



Funding Your Technology Plan

Chapter 8

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Funding Your Technology Plan

The Challenges of Funding

Having a well-conceived and descriptive technology plan is a critical factor for success when seeking technology funding. To reprise our analogy comparing technology planning to building a house (Chapter 2), obtaining money to pay for materials and services is an integral part of both processes. A financial lender will not give you money for your house unless you have a comprehensive plan for how you will spend it. A lender wants assurance that you will spend the money as your plan specifies. The same principle applies to technology planning. Your local school board and other funding sources such as federal and state grants or business donations and other local funding also require that you have a definite plan for using the resources that you are seeking from them.

Preparing the documentation for seeking external funding can be a complicated and time-consuming process; however, the more planning and preparation that you do, the more successful you will be in acquiring the funding. And if you already have a well-developed technology plan, you're halfway there.

If you are not able to find funding for all of the elements in your technology plan, don't give up. Most districts develop a three- to five-year plan and implement the various phases as they can afford it. Prioritizing your goals is an essential part of this process. You would not give up building your house if you could not finance everything you wanted at once. Instead, you would decide to scale back or add the currently unaffordable things at a later date.

When prioritizing your technology choices, it is critical to understand the cost of each of the components. You also need to understand the value, purpose, and impact of the various components. To return to our analogy, if you need to cut back your house construction budget, it's not a good idea to cut out the foundation or roof; this is just common sense. Unfortunately, common sense sometimes takes a back seat in technology purchasing.

It would be highly unusual if one source funded your entire plan. Therefore, you should look for various sources of funds that can be applied to various parts of your plan. Which funds you seek, when you seek them, and how you articulate your requests should all be tied to your technology plan.



Tools in this Chapter

This chapter includes recommendations and resources for you to use in the funding process.

Funding Your Technology Plan. Presented in graphical form, *Funding Your Technology Plan* shows how your strategic technology plan acts as an organizing engine for taking funds from a variety of different sources and applying them to the goals and activities that comprise your technology implementation effort. Consider this before determining where you will seek technology funding.

Strategies for Finding Financial Resources. *Strategies for Finding Financial Resources* is a discussion of the various themes we have discovered when examining how districts around our region have acquired technology funding.

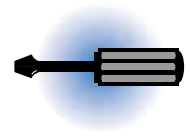
Ten Tips for Educational Technology Proposal Writers. The list of tips covers key concepts and strategies to consider when creating technology proposals.

Resources for Proposal Writers. The resources listed will help you locate funding sources, develop proposal ideas, and fine-tune your technology funding proposal.

Putting the Tools to Work

Funding Your Technology Plan

As discussed in the opening section to this chapter, it is possible to understand your technology plan as an organizing engine that takes various funding *inputs* and creates *outputs* that relate to the bigger picture of teaching and learning in your district. In this diagram, we have listed some sample inputs that might be used to fund a technology plan or engine. The object is to help you see that technology funding actually comes from many different sources and is not always related simply to buying computer hardware and software.



Technology Plan

Inputs— Resources (\$)	Outputs— Implementation
<p>State Grants Technology Literacy Challenge Fund (TLCF)</p>	
<p>Federal Grants Education Department National Science Foundation (NSF)</p>	Curriculum
<p>Federal Entitlements Title I Title VI Perkins</p>	Professional Development
<p>Foundation Grants</p>	
<p>Corporate Grants</p>	
<p>Business Partners</p>	Technology Infrastructure
<p>Parent Supporters</p>	
<p>District Funds Professional Development Curriculum Technology</p>	



Strategies for Finding Financial Resources

Using our experiences with school districts, we have put together the following list of important things that you should keep in mind when seeking financial resources. Several of these suggestions are drawn from *Putting technology into the classroom: A guide for rural decision makers* (Boethel, Dimock, and Hatch, 1998).

