



Knowledge is the key to open new doors

Technical Assistance Guide

Raising Money for a Self-Help/Advocacy Group

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Getting Money for the Group

The larger your self-help project is, the larger your bills are likely to be. Self-help groups need money for a variety of reasons. You might simply need funds for weekly refreshments at support group meetings or you might require money to rent office space for a consumer run drop-in center.

Getting funding for your mental health consumer self-help project requires thought and effort. The first step to any project is planning. Your group should meet to answer the following questions:

1. What do we hope to accomplish?
2. How will we meet our goals?
3. What do we need to meet our goals?

No matter what it is that you need for your group, realize that you have the best resources within your own group. Every member of your group brings something unique to the group, so don't overlook this pool of resources.

Remember to include all group members in the fundraising process; if only one or two people get involved, the group will not feel a sense of ownership of the project. Each member has skills to offer the project, and fundraising is an opportunity for group members to play an active role in the development of the group. In addition to raising money, the group is fighting stigma, developing management skills, and building group cohesiveness and confidence.

Self-help groups traditionally raise funds through one of the following methods:

- **In-Kind Support**

These are services or goods that one group donates to or exchanges with another. For example, a local church may donate meeting space for a consumer group. Or a local community center might offer the use of their computer if you offer to do a presentation at one of their community meetings.

- **Special Events**

We all have seen organizations use special events to raise money. A special event might be a raffle, a bake sale or a car wash. When holding a special event, it is important to find out if your group will need to obtain a permit from the city or county.

- Grants

A grant is money given by a foundation or government agency for a project or program that meets some need. Getting a grant requires writing a proposal. A proposal is a detailed plan of what you will do with the money.

The following pages provide detailed information on in-kind support, special events and grants, as well as suggestions for specific fundraising activities and events.

In-Kind Support

Fundraising can put a lot of pressure on a group that is just starting out. Such a group might need money for a meeting space, refreshments, telephone calls, transportation, printing or postage. Many of these needs can be met through donated services or by exchanging resources with other groups.

Self-help group meetings can be held at local community centers, churches or other public meeting places. Refreshments can be prepared and donated by group members. Group members with cars can provide transportation to meetings. Local churches or community organizations may provide use of their copy machines or computers; many libraries now offer access to computers and the Internet.

As your group solicits in-kind support, you'll also increase community awareness of your group and form valuable relationships. Working with other community groups also provides you with information about the community, which is useful if your goals involve fighting stigma or working toward other types of changes at a local level. Churches, community centers, and disability groups are all good sources of in-kind support. Other groups that might help include senior groups, legal rights organizations, advocacy groups for the homeless, and unions.

Many community groups would like to help self-help groups and they will contribute what they can. No matter what the donation or service, you should always write a formal thank-you letter.

Politicians and the community government are a good place to look for money. Your local mayor might be willing to give you money, and other offices might do the same. This is a great way to make money and to make connections.

Many groups have received valuable support from local mental health programs. Although such programs are often eager to help, it is important for your group to come to a consensus about whether or not you will accept help from mental health programs or professionals. Many feel that mental health programs influence or "take over" groups and it is up to the group to determine what level of assistance they are willing to accept from the mental health system. If your group does take something from the mental health system, be sure to write a thank-you letter, or return a favor.

Special Events

As the group grows, so will its needs. Eventually the group may decide to plan activities such as newsletters, advocacy initiatives, day trips or parties. In-kind support may not be enough to meet these needs. At that point, you should consider holding a special event to raise money. Every group member should play a part.

While trying to raise money through Special Events you might run into problems with your township, such as the need for a license. If you are not recognized as a charitable organization within your state, you might be advised to work under another recognized organization (such as the local Mental Health Association). Regardless of whether you need to follow these laws, fundraising can be fun! You can have a fundraising event to sponsor a group trip just as easily as have an event to raise money for any rent you will have to pay on a meeting room.

Your first fundraising event or special activity should be relatively small and simple to organize. The first event is an opportunity for group members to gain experience and know-how. If the first event is a success, group members will be motivated and excited about planning the next, larger event.

There are several fundraising activities that are easy to organize and don't require a great deal of money up front. Garage sales, bake sales, spaghetti dinners and raffles have all worked for other groups. The goal of these events is to get money from those people to whom you are offering services, but at the same time, these methods bring the community and the group closer together. Be creative: your group can organize a poetry or movie night, an art or photography show, a talent show or a debate or forum.

