How to Find Technology Funding

Thanks to the No Child Left Behind Act and an increased emphasis on improving and tracking student performance, the use of technology in U.S. public schools has become more of an asset than ever. But even as schools strive to strengthen their technology programs, economic conditions and budgetary constraints often make it difficult to fund these programs.

To deal with this situation, principals must:

- View technology funding as a process rather than an event;
- Utilize their technology plan as a road map; and
- Use the power of research to match their needs with funding sources.

The Funding Process

The first step is to establish an advisory group to develop a long-term technology plan. The group should be diverse, including administrators, teachers, parents, community members, students, and representatives from local businesses and colleges. This diversity creates an open forum for sharing ideas and establishes a network to find out about funding opportunities.

The next step is for the advisory group to develop a technology plan that will serve as a road map, establishing needs and setting parameters. An effective plan should cover a period of two to five years and include such components as infrastructure, hardware, networks, curriculum-related software, and student information systems, as well as technology training, service, and maintenance. The plan should focus on desired outcomes and the applications needed to achieve them, not on the technology itself. Technology goals should always relate to student achievement and include an evaluation component to show a return on the investment.

Matching Needs to Funding Sources

Finding technology funding begins with a review of the technology plan to determine specific needs. The advisory group should generate and prioritize a list of needs related to student achievement before seeking input for possible solutions. With clearly defined needs and well-researched solutions, the advisory group is prepared to look for funding sources to match their needs. It is also helpful to prepare a funding profile of the school that includes the number of students, student characteristics (i.e., ethnic mix, number of students receiving free or reduced-cost lunches), and a description of the school’s facilities and educational programs.

Technology funding is available from two basic sources:

Reoccurring funding includes local and state taxes, bonds, or levies; school operating budgets; capital outlay for equipment or renovations; legislative formulas, such as Title I; instructional textbook funds earmarked for software or online content subscriptions; and district monies for maintenance and repairs.

Non-reoccurring funding includes competitive grants and special funding opportunities, especially as they relate to school reform, innovative programs, and staff development; business and community partnerships; university, state, and private agencies; and parent and business donations.

The Power of Research

The group should begin the search for funding by tracking federal, state, local, and private funding sources. Utilize resources that monitor education legislation and identify government agencies, foundations, and other organizations that make technology grants to elementary and middle schools. The U.S. Education Department’s Web site, www.ed.gov, is an excellent source for federal information. Other valuable online resources include www.schoolfundingservices.org, a subscription service that provides current data on federal K–12 education programs, and the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance, www.cfda.gov, a compendium of federal programs, projects, services, and activities.


Private sector funding often parallels federal agencies’ priorities in strengthening schools. The Foundation Center, www.fdncenter.org, has an online subscription service that provides comprehensive information on funding from private sources.

Here are some tips that can help to find private sector funding:

- Ask staff, board members, and parents if they know foundation or corporate representatives personally;
- Contact past donors in your school district;
- Obtain access to the state foundation directory; and
- Research the purposes and funding patterns of area foundations and corporations.

Finally, consider submitting a grant application to a foundation after you receive federal and/or state funding to supplement your program. This will help strengthen the match opportunity and improve your opportunities for more technology funding.

Merna L. Smith is a senior research manager with Pearson School Systems. Her e-mail address is merna.smith@pearson.com.