- **Funding comes from many sources.** No one grant or funding source will fund everything you need as specified in your plan. The plan is designed to show you how all of the pieces of technology integration fit together, and to set priorities for when you need to do certain things. Funding requests need to be made according to this big picture and the priorities set within.
- **Don't rely on grants and donations to cover your ongoing costs.** The initial purchase of hardware and software represents the bulk of your startup expenses; however, you need to allocate a significant portion of your school's technology budget for ongoing costs. According to research funded by the US Department of Education, you should allocate thirty percent of the overall technology budget for professional development. For every dollar you allocate to hardware purchases, you need to budget fifty cents for staff development, software, and maintenance. If you are writing a grant proposal, you should plan to spend about ten percent of the budget on evaluation. You'll need to find ways of supporting these continuing costs.
- **Look for ways to reallocate your current resources.** It will be necessary to reexamine your district's current resources and find areas that can be reallocated to cover your technology budget. If your district is like most small districts, however, you are probably stretched to your limit. Some states allow schools to use a portion of their textbook allocations for technology-related purchases. If you receive Title I funds, you may be able to reallocate some of those expenditures to support technology costs. It may be the opportunity to streamline functions and costs. And you might consider nontraditional sources, such as vending-machine revenues and revenues from renting the computer lab to community organizations.
- **Collaborate and share resources.** Many small districts are setting up partnerships with other schools or area businesses and universities to share—or trade—technology resources. A little collaborative creativity can result in substantial savings. For example, one Florida school district allows cellular-telephone companies in the area to build transmission towers at the edge of the district's football fields. In exchange, the district receives free wireless access to the Internet. Large grants from both public and private sources often require that several agencies partner in the effort. So, look at ways that several schools might collaborate with a university or another community organization. Chapter 4, *Professional Development Planning*, describes how a district might collaborate with a university to create a professional development program.
- **Explore cost-saving options, but beware of bargains.** Be sure your planning committee does its homework in investigating low-cost technology

options. Look into alternative purchasing methods such as leasing equipment or financing your purchases through low-interest loans. Find out if your state department of education has negotiated prices for hardware and software purchases. While searching for the lowest-cost alternatives for achieving your technology goals, however, beware of bargains. Saving a few hundred dollars on a computer purchase can be expensive in the long run if that purchase proves to be outdated in a year or two, requires special support, or is incompatible with the rest of your system. What seemed to be a more expensive purchase may end up as the real bargain.

- **Seek out and use federal and state resources that support technology use.** There is ever-growing federal and state support for technology use. For example, schools and libraries can get substantial discounts on their monthly Internet, telephone, and other telecommunications bills, as well as discounts on some other networking costs, through the Telecommunications Act of 1996. The biggest discounts go to rural schools and those with the highest proportions of low-income students. More information about this act and how to take advantage of the benefits of the E-Rate can be found on the School and Libraries Corporation home page at <http://www.sl.universalservice.org>. Many states provide a per-student technology allocation that you can include in your budget planning. Later in this chapter we have included a list of resources that you can review for ideas for new funding sources.
- **Technology funding should cover professional development.** We can't overemphasize the importance of making adequate provision for professional development and technology support. No matter how tight your budget, you cannot afford to cut corners on these two items. Technology that sits unused because of inadequate training or inadequate technical support is a big waste. Improving teaching through increased professional development opportunities is now a federal priority, so you are likely to find some external funding for supporting the professional development and curriculum development sections of your plan.

Evaluation is quickly becoming a priority. When you write a proposal for this type of funding, be sure to indicate how the professional development or curriculum work is integrated with technology and how you are going to evaluate the project's impact on teaching and learning.



Ten Tips for Educational Technology Proposal Writers

1. Read the Request for Proposal (RFP) carefully.

The first rule for writing a successful grant is to read the RFP (Request for Proposal) and then follow the RFP's rules and guidelines when writing your proposal. Not surprisingly, most unsuccessful proposals violate this basic rule. The RFP is written for the specific purpose of providing prospective grantees with all of the information that they need to write a successful proposal. Most grant makers invest a lot of time writing their RFP. They expect you to read it and follow it carefully.

2. Write appropriate proposals.

This follows from reading (and understanding) the RFP. Don't waste your time, or the reviewers' time, by submitting proposals that don't meet the guidelines of the RFP. If the RFP says that it will not fund proposals for specific items, expenditure categories, or specific populations, then do not write a proposal asking for these things. For example, if a grant maker states that it will not provide funds for hardware and software, do not write a proposal asking for funds for hardware and software. Grant makers follow their own rules to the letter, and exceptions are not made. Inappropriate proposals are rejected.

3. Follow the structure provided by the RFP.

RFPs usually provide a suggested proposal structure or format. If your RFP provides such a structure, follow it! Most of the time, the suggested structure is the basis of the checklist that reviewers will use when reading your proposal. Reviewers use a checklist to determine if each proposal has all of the required elements, sections, and so on. You can greatly improve the chances that your proposal will be approved if you organize it to their specifications.

