



**Funding Tip: Obtaining Federal Funding to Support
LifeSkills Training Program Implementation
July 2011
By Erin McLaughlin**

This funding tip is the final resource of a three-part series developed by The Finance Project to help LifeSkills Training (LST) grantees build capacity and sustain LST program implementation at their sites. The series presents strategies to help a variety of LST grantees, including program leaders, site coordinators, teachers and school administrators, obtain additional funding through foundation, corporation and federal government grants, and by building and establishing community partnerships. This funding tip presents strategies on how to obtain federal funding to enhance and sustain LST programming.

Why Obtain Federal Funding?

Federal funding can be used to build program capacity and sustain LST programs over time. Specifically, it can be blended with other funding sources to help LST leaders develop a broad and diversified base of program funding.¹ Obtaining federal funding is challenging and highly competitive, and most funding sources have strict requirements on how funds can be spent. Nevertheless, the pay-off can be large—in addition to increasing funds, a federal grant award also provides some degree of validation at a national level that your program works. This validation can provide leverage for other local and state government dollars as well as foundation and corporate support.

Strategies for Obtaining Federal Funding

Finding and obtaining federal funding varies slightly by funding type and government agency, but the fundamentals of the process are similar. This funding tip provides information and tips on:

- (1) Understanding federal funding opportunities;
- (2) Finding federal funding opportunities; and
- (3) Preparing and writing a successful application.

To be successful in obtaining federal funding to support the LST program, program leaders need to understand the types of funding available. Next, program leaders should have a wide array of tools and resources to search for and identify relevant funding opportunities. Finally, it is important to be prepared to submit an application when a relevant opportunity arises and to write a strong, tailored proposal.

• **Understanding federal funding opportunities**

Federal funding comes in a variety of forms and may be targeted for very specific purposes. Before searching for funding opportunities, it is important to understand the different types of federal funding. This will reduce the time you spend searching for funding opportunities by allowing you to more easily identify funding that LST

¹ For further information, see: Thinking Broadly: Financing Strategies for Youth Programs. Available at: http://www.financeproject.org/publications/Thinkingbroadly_PM.pdf

programs are eligible to receive. The types of funding that are most relevant to LST grantees include:

- **Competitive/Discretionary grants:** The majority of grants available to support the LST program are discretionary grants. This funding is awarded to eligible entities for specific projects through a competitive application process. LST programs can often apply directly for these grants.
 - **Demonstration grants:** Demonstration grants are awarded for pilot projects and generally involve funding a small number of sites in an effort to learn about the effectiveness of a new program or approach. Some LST programs may be able to access funds of this type.
 - **Formula (or block) grants:** These grants provide states or localities with a fixed amount of funding for a given purpose based on an established formula. Although schools and non-profits cannot access these federal funds directly, individual states may distribute their share of funding to local entities. LST programs should contact their state or city for information on whether relevant formula grant funds can be accessed to support the LST program.
- **Finding government grant opportunities**
 - *Federal Funding databases* –The Finance Project’s Federal Funding Database is a good privately managed website to search for funding opportunities to support the LST program. The database is searchable by keyword, use of funds, federal agency, eligibility to apply and type of funding. It can be accessed at: http://www.financeproject.org/fedfund_search.cfm. Find Youth Info provides funding information for 12 Federal agencies that support programs and services focusing on youth. The site provides descriptions of 12 federal agencies’ major funding initiatives, links to funding information, and mailing lists where you can sign up to receive funding information as it becomes available. Find Youth Info’s Funding Information Center is available at: <http://findyouthinfo.gov/fundingAgencies.shtml>.
 - *Government agency websites* - Many federal agencies list open grant opportunities on their websites or allow you to sign up for grant notifications via email. Targeting your search to agencies relevant to the LST program can enable you to quickly find relevant opportunities. Programs interested in obtaining funding through federal formula (block) grants should consult their state for information on available opportunities. As with federal agencies, many individual state agencies provide information on the grants they award. Agencies responsible for issues such as education, health, youth, or substance abuse may all offer grants that could be used to support the LST program.
 - *Government funding databases:* The federal government operates two main websites that provide information on available sources of federal funding: www.grants.gov and www.cfda.gov. These sites are available at no cost and provide a variety of search options to identify relevant funding sources. However, these sites can be overwhelming and difficult to navigate. Grants.gov allows you to sign up to receive email notices, including a daily list of all new funding opportunities, notices based on specific criteria (such as funding agency or eligibility), or notices about a specific grant, which can help simplify the search process.