Another way to raise awareness within your community is to attend already sponsored events. The group can set up a table at a mental health fair or conference. In addition to providing attendees with information about the group and other mental health issues, the group can sell products or put a donation can on the table. Some groups sell buttons or T-shirts; this raises money and promotes the group.

Yet another fundraising idea is to hold an event, such as a talent show, and ask for donations from the community. Instead of setting a donation price, there can be a “suggested donation” – something to remind the community that you are trying to raise money without demanding it. With a suggested donation, the community members can give whatever amount of money they want.

Fundraising events also offer an opportunity to sell refreshments or even a lunch or dinner. Group members can donate, prepare, and sell the food.

Most events require at least three to four months of planning. Larger events may need to be planned six to eight months ahead. Organizing a special event requires careful planning. Large events may require the use of committees to focus on particular details. Committees delegate work among their members so that the majority of the work is not left to a few people. It allows the group to better decide who does what, therefore, makes the work go more smoothly than if only one person takes all the responsibilities upon him or herself.

When planning for a fundraising event, it is necessary to advertise. Publicity is the key to a successful turnout, and posters or flyers are a great way to let many people know about your event. The building in which you meet might allow you to post the flyers about the event. Word of mouth can also be effective. Other groups have used the following publicity techniques:

- Hanging posters in store or theater windows
- Setting up booths in local malls
- Tacking up notices on bulletin boards
- Placing an ad or notice in church, university, company or non-profit newsletters
- Public access channels on cable T.V.

Grants

The group may reach a point when in-kind support and special events are no longer enough to meet its needs. For example, the group may be ready to start a newsletter. You may want to open a drop-in center or operate a food bank. You may even be ready to run a small conference.

At this point, the group needs to write a proposal for grant money. This money can be used to start a service, provide a product, or to continue funding something you are already working on. There are foundations, corporations and government agencies that offer grants to fund projects for groups like yours. A grant is money given by one of these organizations for a project or program that meets some need. The proposal is your specific request to one of these organizations that outlines your plans for the money.

Letters of support are letters from other agencies that will be participating in your project. These letters should indicate that the agency feels that you have a good track record and that they intend to support you in the upcoming project. Any organization that is mentioned in the description of your project must have submitted a support letter. Asking for a letter of support from an organization is best done with a form letter that they can place on their stationery. A form letter should be short and should say that your organization is a good part of the community. It should emphasize that the other organization will be involved.

Once your group has a clear idea of what you would like to accomplish, the next step is to locate a funding source. Very often, this is harder than actually drafting your proposal in writing, but with some persistence and research skills, you can find sources of funds. Basically, there are two types of funding:

- Government sources
 - The Federal government
 - Your State government
 - Your County, or local, government
- Private sources
 - Donations from individuals
 - Foundations set up by wealthy individuals or corporations who take active roles in contributing to societal issues

The Internet is an obvious tool for finding web sites for all of these sources. And libraries often have reference guides that list funding sources. A good example of a web site is a site hosted by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) <<http://www.samhsa.gov>>. This is the organization within the Federal Government that funds most projects related to mental health consumers.

If you don't have access to the Internet, check your local library for guides such as The Foundation Directory, a compilation of all the foundations in the country, usually

organized by state or area in which they fund projects. Remember that corporations in your geographic area often fund projects that improve the community in which those companies reside. If there's a major corporation near you, check their web site or call them and ask for the office of "Charitable Funding."

Local mental health providers and advocacy groups may have information on which government, state, and city agencies usually fund mental health projects.

Most funding sources provide specific guidelines that tell you how to write your proposal. They may include instructions on details such as margin width or type size. Proposals have been rejected due to incorrect format; it is important to follow these guidelines to the letter. Regardless of the specific requirements, all grant proposals should be written in a clear and concise manner. Reviewers will not agree to fund a project that they do not understand.

In general, a proposal must describe:

- What you plan to accomplish
- Why you want to complete the project
- When you want to start and finish the project
- Where the project will take place
- How the project will be completed
- How many people you will need to complete the project
- How much money you will need to complete the project

Most funding sources will award grants only to organizations that have tax-exempt status. The process of applying for tax exempt status is somewhat complicated and is covered in the Clearinghouse Technical Assistance Guide, *Consumer-run Businesses and Services*. An alternative is to affiliate with another group, such as a local Mental Health Association or other agency that already has tax-exempt status and would be willing to serve as your "fiduciary agent" for the grant.

