

Securing Matching Funds: Results of our First Crowdsourcing Challenge

The U.S. Department of Education requires Effective Educator Development (EED) grantees to match a percentage of federal funds with in-kind contributions or cash funds. These funds demonstrate a community investment in grantee programs and represent an important first step toward financial sustainability. That said, grantees often report challenges related to securing matching funds.

In July 2020, we asked our EED Grant Project Directors to share their successes, challenges, and creative solutions with this question in mind:

How can EED grantees rethink how they secure matching funds to support their work?

We received responses from 14 grantees. Thirteen of the 14 grantees reported successfully securing matching funds for their grant. When asked for details about the funds they secured/contributions they identified as matching funds, the most common response related to personnel (10 out of 14 grantees). Examples included a portion of salary and expenses of higher education faculty and administrators, stipends for PK-12 educators, or the costs associated with paying graduate research assistants.

Other identified in-kind contributions included space to house the project, technology, supplies, books, discounts from local businesses, and unreimbursed travel costs. Two grantees secured additional funding--one from foundations and one from the state--to serve as match funding.

Respondents reported a variety of challenges in securing matching funds, including documenting time and effort, ensuring district in-kind contributions are not already supported with federal funds, and discussing funding with prospective partners given competing interests for time and financial uncertainties related to COVID-19.

Below, we profile two different examples of how Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) grantees have calculated and secured matching funds.

Calculating In-Kind Contributions of Time: Example from Illinois State University (SEED 2017)

Illinois State University (ISU) applies an in-kind contribution of principals' and superintendents' time spent in meetings, training, and/or coaching to its grant's matching funds requirement. (See Step 1 in ISU's Example Calculation.)

Rather than ask all partner districts to report individual principal and superintendent salaries, ISU uses the Illinois average salary calculation, which is calculated annually by the Illinois Association of School Boards, to calculate an hourly rate. (See Step 2 in the ISU Example Calculation.)

Using the Illinois average principal and superintendent salary, ISU calculates an hourly rate and then multiplies that by the total number of hours to generate the match contribution amount. (See Step 3 in the ISU Example Calculation.)

ISU Example Calculation for Principals

Step 1 - Calculation of Hours

Training - 6 sessions at 2.5 hours each x 100 principals = 1,500 hours

Principal Network Meetings - 4 sessions at 2 hours each x 100 principals = 800 hours

Coaching Sessions - 10 sessions x 2 hours each x 100 principals = 2,000 hours

Total - 4,300 hours

Step 2 - Calculation of Hourly Rate

Average Illinois Principal Salary for 2017 (as reported in January 2018) - \$102,253

Hourly rate = \$102,253 / 12 months / 37.5 hours per week = \$52.44 per hour

Step 3 - Calculation of Matching Funds Contribution

4,300 hours x \$52.44 = \$225,492 in matching funds

Securing Funds from Foundations: Example from WestEd (SEED 2018)

When asked if there was something different they would like to try in order to secure matching funds, a few grantees noted they would like to try to reach out to foundations. We followed up with WestEd, a 2018 SEED grantee, to learn more about how they have secured grants from two foundations--the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Foundation--to support their work.

WestEd staff members set up multiple conversations with foundations that had priorities related to the content of their grant. Many conversations did not lead to a partnership, either because funding was not available or because the foundations' priorities did not connect well to WestEd's grant work. However, the Hewlett Foundation was very interested in Open Education Resources in science and the grant's focus on literacy and science was a natural fit with the foundation's portfolio. Similarly, Schusterman Foundation had a strong interest in how professional development can support the implementation of high quality English language arts curriculum, which aligned well to WestEd's SEED-funded work. After multiple conversations, WestEd secured funding from both organizations.

Working with foundations has clear benefits, according to Linda Friedrich, Director of Literacy at WestEd. Funding from foundations is easy to document and can be used to support things like staff salaries. More importantly, partnering with foundations can expand a grantee's network. For example, both Hewlett Foundation and the Schusterman Foundation have helped connect WestEd with other experts and partners. In addition, WestEd has appreciated the opportunity to work with foundation staff and benefit from their content expertise in similar areas.

Although documenting match contributions from foundations is easy, most foundations have their own reporting requirements that grantees must follow. In addition, it is critical that staff keep the big picture in mind and be responsive to all partners, including foundations.

As a national non-profit, WestEd benefits from having institutional knowledge and resources to support securing funding from foundations. Over time, WestEd staff have also cultivated relationships with foundations so they are already familiar with grant portfolios. However, colleges, universities, and smaller non-profits can all benefit

from Friedrich's advice:

- If you have a relationship with a foundation, start there. Place-based and locally-driven community foundations can also be great partners. Have conversations about your work and ways it might intersect.
 - Through a series of conversations, try to find a slice of your current work that matches project scope and foundation's priorities.
 - Be prepared for "nos" from foundations and be prepared to walk away if the foundation's portfolio does not align with your work.
 - Treat a relationship with a foundation as a partnership. Invest the time necessary to build a two-way relationship through regular conversation and resource-sharing.
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Even though only a small number of grantees participated in our Crowdsourcing Challenge, one theme is clear: There is more than one way to identify and secure matching funds. Through relationship-building, creative thinking, and attention to detail all grantees can successfully meet matching funds requirements.