4. Clearly state your proposal's goals and objectives.

All reviewers expect to see your proposed project's goals. If you do not clearly state them, then the assumption will be that you have none. Proposals without goals are generally not funded. Furthermore, it is important that your goals be aligned with the purposes of the grant program (as stated in the RFP) and that they be reasonable within the scope of your proposed project and resources. Good goals are at the core of all good proposals. Good objectives are measurable and can be attained within the life of the project.

5. Align your proposal with your technology-planning goals.

Good goals are also at the core of good educational technology plans. Therefore, when writing technology proposals, you should reference your planning goals. Show how your proposal supports your broader goals and how it completes some element (albeit a possibly small element) of your technology plan. Alignment with planning goals gives your proposal a big picture that demonstrates that the funds you are requesting will accomplish additional goals beyond the specific, anticipated outcomes from the proposed project.

It is worth mentioning here that technology proposals that come from districts that do not have technology plans are usually not funded. Funding agencies expect a proposal to be grounded in the long-term vision and strategies expressed in a technology plan. While it is sometimes not necessary to include your technology plan with your proposal, it is always a good idea to reference it in your proposal and/or include it as an appendix.

6. Specifically state your project's impact on teaching and learning.

What impact will your proposal have on teaching and learning? This is the bottom line of any successful technology proposal. If you cannot clearly describe the anticipated impact, it is unlikely that your proposal will receive funding. Do not make reviewers search for your anticipated impact. Do not assume that they will understand your impact unless you specify how your plan will positively impact students and their educational environment.

7. Include evaluation and dissemination components.

In many cases, the RFP will require that your proposal include evaluation and/or dissemination components. Funders are interested in projects that can measure success, document challenges, identify potential problems, and ask questions for future research. They want the projects they support to be learning experiences for a larger educational constituency and guides for future funding initiatives they might make. Therefore, they ask you to submit a study showing how the funded project has made a difference. In addition, funders want to know how you will share the outcome and learning described in your proposal through a dissemination plan.

Some proposal writers often consider evaluation and dissemination as a waste of project funds. Do not fall into this trap. Evaluation and dissemination components are critical to successful projects. Conscientious proposal writers who can visualize the big picture know they must devote sufficient project time and resources to evaluation and dissemination. Even when the RFP does not specifically ask for these components, their inclusion very much strengthens a proposal.

8. Realize that not all technology-related RFPs fund hardware.

In fact, most grant programs do not fund basic hardware, software, network access, and other infrastructure needs. At the present time, the majority of technology-related grant programs fund staff development and curriculum development. Writing a proposal for one of these programs requires a thorough understanding not only of what you will use, but how and why you will use it, and how it will have a positive impact on learning.

9. Collaborate!

Successful proposals are collaboratively written. Collaboration not only helps in terms of editing and reviewing drafts but, more importantly, it expands the ideas in your proposal. Furthermore, proposals that involve several collaborating partners are always more successful than those which are limited to a single organization,

school, or individual. A collaboration agreement shows that others share your vision and will work to make it a reality.

10. Write, modify, resubmit.

It is not unusual to have your proposal rejected the first time. Don't be discouraged, try again. Try with a different funder and, if possible, resubmit the proposal to the original grant maker. Before you resubmit an idea, however, it is wise to incorporate any feedback you received on your rejected proposal. Remember, when resubmitting a proposal it is necessary to redraft the proposal document to the new RFP (in terms of organization, components, budget requirements, etc.). Do not simply photocopy your old proposal for the new submission, and do not submit proposals that do not fully fulfill the current RFP.

Resources

Resources for Proposal Writers

The following resources should prove helpful to you in your search for funding for your district's technology plan. Programs and grants are available from many sources that range from large, complex funding efforts from the federal government to small grants from local business or parent groups. Remember, too, that there might well be sources of funding within your community, such as civic organizations and businesses.

Before you go to the following sites, however, you might want to check out the SEIR♦TEC web site at <http://www.seirtec.org>. There you'll find links to web sites of funding agencies (some of which are listed among the following resources) as well as materials from a proposal-writing workshop that SEIR♦TEC staff members conduct for districts applying for Technology Literacy Challenge Fund grants. The materials include tips for proposal writing, strategies for managing the proposal-writing process, and suggestions for what to include in each section of a proposal, e.g., needs or problem statement, management plan, evaluation plan, and so forth.

