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FUNDING ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Funding is a major barrier in acquiring assistive technology (AT) devices and services. Barriers may arise from the high cost of equipment, vague eligibility criteria, lack of knowledge about funding sources, and locating/accessing third party payment sources. While funding should in no way shape the AT selection process it is certainly an aspect of the process that should not be ignored.

Before deciding on a specific funding source the following information should be obtained.

Child and Family Information	Funding Source Information
Child's age	What authority the funding source is established under (e.g. federal legislation, waiver of legal requirement)
Parental income	Who is the administering agency for the funding source (e.g. private insurer, Dept. of Health)
Child's disability	What term does the funding source use to describe AT (e.g., durable medical equipment, rehabilitation technology)
Where the AT will be used	Does the AT have to be used for a specific purpose
What the family and child want to achieve	Does the AT have to be used in a specific place
	The process to acquire AT (e.g. application)
	The individuals involved in the process
	The appeal process if the AT is denied

Source: A Parent's Guide to Assistive Technology by Wyoming New Options in Technology

POSSIBLE FUNDING SOURCES

Medicaid—state and federal medical insurance program for individuals and families with low income. Durable medical equipment (DME) is covered if the device is medically necessary; a physician's authorization is needed. There are variations in the services that each state provides. AT services (OT, PT, speech therapy) are covered under federal Medicaid law.

Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment (EPSDT) - is a program through Medicaid for children from birth to 21 that covers regular/periodic exams for eligible children. Any medically necessary services or DME prescribed must be provided to child, even if the service is not covered by that state's Medicaid program.

Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Uniformed Services (CHAMPUS) - Federally funded medical benefits insurance program for spouses and children of active duty, retired, and deceased active duty and retired uniformed services personnel. Will provide funding if it is medically necessary.

Public School Programs—School districts are required to provide AT to children with disabilities if it allows them to receive an education in the least restrictive environment. Need should be noted on the child's IEP.

Private Insurance - Varies greatly, most cover AT that is medically necessary and prescribed by a physician.

Private funding—Nonprofit disability associations (March of Dimes, United Cerebral Palsy Association), private foundations, service clubs and organizations (Shriners, Rotary Club), and national advocacy groups may provide funding for AT, especially if other sources have been unsuccessful. Must meet eligibility requirement and follow specific guidelines.

Loan programs—Info about credit financing can be obtained from the manufacturer of the AT. Some state Tech Act projects have low or no interest loans.

Source: Judge, S.L. (2000). Accessing and funding assistive technology for young children with disabilities. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 28(2), 125-131

DEVELOPING MINI-GRANTS

Excerpt from Assistive Technology and Early Childhood Education by The Early Assistive Technology Training Project Staff

A mini-grant is defined as a relatively brief and straightforward document sent to local or regional service organizations or foundations, for the purpose of funding a specific piece of equipment or project. A simple mini-grant process can be used to yield increased funding with a minimum amount of time and effort:

- A. Select Appropriate Equipment or Projects for which funding is requested
 1. Choose and describe specific pieces of equipment (e.g., speech output device, microcomputer); add supportive information such as vendor brochures.
 2. Choose and describe specific projects (e.g., setting up a toy lending library or adaptive cooking program)
- B. Identify Potential Funding Sources
 1. Sample funding sources
 - a. Service organizations are excellent targets (e.g., *Lions*, *Rotary International*, *Civitan Sertoma*, *Seroptomist*, *Knights of Columbus*)
 - b. Local/regional foundations (contact the librarian of your local college for assistance in locating appropriate foundations); *The Foundation Center* (79 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10003) is an excellent resource for learning about available funding sources.
 - c. Support groups for your organization (e.g., auxiliary for hospital, parent-teacher organization for school)
- C. Develop a Basic Cover Letter
 1. Include the following information:
 - a. Identifying information
 - b. Tie-in to the target organization
 - c. A brief summary of request
 - d. A comment on the impact of the project/equipment
 2. Offer to give a presentation to support your proposal
 3. Take the time to use a word processor to tailor the letter to the needs and interests of the group; for example, the mission of *Seroptomist* is to assist persons with communication impairment, and the motto of the *Society for Preservation of Barbershop Quartets in America* is "We sing so that they might speak." This is information you can use in writing proposals.
 4. Make references to enclosures, which provide the "meat" of your proposal.
- D. Write a Mini-Grant to Send to Each Target Organization
 1. For the purpose of this chapter, a mini-grant is defined as a brief funding proposal to be provided to an organization, whether solicited or unsolicited.
 2. For maximum success, the mini-grant should include the following:
 - a) Abstract Page: This should summarize the need, the scope, and procedures for accomplishing the project. Reference should be made to additional information, which will be included in appendices.
 - b) Target Population: A description of the individuals who will benefit from this project, including specifics. Information on the host facility may also be included, indicating why it is an appropriate site for the project.
 - c) Project Objectives and Expected Benefits: This should describe outcomes of the grant in specific measurable terms. The listing of specific benefits should be based on a framework (e.g., domains such as social skills or, expressive communication, or academic areas such as math or science).
 - d) Budget/Description of Equipment Requested: A clear budget should be outlined, with a concise description of each piece or equipment requested. Specific ways that equipment will be used should be delineated.
 - e) Evaluation and Dissemination Plan: This will help determine the degree to which objectives are met and a procedure for reporting back to the granting agency. For some projects, information gained will be shared with other professionals. While extensive dissemination plans are beyond the scope of mini-grants, it is feasible to indicate plans to share information via strategies such as giving a presentation at a local or regional conference. In addition, this section might indicate how an announcement of the project can be shared with the general public (t.v., newspaper), thus giving positive exposure to the granting organization.
 - f) Summary of Expertise of Grant-Writer: A brief résumé should be appended, highlighting information relevant to the grant request; for example, if requesting, computer equipment, a summary of recent microcomputer workshops attended would be appropriate.

