

# Finding Funds for the NPS Museum Collections

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**M**useums are found in over 300 national parks. These museums are as rich and diverse as the parks themselves, containing the following types of material:

- archeological artifacts
- ethnological artifacts
- fine and decorative arts
- manuscripts and archival audio-visual, electronic and textual materials and rare books
- memorabilia and personal artifacts associated with notable Americans
- technological, architectural, and historical artifacts
- military regalia and weapons
- natural history specimens

In a time of rising costs, parks become more creative as they search for funding for special exhibitions, publications, research, outreach, and special projects. Museum staff can contribute to this effort by seeking partnerships to share resources and by working with their associations to solicit grant funds from corporations, foundations, and individuals.

*"This only is charity, to  
do all, all that we can."  
—John Donne*

This article focuses on how to obtain such funds.

## *Work with an Association*

Although park employees may not send out general solicitations (i.e., general "begging" letters asking for funds), they may apply for a grant from an organization that has a standard grant application process (e.g., a form or published instructions on how to apply). According to the NPS Policy Office, in such instances the employee is not soliciting—but is instead being invited to submit an application. However, despite a park's ability to write grant applications, working with an expert makes the grant process much easier. Most national parks are affiliated with a local friends group or an association, such as Eastern National Park and Monument Association. Any national park may work with the National Park Foundation (NPF) for fund-raising purposes. Many of these groups are set up to assist parks by raising funds

and administering accounts for special park-related projects.

Associations, friends groups, and the NPF can apply for private foundation grants. They also can conduct direct mail solicitation campaigns for donations. In addition, they may sponsor special fund-raising events or activities. Once the fund-raising project is defined by the park, the NPF, association, or friends group should be approached. Discuss the project with the key NPF, association, or friends group personnel. Find a project sponsor in the group. Ask for help in identifying foundations, fund-raising techniques, and project marketing strategies. Brainstorm together to identify the project audience, products, and process.

## *Explore Collaborative Ventures and Partnerships*

Grant-funding groups appreciate applications that come from more than a single organization, as it allows them to meet several needs with a single gift. Collaborative relationships also can provide the park with the opportunity to share collections and draw upon the expertise of their partners. Most universities and many major libraries and museums have development offices, highly trained automation staff, and other professionals that can be very helpful in preparing grants and running projects.

Build collaborative partnerships with non-federal agencies to undertake special projects. Fit the projects to park and ecosystem-wide, regional, state, or local needs. Such projects might include curriculum-development utilizing museum resources. Propose grant-funded special or virtual exhibitions related to key park resources, expertise, or interpretive themes for museums, historical societies, and the Internet. Consider grant-funded publications—such as books, technical and historical Internet resource guides, CD-ROMS, and videotapes—that showcase the park's themes, collections, research resources, and staff expertise. Such products, if handled correctly not only share park goals and information, but in some cases can also generate royalties for the association to use for future park projects.

### *Obtain Approval for Fundraising Work*

Obtain approval for all fund-raising activities with the park superintendent, regional staff, and the NPS, friends group, or association. Major fund raising programs with goals of one million dollars or more also require the NPS director's approval. Ask the advice of park, association, and regional staff in selecting potential funding sources. Since many foundations focus on giving in a particular state, ask development officers in nearby universities, museums, libraries, and historical societies for names of foundations they have found useful for similar projects. Discover if the park or association staff can use local library, university, museum, or historical society development office reference files to determine who has funded similar local projects in the past.

The park's association or friends group must avoid soliciting individuals or groups with whom the NPS or DOI has either a business conflict or the appearance of a conflict, or with whom they are currently involved in lawsuits or negotiations. Also avoid organizations that might seem to be inappropriate, such as partisan political organizations. Look for funding organizations that complement your employer without raising significant policy questions.

Begin by identifying appropriate sources that have funded similar projects in the past. For example, a little research in the books listed in

the bibliography will indicate that the Jessie Ball duPont Fund gave the Woodrow Wilson Birthplace Foundation \$50,000 to establish a fund-raising office and professional development program in 1994. The Pew Charitable Trusts are one of the most generous funding agencies for archival work. The J. Paul Getty Trust and the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund have both been generous donors on projects relating to African-American history or archives. Development offices at local universities, museums, and libraries may be able to help you identify such foundations. The best source, however, is the Foundation Center.

### *Use the Foundation Center*

The Foundation Center, a non-profit independent organization created to increase public understanding of foundations, is the single most powerful tool for locating appropriate foundations and corporations for solicitations. Located in Atlanta, Cleveland, New York, San Francisco, and Washington DC, the Foundation Center is open to the public. For interested users in other locales, the Foundation Center has set up 200+ cooperating foundation research centers (called cooperating collections) located in all 50 states which are also available to the public.