Federal Opportunities

<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/KnowAbtGrants>

“What Should I Know About ED Grants?” from the US Department of Education

<http://www.ed.gov/Technology/inititiv.html>

US Department of Education, Office of Educational Technology

<http://www.ed.gov/Technology/challenge/>

US Department of Education, Technology Innovation Challenge Grant

<http://www.ed.gov/Technology/TLCF/>

US Department of Education, Technology Literacy Challenge Fund

<http://www.ed.gov/prog info/StarSchools/index.html>

US Department of Education, Star Schools Program

<http://www.ehr.nsf.gov/ehr/esie/TE.htm>

National Science Foundation, Teacher Enhancement Program

<http://www.ehr.nsf.gov/ehr/esie/ISE.htm>

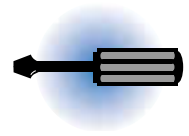
National Science Foundation, Elementary, Secondary, and Informal Education

<http://www.neh.fed.us>

National Endowment for the Humanities

<http://198.3.128.64/edugate/>

US Department of Defense



<http://www.ntia.doc.gov/otiahome/ptfp/index.html>

US Department of Commerce, Public Telecommunications Facilities Program

<http://www.ntia.doc.gov/otiahome/top/index.html>

US Department of Commerce, Telecommunications and Information Infrastructure Assistance Program

<http://www.ree.usda.gov/programs/distanced/dist.htm>

US Department of Agriculture, distance learning projects

Private Entities

<http://www.att.com/foundation/programs/education.html>

AT&T—Educational programs

<http://www.cisco.com/edu/>

Cisco Systems—Virtual Schoolhouse Grant Program, Networking Academies, International Schools CyberFair, Educational Archive

<http://www.microsoft.com/education/k12/>

Microsoft Corporation

<http://www.gatesfoundation.org>

Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

Other Resources

<http://www.computers.fed.gov/school/user.asp>

The *Computers for Learning* project works to place surplus federal computer equipment in schools and educational nonprofits.

<http://www.aspeninst.org/rural/foundres.html>

“Foundation Resources, Community Networks, Telecenters, and Televillages,” an article on private-foundation sources for rural communities, is available through the Aspen Institute Rural Economic Policy Program. More information is available through the web site listed or by contacting Aspen Institute Rural Economic Policy Program, 1333 New Hampshire Ave. NW #1070, Washington, DC 20036, (202) 736-5834.

<http://www.nsba.org/itte/index.html>

The National School Board Association’s Institute for the Transfer of Technology to Education offers an array of print and online publications targeted for school leaders. Visit the web site listed or contact NSBA, 1680 Duke Street, Alexandria, VA 22314, (703) 838-6214.

<http://www.electronic-school.com/>

Electronic School

<http://www.mcrel.org/products/tech/technology/funding.asp>

Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory’s (McREL) Funding for

Technology page provides access to a number of reports, articles, strategies, and sources for funding.

General Resources

American Association of School Administrators. 1995. *From here to technology: How to fund hardware, software, and more*. Arlington, VA.

<http://www.ed.gov/funding.html>

This web site lists all of the different grants or contracts available through the US Department of Education.

<http://www.sedl.org/pubs/catalog/items/tec24.html>

Boethel, M.; Dimock, K.V.; and Hatch, L. 1998. *Putting technology into the classroom: A guide for rural decision makers* (pp. 24–29). Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. This publication is available online in both Spanish and English.

<http://www.ed.gov/funding.html>

The US Department of Education's web site has detailed information on all of the department's grant opportunities, as well as some general information for those interested in applying for federal grants.

<http://www.fdncenter.org>

The Foundation Center is a nonprofit organization serving grant-making private foundations and those grant-seekers wishing to locate foundations. This site contains a wealth of information on the grant-seeking/writing process as well as links to many foundations and their web sites.

<http://www.ascd.org/readingroom/books/orlich96book.html>

A summary of the book *Designing Successful Grant Proposals* by Donald C. Orlich is provided by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development online.

<http://www.learner.org/sami/view-category.php3?category=fund>

Created by the Colorado-based Science and Math Initiative, this site contains lists of current grant opportunities for science, math, and technology-based projects.

