funding source, even if you have been turned down. Keep them informed about your program, as funding priorities often change.
- **Build on your fundraising successes, using each one as a stepping stone for the next effort.**  
Don’t hesitate to ask your current donors to introduce you to other potential donors.
- **Strive to maintain a good relationship with every donor.**  
Invite donors to visit the program so they can see how their money is being spent. Send donors copies of favorable publicity about the program. Encourage staff, providers, patients, and parents to write special thank-you’s for donations. You can never say thank you too many times.

## LOOKING LOCALLY

### Individual Donors

As mentioned, after government dollars individual contributions comprise a larger percentage of all total giving than foundations and corporations combined. What’s more, individuals do not operate on the same timelines as other funders. Charitable contributions made by individual community members are important sources of support for non-profit programs like ROR.

- **Charitable contributions often result from publicity, presentations, and solicitation letters.**
- **The greater your program’s visibility, the more successful it will be at fundraising.**  
Media attention helps to get the word out about your program and frequently leads to donors. See the Public Relations section of your Program Manual for further details on the ‘how-tos’ of publicizing your program.
- **Begin building a list of friends and family as soon as your program is up and running.**  
Begin by including your staff, board, and other friends of the program. Don’t hesitate to ask current supporters for names of friends and others interested in literacy efforts.
- **Donor cultivation or stewardship is key to keeping individuals interested in ROR. There are many things you can do to keep your donors involved in the program and to interest new donors in ROR. These include:**
  - **Site Visits**  
Invite a group of donors to your clinic to see it in operation. Combine site visits with small events featuring celebrity readers or library card registration day.



- **Newspaper Coverage**

News coverage increases visibility. Consider creating a photo opportunity or have your staff prepare an article on the importance of early literacy for the lifestyle section. See the Public Relations Section of your Program Manual for more information.

- **Create a recognition event to honor volunteers and donors.**

This could coincide with your program's birthday.

- **Schedule a breakfast meeting at the clinic and invite donors, city and/or school officials and legislators.**

- **Send solicitation letters to your mailing list on an annual basis.**

Holiday appeals are very popular – many programs mail solicitations several times per year. Include a clear description of the program in your letter – anecdotes and stories about the children involved and the impact of ROR add a human touch. Consider including a remittance envelope with the request; the National Center can help you with a template.

### **Making Contact with your Community**

If your program or coalition has a Board of Directors, get members involved in the program and make use of their network of contacts.

Approach the community relations committees of locally based or headquartered corporations. Often, these committees are looking for worthwhile community service projects for their employees. Corporate book fairs held for employees allow companies to donate a portion of the proceeds to ROR programs.

Think creatively and broadly about how to involve local organizations in your ROR program. For instance, High School Clubs and College Service and Social Organizations often have service components or devote their time entirely to public service. Ask them to 'adopt a clinic' or to simply 'adopt a shelf' and keep it stocked with new books. Engaging such organizations in book drives, book fairs or 'bring a book' social events are also effective ways of engaging community groups and keeping your ROR program running.

Local businesses can become active partners – many are willing to donate profits from a special events day or store opening. Others may be interested in offering benefits or coupons to customers who make a donation to their local ROR program. Bookstores can host promotions where customers buy two books at a discount and donate one to ROR. Be sure to approach businesses with organizational materials and several detailed ideas to increase your chances for support.

Local newspapers often have foundations dedicated to furthering the cause of literacy.

Print contribution envelopes to send past or lapsed supporters of your program an update letter (with thanks for their previous support) and a return envelope.

Consider conducting an Annual Campaign.

### **FUNDRAISING EVENTS**

Special events are a common fundraising vehicle for small non-profit organizations. However, special events are generally more successful at increasing the visibility of your organization and attracting new friends than they are at effectively fundraising. As a rule, it takes years of repeating an event to build an audience and turn a profit. Planning for special events can be time consuming and requires the support of an active volunteer committee. Be cautious in your planning and make certain that your goals are reasonable. With each successive annual event and in combination with other fundraising and organizing efforts, your program will become more widely known and your base of supporters will increase.

#### **Ideas for Fundraising Events:**

- **Walkathons and Readathons**

Encourage sponsors to pledge sums of money for miles walked or pages read.

- **Book Fairs Starring Celebrity Readers**

Contact a local bookstore or publisher's representative to arrange for books to be sold. Publicize the event in your local media.

- **Events featuring local authors or book illustrators.**

- **A reception at a local bookstore where patrons buy two books and donate one to your program.**

## RESEARCH, RESOURCES & BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Internet makes researching like-minded foundations and corporations incredibly easy. For nominal membership fees, you can join searchable databases that allow you to locate foundations and corporations with local interests (statewide or city-focused) who are dedicated to supporting early or pre-K education and literacy. These databases include:

[www.bigdatabase.com](http://www.bigdatabase.com), [www.foundationsearch.com](http://www.foundationsearch.com), [www.guidestar.com](http://www.guidestar.com)

Instead of paying for database services, compile a list of possible funders and research online at corporate or foundation websites. Having trouble finding giving information? Always check the “Contact Us” or “About Us” sections of corporate websites – they generally link to “Corporate Giving”, “Community Investment”, “Community Service”, or “Social Responsibility” pages. These phrases are appropriate and generally successful search terms, as well.

Each Foundation or Corporation has specific guidelines for submitting formal proposals: no two organizations are alike in their initial requirements or timelines. When researching, look closely for the following items:

- The organization’s most recent Form 990, which generally contains a list of every grantee and the amounts that each received.
- Deadlines for letters of intent and proposals and dates for board meetings and granting decisions.
- Guidelines for submissions. These will include:
  - the maximum number of pages allowed
  - information that needs to be included or addressed in your submission
  - extra materials required, such as lists of board members, current funders and organizational budget
  - guidelines for drafting a budget
  - contact names, addresses, and phone numbers

If possible, always call foundations or the charitable giving arms of corporations to speak with a program officer about giving guidelines and priorities and deadlines. You will save yourself valuable time and effort with a simple phone call; websites often provide dated or partial information.

The other benefit to calling with pointed, well-thought questions for program officers is that it provides a contact. Don’t forget to ask the name of the person you’ve spoken with before hanging up the phone! A cover letter and grant proposal directly addressed to a specific person involved with grant-making is more likely to get noticed and paid proper attention.

## GRANT WRITING 101

- After you have researched funding sources, you may want to begin the process of grantseeking by sending out a basic, but customized letter of inquiry to qualified prospects.
- Contact the foundation and ask for the appropriate program officer and initiate a conversation about your program. Program officers can be extremely helpful in guiding your request and establishing a personal relationship may turn that offer into an advocate for your program.
- Respect the organization’s deadlines and make a timeline for yourself that is realistic.
- Keep grant related material like staff resumes, tax-status documents, project abstracts and research on hand to make grant writing more expedient.
- Follow the guidelines for the organization you are applying to for funding.
- Keep it simple. State your case clearly and concisely in the first paragraph. Be sure that your goals and your plan to achieve them are realistic and reasonable.
- Pay special attention to your budget. Include a budget justification (a narrative that explains and justifies each expenditure) for each line item.
- Review the final draft. Have a colleague who is not connected to your program read your proposal and offer comments and corrections.
- Grant writing can be a time consuming activity. Consider finding a volunteer who has experience in grant writing.
- Use the ROR Listserv to communicate with other sites around the country and share grant writing successes. You can get information on how to join the Listserv from the ROR National Center.