FUNDING DECISION TREE

Source: Adapted from *Access to Learning Through Assistive Technology by Wyoming New Options in Technology*

1. Will AT help child perform functional skills (e.g., mobility) or participate in activities and routines?

No Yes

→ If the IFSP team determines that AT is necessary for the child to perform functional skills or participate in activities/routines, the EI program is required to provide the child with the needed technology.

2. Is AT written on the child's IFSP?

No Yes

→ If AT is part of the IFSP, the team must determine if it is necessary for the child to participate in activities/routines and perform functional skills. Many Part C programs purchase AT when listed on the IFSP and not covered through other sources.

3. Is AT medically necessary?

No Yes

→ If AT is medically necessary or if it can be proven to be medically necessary, additional funding sources may be available.

4. Is child Medicaid eligible?

No Yes

→ If child is Medicaid eligible and the AT is covered in the State Plan as one of the Medicaid services, Medicaid is a funding source.

5. Is child covered by private insurance?

No Yes

→ Private insurance may pay for AT if it is covered in the policy. AT may qualify as Durable Medical Equipment.

6. Is child deaf or blind?

No Yes

→ Special equipment and devices may be purchased for students who are deaf, blind, or deaf/blind through special programs for these populations.

7. Does your state have a Tech-Act Program?

No Yes

→ Most states have a federally funded Technology-Related Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities Program. Some of these programs allocate resources for the purchase of AT devices. Find your state's Tech-Act program here: <http://www.resnaprojects.org/nattap/at/statecontacts.html>

8. Are special purchase programs available?

No Yes

→ Many service and disability related organizations have programs to purchase devices for children.

9. Is private/family purchase possible?

Yes

→ If other sources aren't available, families may have to purchase the device. Organizations do exist to assistive families in organizing fund raising activities.

FUNDING RESOURCES

Tools for Life Dollars and Sense: Navigating the Funding Streams Funding Guide

Sample Materials—<http://gatfl.org/ds/samplematerials.htm>

This site provides sample funding materials on how to develop a funding strategy, a funding worksheet to match needs to funding sources and a sample funding letter.

Funding Sources—<http://www.gatfl.org/ds/Search/Search.aspx>

While this site mainly applies to the state of Georgia, the user can search for National funding sources for assistive technology.

AT Network

Developing a Funding Strategy—<http://www.atnet.org/index.php?page=developing-a-funding-strategy>

This website, produced by a California based organization, details steps to follow when funding assistive technology.

Sample Letter—<http://www.atnet.org/index.php?page=sample-letter>

This website contains a sample cover letter to philanthropic organizations for assistance with funding.

RESNA

State AT Loan Programs—<http://www.resnaprojects.org/AFTAP/state/RESNA.html>

A list of AT loan programs with contact information by state.

State Financing Activities—<http://www.resnaprojects.org/nattap/activities/financing/statefinancing.htm>

This site contains information on the definition of state financing activities, what makes a good state financing activity, and examples of financing activities from Maryland, Kansas, Nebraska, Illinois, and Virginia.

Alliance for Technology Access

Guide to Low-Cost/No-Cost Online Tools for People with Disabilities—<http://www.ataccess.org/resources/lowcostnocost/LowCostNoCostATAguide.pdf>

A general funding guide with lots of funding resources.

United Cerebral Palsy

Assistive Technology Funding Search Tips—http://www.ucp.org/ucp_channel/doc.cfm/1/14/86/86-86/2938

Practical tips when searching for funding of assistive technology.

NOCK

Do You Need NOCK's Help? - <http://www.nockonline.org/?q=node/5>

NOCK provides assistive technology to qualified special needs children when families have no other means to pay for such devices. Current programs focus on technology that can assist or improve mobility and communication.