- **Preparing and writing a successful application**
 - *Leveraging Community Partnerships*²: LST grantees can apply for many federal funding opportunities on their own; however collaborating and establishing partnerships with school and community leaders will strengthen a grant application for highly competitive federal funding. Developing these partnerships early will help ensure that these relationships can be leveraged when writing an application.
 - *Registering with Grants.gov* – Most federal agencies accept applications for discretionary grants through grants.gov, which requires potential applicants to complete a registration process before submitting applications. This process can take up to 3 weeks, but only needs to be completed once. Registering early and keeping registration information accessible will help ensure that your organization is able to submit an application once a funding opportunity opens. A detailed user guide on how to complete the registration process is available at: http://grants.gov/applicants/get_registered.jsp.
 - *Follow the instructions of the funding agency* – Once a funding opportunity is open, carefully read the request for proposals and ensure you understand exactly what is required. Government agencies are flooded with grant applications, and failure to follow directions is a quick and easy way to weed out proposals. Different agencies have different requirements for proposals and specific preferences for formatting and presentation. Before beginning to write an application, consult the funding agency’s website for any agency-specific requirements or preferences. Some federal agencies provide their own grant-writing tips, such as:
 - **Department of Education: *Grantmaking at ED: Answers to Your Questions about the Discretionary Grants Process***
<http://www2.ed.gov/fund/grant/about/grantmaking/grantmaking.pdf>
 - **National Institute of Health (HHS)**
http://grants.nih.gov/grants/grant_tips.htm
 - **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: *Developing Successful SAMHSA Grant Applications***
<http://www.samhsa.gov/Grants/TA/2007Modules/GrantApplicationManual.pdf>
 - *Write a convincing proposal* – The federal government wants to ensure that funds are spent in a way that will most benefit the community. To the greatest extent possible, your proposal should use specific local statistics and information to describe how LST has been and can continue to be effective in addressing a specific need in your community. Budget information should carefully explain all costs associated with the program, as well as sources of matching funds from corporations and foundations. Many resources are available that offer additional tips on preparing a federal grant proposal. Some helpful resources are:
 - The Institute for Youth Development: *The Federal Grants Manual for Youth Programs*
<http://www.youthdevelopment.org/pdf/howtowrite.pdf>

² See Funding Tip #1 in this series: Building and Establishing Community Partnerships to Support LifeSkills Training Program Implementation

- Federal Grants Wire: *How to Write a Federal Grant Proposal*
<http://www.federalgrantswire.com/writing-a-federal-grant-proposal.html>

Examples of Federal Funding Sources

Applying for federal funding is a challenging, time-consuming process. Carefully evaluating each funding source will help ensure that your time and resources are targeted toward applying for grants with a strong likelihood of success. This section illustrates key questions to consider when deciding whether to apply for a specific funding source.

Funding Considerations

When searching for new funding sources, it is important that program leaders determine whether a specific funding source is worth pursuing. Consider the following questions to assess if a specific funding source meets the program's goals and resource needs.

- 1. Does this funding source support the goals and priorities of the LST program?**
 What types of investments can the funding source support? Does it align with your organization's priorities and needs?
- 2. How can these funds be accessed?** What types of programs or organizations can apply for funds? Can youth programs apply directly for the funds or do funds flow through the State or Local government?
- 3. Should I apply?** How many grants are given out each year? What is the average grant size? What are the reporting requirements? Is it worth the time and effort to apply?