The Foundation Center and the cooperating collections have private foundation information such as IRS information returns from foundations; publications; grantmaker files including annual reports, press releases, application guidelines, and clippings; current awareness topical files; and bibliographic databases on the literature of giving and on the foundations and corporations that provide grants. Note: Many of the Foundation Center publications are also available in most state or mid-sized university research libraries and some public libraries.

### *Identify Potential Outside Funding Sources*

Begin research into funding possibilities by taking either a course in grantsmanship (see the course list at the end of the article) or the Foundation Center orientation. Spend a morning reviewing the reference books listed in the bibliography. Perhaps the easiest way to conduct research is to either begin with the appropriate topical volume of the National Guides (see items 8-10 in the bibliography) or to search for foundations that are active in the park's geographical area (see items 1 and 6 in the bibliography).

Once potential donors have been identified, research each donor's patterns of past giving by utilizing the reference works listed in the bibliography. Look for a foundation or corporation active in your state that has given for projects similar to the park's projects. Try to find a link between the park and the foundation, such as a common acquaintance who serves on the foundation's board or a shared concern with ecosystems or museum automation. Such foundations are the park's best prospects.

Database searching is another effective research technique. The Foundation Center's database on DIALOG and the Sponsored Programs Information Network (SPIN) of the Research Foundation of the State University of New York both contain significant information on giving patterns, restrictions, and objectives. Ask your park, region, public, state, or university library reference staff how to have such a search performed for the park.

Next, look at the foundation's annual report in the local research library or Foundation Center. Annual reports provide much information that may be helpful in determining if the foundation is appropriate for the park's project. If your association is approaching a corporation, corporate annual reports are generally also found in business libraries. Records of an individual's giving may be difficult to locate, outside of newspaper reports and special development files.

In identifying potential donors, look for groups or individuals that have a clear linkage to your park or museum without a conflict of interest.

*"[Charity is] feeling for others—in your pocket."  
—Charles H. Spurgeon*

Consider all funding options, from contacting individuals, corporations, and foundations to setting up collaborative approaches. Working with collaborators will allow the park to tap a broader range of funding agencies.

#### *Break the Project into Attractive Pieces*

While it is always easiest for a park to manage the application forms and final reports for a single grant, it may not always be possible. In times of tight funding, a single project can be packaged as a series of separate, smaller grant requests. A different collaborative partner may serve as the main applicant for each separate grant request. Match the partner-applicant to the foundation based upon what sort of applicant the grant funding agency is most likely to fund. This can be discovered by looking at the agency's past record of giving either in a local development office or via the publications of the Foundation Center listed in the bibliography.

For example, if the project goal is to publish a unified guide to the museum collections found in the park, university, and historical society of a single town, several foundations might be approached. The research section of the project could be applied for by the university as a two-year fellowship from a foundation that has a history of funding scholarly work. The actual publication costs might be packaged as a separate grant requested by the historical society from a foundation that has a history of funding historical society publications. The park could then apply for a separate grant to produce a digital copy of the finished product for mounting on the university's Internet node.

Determining how best to package the park's needs depends upon four factors:

- What partnerships can be built
- What foundations and other grant funding sources your association is willing to approach
- What grant foundations or corporations are appropriate for the park, based upon an examination of their histories of giving (e.g., what regions do they fund in and what types of projects do they fund)
- What linkages the park has to the foundations or corporations

#### *Make the Initial Funding Approach*

Locate mutual acquaintances, such as collaborators or members of the association's board, who can introduce you to the key foundation or corporation funding contact persons. The sixth book in the bibliography tells you who these key corporate and foundation contacts are. Call and introduce yourself once your project has been introduced to the potential funding source by your mutual acquaintance.

The next step is to write a preliminary approach letter. This one page letter should include the following:

- a one-paragraph description of the project
- the total project cost and any matching funds provided by collaborators or the park
- the reason why the park is approaching this potential donor or foundation
- the background of the park museum (attach separate letters of reference and endorsement and a museum profile or descriptive overview)
- a request for a follow-up appointment

The letter should conclude by saying that the donor will be contacted by a certain date for further discussion. Do not forget to make this follow-up call. Attached to this letter is a brief official overview of the park's activities and accomplishments for the last year. This report should be the equivalent of an annual report, stressing the value of the park to its audience. Also attached should be a copy of the park budget and copies of IRS forms indicating tax exempt status.

