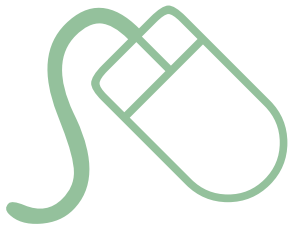


>> Finding Grants Through Online Databases



by Waddy Thompson, excerpt reprinted with permission from *The Non-Profit Weekly*

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Competition for funding has never been greater, with the proliferation of nonprofits well outpacing the robust growth in new foundations. Not surprisingly, online databases offering information on grant-makers are also increasing, and existing databases are improving their services. Here's how to decide which is right for your organization.

The Foundation Center's Foundation Directory Online (foundationcenter.org) offers a comprehensive database of grants made by foundations, corporate foundations, and other grant-making nonprofits. This is a broad scope not available in some other online databases. Another virtue of this database is that the Foundation Center, in New York City, actively solicits information from all grant-making organizations as to past, present, and future grant making activities and plans. This gives its information a completeness that may be lacking with databases based solely on the Form 990s filed with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS).

This is also probably the easiest to navigate. You can use drop-down lists for many search fields or type text directly into the fields, although you get more reliable results when you use the drop-downs. When you enter multiple criteria, you get real results without having to be a mathematician specializing in Boolean operators.

What you get varies greatly with your level of subscription. Access is at five levels (each with a greater fee).

The other online databases have more a one-size-fits-all approach to pricing, but some do not offer the economical monthly subscription option, which makes even the highest level of the Foundation Directory Online within reach for most organizations—at least for a limited time.

FoundationSearch (FoundationSearch.com) is built around its "Grant Visualizer," allowing access to information through a map interface. Since geography has got to be the number one limiting factor for most foundations, this is a good way to

start your research. The profile for each foundation features graphs of grants by sector, year, and region allowing you to see at a glance a foundation's concentration in arts vs. health vs. social services, etc. You'll find here information on foundations, corporate foundations, community foundations, and many nonprofits that also make grants (all based on their Form 990s).

In addition to the graphic interfaces, FoundationSearch also offers effective simple search and advanced search options using Boolean operators. The handy "990 Keyword Search" performs a quick search on every word in the Form 990s. When you click on the search results, it takes you directly to the highlighted search words in the form.

FoundationSearch has recently added new features under the "My Foundation Manager" heading. Using the latest "push technology," this section allows you to generate and save a prospect list based on several criteria and select specific foundations to monitor in your project folder. You can then request FoundationSearch to email you if there are updates to your selected foundations' records, and you can request an email reminder when, for example, a deadline is approaching or a new foundation has been added.

You can also record notes on each foundation for future reference. With this additional functionality, FoundationSearch becomes a management, as well as a research tool. FoundationSearch includes information on more than 98,000 U.S. grantmakers and their grants of \$4,000 or more. It claims access to information on 6.5 million grants.

FoundationSearch's parent company, Metasoft, also offers the BigOnline.com database, with more detailed information on the largest foundations, corporate giving, and federal grants. It also provides a library of sample grant proposals that is useful. Access to this database comes, of course, with an additional fee.

You've almost certainly used GuideStar (guidestar.org) to get access to the Form 990s of foundations and other nonprofits. But, you might not be aware that GuideStar offers a very flexible search engine to dig deeply into all that data. Grant Explorer (look under "Products" on the home page) is based on the Form 990s. It includes only foundations and corporate foundations—grant making nonprofits (including

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community foundations) are excluded. This is limiting, but the interconnectedness of the information in the database more than makes up for the exclusion of non-foundations.

“Drill down” is the name of the game with Grant Explorer. An example: You work for an art museum and so you query the database to see who is funding another art museum in your area. The search results for that query include a foundation you have never heard of, so you click on the link and go to information about that foundation.

In looking at other grants made by that foundation, you see they are also supporting a third area museum, so you click on that link to see who else funds them. You then notice an unexpected funder of that museum, so you click on the link. This is such a great way to discover new potential funders. Grant Explorer indexes information on more than 52,000 foundations and includes grants of \$5,000 or more.

The databases for researching individuals definitely will support your foundation research. The more you know about the trustees and staff of a foundation, the better you can focus your proposal on their specific interests and possibly identify contacts that will help your proposal get noticed.

With fees ranging from \$19.95 for one month to nearly \$2,500 for a year (with no monthly option), price definitely becomes an issue. For quick research that covers most of the bases, GuideStar’s Grant Explorer can’t be beaten. For longer term in-depth research, you’ll probably want to invest in one of the Foundation Center’s more deluxe subscriptions.

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