<http://www.nsf.gov/home/grants.htm>

The National Science Foundation web site provides current information on grant opportunities.

<http://www.magicnet.net/~gwest/grant.htm>

Organized by the director of University of Central Florida's Instructional Technology Center, this page contains a wealth of information on proposal writing and current sources of grant funding for educators.

<http://www.sun-associates.com/grantwriting.html>

The Sun Associates site contains links to several successful proposals and an up-to-date list of online grant resources.

Putting It All Together

A conversation about funding instructional technology

What seems to be the biggest challenge faced by schools and districts when it comes to technology funding?

We see many schools struggling as they begin trying to locate funding for their technology plans. This struggle takes place because they lack a useful technology plan created by a motivated, broad-based planning team. As a result, they lack ideas or strategies for seeking the funding they need.

In many states, schools are expected to submit strategic technology plans when they apply to their state department of education for technology funding. Prior to this, schools either did not receive any technology funding or had to find funding within their existing revenue streams. The advent of programs such as the Technology Literacy Challenge Fund (TLCF), which provides funding to states which then pass it on to schools, has changed much of this. Schools can access these funds, but they have to justify their expenditures through a school technology plan.

In theory, this should be pretty simple. It should be just a matter of creating a grant proposal that draws from the plan and the energies of the committee. In practice, however, we have found that it doesn't always happen that way.

We are finding that most technology plans and the proposals that grow out of them are lacking in specifics as to how technology will impact teaching and learning. The vision statement may spell out the connection between technology and learning, but the plan's subsequent goals, objectives, and actions relate mostly to buying hardware and software and perhaps offering some basic how-to workshops for teachers. Therefore, when a school goes to that plan to find the *fundable ideas*, they wind up with no ideas. *In other words, most technology plans do not support the generation of proposals.*

Furthermore, we often find that the committee of stakeholders is really a handful of teachers and administrators who are either dedicated to the cause or who have been drafted into the plan-writing task. We find that when the technology plan is a useful document and where the committee is truly motivated and broad-based, there is a plethora of good ideas turning into proposals that get funded! This is the reason why some schools (or districts) keep getting more and more funding while others don't receive any. We constantly observe that in the area of proposal-writing, success breeds more success. Basically, that success exemplifies a quality technology plan.

If this is a common situation, what's the solution?

Leadership is required to create a meaningful technology plan, and it is also required to secure funding for that plan. Essentially, leadership provides the safe space within which these efforts can occur. This space is defined by setting priorities that encourage and support particular types of effort and recognizing

the benefits of those efforts. Schools that have this sort of leadership are most likely to be successful in many ways—technology included.

Many educators don't realize the amount of change that the introduction of technology brings. They may set their expectations too high at the beginning or may become discouraged if the implementation process is lengthy and difficult. Sometimes, administrative support wanes after one or two grants have been won.

We have also seen districts that don't place technology high on their list of priorities. Even worse, grant funds may come in and end up being spent on other projects because key administrators do not truly honor guidelines in a proposal.

No amount of modeling or how-to lists for proposal writing will fix district or school leadership that lacks vision, priorities, or willingness to dedicate itself to making technology happen. These underlying issues need to be remedied first, so that a good foundation can be created for technology planning and implementation.

So, let's suppose that a school does have supportive leadership; the bottom line still seems to be that there is never enough funding to fully support technology implementation. How does one address that issue?

You're right, grants and proposals seldom provide full funding. The real bottom line is that schools need to redirect existing funding to support the integration of technology into the curriculum. Yes, making existing funds pay for some technology requires reallocation of funding, and this requires strong leadership.

Finally, everyone needs to realize that no plan will be 100% funded or 100% implemented. Changes and compromises will (and must) be made. The ultimate goal is to achieve the vision, and this cannot come without some degree of compromise.

This may be redundant, but could you sum up what your experience has shown to be the basic recipe for success for schools to secure technology funding?

Sure, based on our experience and in order of importance, the factors for success are:

- Strong leadership on the part of school officials
- A technology plan with concrete goals that support a sound vision of technology's role in improving teaching and learning
- Clear understanding of the relationship between curriculum and technology tools
- An energetic and skilled group of staff members who are willing to invest the time—often to some extent at their own expense—to write a compelling proposal out of that plan
- An understanding of your school's, district's, and community's needs