Once the approach letter has been answered positively by the donor, you will receive a grant application guideline and a list of application deadlines. Always follow the guidelines exactly while writing a grant application. Provide all requested information. Meet all deadlines.

#### *Learn How to Write Grants*

There are many ways to learn how to write grants. You may do any or all of the following:

- take courses at your local university or at the Foundation Center (see list of courses at the end of this article)
- read books (see bibliography below)
- conduct research on grantwriting in a branch of the Foundation Center (see the locations under Resources) or a cooperating university development library
- visit the development office of major regional museums to review their successful proposals and do volunteer work with staff on a development project
- advertise for a volunteer with grant writing (i.e., development) experience

Perhaps the best way to learn to write grants is by regularly reading and evaluating grant applications. One interesting way to ensure this experience is by offering to serve as a grant reviewer for projects in your area of expertise where there is no conflict of interest.

Consider applying to serve as a reviewer for the National Endowment for the Arts; the National Endowment for the Humanities; the National

Historical Publications and Records Commission; or The Institute of Museum Services (IMS). After reviewing several grants, you will become familiar with the guidelines, criteria, and how to evaluate proposals.

Institute for Museum Services (Tel: 202-606-8539; Fax: 202-606-8591. Note: Ask for the reviewer application for one of the following: general operating support; conservation project support; professional services; museum assessment; museum leadership; or conservation assessment.)

National Endowment for the Arts (Tel: 202-682-5442; Fax: 202-682-5603. Note: Ask for the reviewer application for the Museum Program.)

National Endowment for the Humanities (Tel: 202-606-8400; Fax: 202-606-8240. Note: Ask for the reviewer application for the Humanities Projects in Museums and Historical Organizations or the Humanities Projects in Libraries and Archives.)

National Publications and Records Commission (Tel: 202-501-5610; Fax: 202-501-5601. Ask for an application.)

### *The Basics of Grantwriting: A Quick Overview*

The first step in grantwriting is to identify what you would like to do. As in all sales documents, you must sell the key concept (e.g., Internet access to museum collections) before you sell the brand (e.g., purchasing specific equipment, hiring specific digitizing firms, or producing a specific product). Develop a list of talking points by answering the following questions:

- *Who will be involved in the project* (i.e., who are they, what percentage of their time will be taken, and what are their qualifications)? Who will sponsor and endorse the project? Who will benefit from the project (e.g., identify the audience and explain how the project results will be used)? Who else is being asked to fund this project?
- *What is the focus and background of the project* (i.e., what is the reason and purpose of the project)? What need does the project fill? What will the resulting product, results, or outcome of the project be? What organizations will be involved? What matching funds will be used? What is the budget? Note: List the budget by major categories such as personnel, equipment, travel, and expendable supplies.
- *Where will the work be done* (i.e., location)?
- *Why is the project necessary?*
- *When will the project be done?* When will the final products or results be ready? Note: List the project phases on a timeline.

- *How was the need for the project determined?* How will the work be accomplished (i.e., what is the methodology and timeline)? How long will the project take?

Begin by identifying the key needs, benefits, and products of the grant project first (e.g., access to collections for scholars, faster retrieval of materials). Make a quick list of the audiences for those products (e.g., students, outside scholars).

Next, develop a list of project staff. Decide what each individual's role would be. Try to sketch this out in a rough timeline. Identify what percentage of each participant's time would be necessary for each year of the project (e.g., .5 FTE for two years, for a total of 1 FTE).

Try to identify key events such as anniversaries to which the project and your potential giver may be linked to give your project a further boost (e.g., a birth or death of the site-associated eminent individual; the park creation). Projects keyed to anniversaries have an added urgency.

### **Example**

*Project:* Publishing a Catalog of Park Museum Collections on CD-ROM and the Internet.

*Need:* The XXXX NP has a significant collection of objects relating to the Oregon Trail and the exploration of the American West; while the YYYY Historical Society and the ZZZZ University have similar materials. These items are not now currently accessible to scholars and the public despite over 2,000 annual requests for information on these items. This grant would provide the public, scholars and students with access to descriptions and images of the museum collections of these three stellar institutions.

*Benefits:* Increased access to NPS museum collections for scholars, students, and the general public.

*Audience:* Provide CD-ROM copies to all state high schools and public libraries; provide access also to 25 million users internationally via the Internet node of the university.

*Staff Participants:* XXXX NP (Curator and Chief of Interpretation; both .25 FTE for each of 2 years, for a total of 1 FTE).

*Direct Sponsor:* AAAA Cooperating Association.

*Potential Sponsors:* Chiles Foundation, Samuel H. Kress Foundation, Pew Memorial Trusts, Oregon Community Foundation, WXYZ Foundation.