Basic Ingredients of a Proposal

The following items are typically found in a grant proposal. Remember that each funding source has its own requirements. If you'd like more detailed information about writing grant proposals, please contact the Clearinghouse and request the Technical Assistance Guide, *The Art and Science of Writing Proposals that Win*.

▪ Abstract

Also referred to as the proposal summary, the abstract is a brief description of your group, the proposed project, and the cost of the project.

- Background

This section of the proposal should cover the following items:

- The history of the group
- Why the group was formed
- How and when the group began
- Who was involved in the development of the group
- The goals of the group
- Other projects the group has worked on
- How and from whom your group has been funded
- How your group has changed and grown

- Needs Statement

This section should answer the question “What needs are the group trying to meet that are currently unmet?” It should then go on to state how your project would meet these needs. You’ll probably need to do some research for this section. Find out how other groups have attempted to fill this need. Include examples of both successful and unsuccessful attempts. Remember that your proposed project is your solution to this need. The way in which you describe the need should demonstrate your ability to meet it if you receive funding.

- Goals

The goal or goals of your project are the end result of what you hope to accomplish. This section should state *what* you are going to do, not *how* you will do it.

- Objectives & Methods

An objective is something you need to achieve in order to meet your goals. For example, if your goal is to publish a newsletter, one objective may be to obtain a photocopier. Most goals require several objectives. Several steps must take place in order to meet each objective; these steps are *activities* or *methods*.

- Evaluation

In recent years, most private and government funding agencies want information on how you intend to evaluate the effectiveness of your program. Some examples of evaluation methods include documenting the number of project participants, keeping track of referrals, phone contacts and written correspondence, as well as questionnaires and surveys of group participants.

The way in which you evaluate your program can be important to your group as well as to your funding source. Once you have the results of a survey, for example, you can use the information to improve your project in the future.

Every good proposal has an evaluation form, and every evaluation form has to deal with confidentiality. People who have been involved with your group might not want to be named in this evaluation for fear of any stigma attached to that association. When writing this evaluation, be aware of how those around you feel on this issue. The privacy of the consumers that you serve should be a top priority.

- **Budget**

The budget section will document the specific monetary needs of your project. Most grants require a budget narrative that describes what you need the money for and how you will use it. It is in the budget section of your proposal where you will need to talk about the kinds of resources you need, including any “in kind” sources you plan to use (which are at no cost to you).

It is important to demonstrate to the funding source that you will not be completely dependent on them. Talk about any special events or activities you are planning to raise money on your own. The Technical Assistance Guide *Art and Science of Writing Proposals that Win* provides detailed explanations and examples of budgets. Contact the Clearinghouse to get a copy.

- **Appendices / Support Documents**

Funding sources often ask for specific documents to be attached to your proposal and included in the appendices. These documents may include proof of non-profit status, resumes of group members, articles of incorporation, etc. The funding source might also request letters of support from other organizations.

Some Words of Advice

- Start small. Don't expect to receive huge sums of money your first time out. Your first attempt at a grant should demonstrate that you can plan a project and follow it through. Future funding sources will use this project as a measure of your ability to do what you say you will.
- Have several people review your proposal, preferably those with experience in writing or evaluating proposals.
- Look at a successful proposal to see how it's done.
- Include every group member in the grant writing process. It can be a valuable learning experience, plus, the entire group will be carrying out the project. In addition, it will enable members to have input from the beginning.

A Few Final Words

Once your group begins to receive funding from outside sources, things will change. You will no longer be responsible for only your own members; you will have to answer to your funding source. Before planning large projects, make sure your group is ready. Don't seek funding just because it is available; the money you seek should be necessary to meet your goals. Make each fundraising event an opportunity for learning and growth for the entire group. Here are a few more tips:

- Planning

The success of any project is dependent on a well thought-out plan. Each project you take on should be directly related to one of the goals your group has established. Even the smallest event or activity should have a written project plan that describes the project, the need the project will meet, the activities necessary to complete the project, and the responsibilities of each group member.

- Persistence

Every group faces setbacks when trying to raise money. Don't be discouraged if you don't meet all your monetary goals the first time. Keep trying.

- Publicity

Each fundraising event is a chance to promote your group. Let the public know about your accomplishments. This works to fight stigma in your community as well as open up more resources for "in-kind" support.

- Personal Contacts

Make and maintain personal contacts with funding sources. Let them know what you're doing, and what new ideas you're thinking of. Maintain contact with all individuals and agencies that have assisted your group.

- Above all:

Remember that you, as group members, are the greatest resource of the group. Each of you brings your own background and experience, skills and talents. The success of your group depends on you.