

NONPROFIT MASTERMIND & GRANT WRITING

Free Deliverable Guide - Strategic Funder Alignment

FREE ACTIONABLE RESOURCE

How to Find Funders That Actually Fit

A Step-by-Step Prospecting Blueprint to Avoid the Shotgun Approach and Target High-Probability Grantmakers

Introduction: Why the "Shotgun Approach" Fails

Many nonprofits treat grant writing like a numbers game: sending out as many proposals as possible to any foundation with an open application deadline. This "shotgun approach" wastes hundreds of staff hours and leads to burnout and high rejection rates.

Grantmakers do not award funding based on desperation or poetic writing alone. They fund organizations that directly align with their specific strategic objectives, geographic focus, and preferred grant sizes. By shifting to a targeted funder fit research model, you can dramatically raise your success rate while submitting fewer total applications.

Core Principle: A highly targeted list of 10 well-aligned funders will yield 5x more grant dollars than an unvetted list of 50 random foundations.

1. The 5-Point Alignment Criteria Checklist

Before adding any funder to your active pipeline, rate them against these 5 essential alignment pillars:

Alignment Pillar	Key Questions to Ask	Alignment Threshold
1. Mission Fit	Does the funder explicitly support your exact cause area and target population?	Must match primary focus area directly, not tangentially.
2. Geographic Scope	Does the funder give in your specific city, county, or region?	Must have documented giving history in your geographic area.
3. Grant Size Alignment	Is your requested amount within their average award range?	Your request should be within 10% to 25% of their average grant size.
4. Org Stage & Budget	Do they fund organizations of your budget size and years in operation?	Ensure they do not require a minimum budget size you have not reached.

Alignment Pillar	Key Questions to Ask	Alignment Threshold
5. Funding Type	Do they offer general operating support, program funds, or capital grants?	Funding type must match your immediate financial requirement.

2. Where to Look: Primary Funder Research Tools

To uncover deep insights on prospect foundations, utilize these primary research tools:

A. Foundation Directory Online (FDO) & Candid

The gold standard for foundation research. Search by Subject Area, Geographic Focus, and Population Served. Look at the "Recipients" tab to see which organizations in your local area have previously received funding.

B. Form 990-PF Filings (Free IRS Records)

Private foundations are required to file Form 990-PF annually with the IRS. Search ProPublica Nonprofit Explorer or GuideStar. Look at Part XV (Grants and Contributions Paid During the Year) to see the exact names of grant recipients, grant amounts, and purpose.

C. State & Regional Grant Databases

Many state humanities councils, regional grantmaker associations, and community foundations maintain public grant directories that showcase active local opportunities.

3. Red Flags vs Green Flags

Red Flags (Do Not Apply)

- "Does not accept unsolicited proposals" with no existing relationship.
- Giving history shows zero grants in your geographic region for 3 years.
- Average grant size is under \$1,000 while application requires 30 pages.
- Board members or staff are exclusively focused on unrelated causes.
- Strict policy against funding personnel or general operating costs if that is what you need.

Green Flags (High Probability)

- Funder has awarded grants to organizations similar to yours in size and mission.
- Explicit interest in innovative programs addressing your specific community need.
- Clear, open application window with published program officer contact info.
- Recent announcements expanding their giving in your geographic region.
- Invites Letter of Intent (LOI) or introductory conversation prior to full application.

4. Action Plan: Build Your Curated Prospect List

1. **Step 1:** Identify 30 potential leads using Candid, 990-PFs, and local community foundations.
2. **Step 2:** Screen all 30 leads through the 5-Point Alignment Criteria Checklist.
3. **Step 3:** Eliminate red flag prospects to narrow down to top 10 to 15 high-fit targets.
4. **Step 4:** Rank targets into Tier 1 (Strong Fit), Tier 2 (Moderate Fit), and Tier 3 (Long-shot).
5. **Step 5:** Calendar submission deadlines and program officer outreach milestones.

TAKE YOUR STRATEGY FURTHER

Transform Your Funder Pipeline into Winning Grants

Now that you know how to find funders that fit, build the complete organizational engine needed to win and manage those funds predictably.

Enroll in **60 Days to Grant Ready (\$997)**, our step-by-step master program designed to make your nonprofit irresistible to institutional grantmakers.

[Explore 60 Days to Grant Ready \(\\$997\) »](#)