*Special Links:* This project is keyed to the 50th anniversary of the opening of the museum in XXXX; the centennial celebration of the birth of the park's eminent figure in XXXX; and may be linked to the WXYZ foundation for whom the

park's eminent figure conducted geographical surveys in XXXX.

*Timeline:* The project start date is 1/1/96. The project may be broken into six separate projects, but must be done in sequence.

ACTION	TARGET DATE
1) Research of collections.	6/ 6/96
2) Writing of collection catalog.	12/30/96
3) Editing/layout of catalog text.	6/30/97
4) Digitization of text.	8/30/97
5) Inspection of digital copy.	10/30/97
6) Upload text onto the Internet.	12/30/97

*Collaborative Possibilities:* YYYY Historical Society (Registrar and Curator), ZZZZ University (Head of Library Special Collections and Programmer from the Automation Branch).

After all writing is complete, have the grant application edited by a professional. After the edit, the application should be reviewed by the superintendent, the regional curator, and all collaborators. With a little ingenuity and care, NPS museums will benefit from your grantwriting expertise. The grant funds will provide greater visibility for the significant NPS museum collections in exhibitions, publications, and special projects.

## RESOURCES

### Bibliography

Note: All the following Foundation Center publications were published in New York by the Foundation Center and are issued annually unless otherwise noted. Publication inquiries may be made by phone at 800-424-9836 or by fax at 212-807-3677.

1. The Foundation Directory. [This 3 volume set identifies grant funders by subject, geographic focus, and key official, as well as providing financial data, program statements, application facts, and lists of recently awarded sample grants.]
2. The Foundation Center's Guide to Proposal Writing. [Focuses on the components of the proposal, how funding staff select winning proposals, and planning.]
3. The Foundation Center's User Friendly Guide. [A handbook for novices explaining how to research foundations and prepare to write a grant application.]
4. Foundation Fundamentals. [A how to book that focuses on research resources and the grantwriting process.]
5. The Foundation 1000. [Analyses the 1,000 largest U.S. foundations, provides contact information, lists their grant-making priorities, and explains their application processes.]
6. Guide to U.S. Foundations, Their Trustees, Officers, & Donors. The Foundation Center, 1994. [Lists 35,7000+ U.S. Foundations, provides an index by trustee, officer, and donor names; provides access by geographic area, as well as by foundation name, donor information, amounts, and giving limits; and is cross-referenced to other Foundation sources.]

7. National Directory of Corporate Giving. [Provides information on almost 2,300 corporate giving programs, lists their recently awarded grants and priorities, analyzes their giving priorities, and provides information on the companies.]
8. National Guide to Funding in Arts and Culture. 3rd edition. [Lists information on 4,000 foundations and corporate donors who provide funds for the arts, as well as giving 9,000 descriptions of recently awarded grants, and indices by program and geographic areas.]
9. National Guide to Funding for the Environment and Animal Welfare. 1994/1995. [Matches the arts and culture guide immediately above.]
10. National Guide to Funding for Libraries and Information Services. 2nd ed. [Matches the arts and culture guide, no. 8 above.]

### Courses

The Foundation Center regularly offers courses, such as the following:

1. Proposal Writing Seminars [\$150];
2. Common Grant Application and Budget Format [free];
3. Grantsmanship in the 90's: An Overview for Beginners [\$35];
4. Grantsmanship: Program Planning and Proposal Writing [2 parts \$50 each]).

Note: Many universities also offer courses in grantwriting and foundation research.

### Foundation Center Database

There is also a separate Foundation Center database on the DIALOG databases relating to donors and giving activities accessible by calling 1-800-334-2564 or 212-620-4230.

### Regional Branches of the Foundation Center

For information contact the nearest Foundation Center:

1. Atlanta: Suite 150, Hurt Bldg, 50 Hurt Plaza, Atlanta, GA 30303; tel: 404-880-0094
2. Cleveland: 1356 Hanna Bldg., 1422 Euclid Ave., Cleveland, OH 44115; tel: 216-861-1934
3. New York: 79 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10003-3076; tel: 212-620-4230
4. San Francisco: 312 Sutter St., San Francisco, CA 94108; tel: 415-397-0902
5. Washington, DC: 1001 Connecticut Ave, NW, Suite 938, Washington, DC 20036; tel: 202-331-1400

### Cooperating Collections

The Foundation Center has 200+ cooperating collections containing Foundation Center publications and reference materials and trained reference staff in all 50 states. For information on the cooperating collection closest to you, call 1-800-424-9836.

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