1. Does this funding source support the goals and priorities of the LST program?

As with any grant, it is important to carefully consider whether the LST program fits the goals of the funder. Some grants are targeted for very specific populations or purposes, while others are very broad. Always carefully review the federal request for proposals (RFP) to make sure the goals and priorities of the federal government are aligned with the LST program goals and priorities. For example:

- **Healthy People 2020 Community Innovations Project** is a 10-year project by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services designed to guide national health promotion and disease prevention efforts to improve the health of people in the United States. Non-profit, community-based organizations with budgets less than \$750,000 can apply for these funds, and funding awards will range from \$5,000 to \$10,000. Two priorities that align with LST programming include: Healthy equity and Healthy Behaviors across all life stages.

2. How can these funds be accessed?

Government grants can be accessed at different levels, depending on how funds flow. As described, some federal grants are awarded through a competitive process directly to eligible groups such as nonprofits, school districts, or other local organizations. In other cases, federal funds are awarded first to states or cities that then award these funds to local entities through their own competitive process. For example:

- **Title V grants** are offered through the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) and are designed to increase the availability and types of programs to improve juvenile justice systems. Funding is awarded first to qualifying states. Individual states then use a competitive process to award funds to local organizations or entities. Application requirements vary by state, so LST programs interested in obtaining these funds should research the application

process in their state. In all states, membership in a community coalition is required for local entities to access Title V funding.

3. Should I apply?

While states may have some flexibility in determining the number and size of grants to award from federal funds, some requirements are constant. For example, federal grants may have certain reporting requirements for local entities, regardless of the size of the grant they receive from their state. These requirements may be difficult and time-consuming, particularly if the award is small. At the same time, if a state offers fewer large grants, LST program leaders without a strong community partnership may be less likely to be awarded funds. Reading the RFP carefully, will help your program determine if you should apply for funding on your own or develop critical community partnerships.

Summary

While accessing federal grants may seem overwhelming, the tips outlined above can help make the process more manageable and increase the likelihood that applications will be successful. First, understanding the types of federal funding available will make it easier to identify potentially relevant funding sources that LST programs can access. A variety of tools and resources are available to find good opportunities for LST programs. Registering for grants.gov early and building partnerships before an opportunity opens will help strengthen applications for federal funds. Remember, these tips are just a start—the government funding process can be very complicated and differs among agencies and by funding source.

Other Resources

The Finance Project has an extensive body of information and resources to help leaders finance and sustain effective *programs* that support the positive development of youth, and develop *systems* that provide an infrastructure to help coordinate and guide investments in youth. Visit The Finance Project's [Youth Programs Resource Center](#) for tools and resources on financing and sustaining youth programs and also the [Find Federal Funding](#) database, an online catalogue of nearly 350 federal programs.

Suggested publications produced by The Finance Project:

- ▶ [Building Capacity for Better Results: Strategies for Financing and Sustaining the Organizational Capacity of Youth-Serving Programs \(September 2010\)](#)
- ▶ [Beyond the Award Letter: Fund Management for Leaders of Small Youth-Serving Organizations \(September 2009\)](#)

This funding tip is part of a three-part series of resources developed by The Finance Project to help LifeSkills Training (LST) grantees build capacity and sustain LST program implementation at their sites. Please see additional resources in this series:

- ▶ Building and Establishing Community Partnerships to Support LifeSkills Training Program Implementation
- ▶ Obtaining Foundation and Corporate Funding to Support LifeSkills Training Program Implementation
- ▶ Obtaining Federal Funding to Support LifeSkills Training Program Implementation

This Funding Tip was developed under a grant from Philip Morris USA, U.S. Smokeless Tobacco Co. and John Middleton Co., an Altria Company. The contents of this document do not necessarily reflect the views of the company.