

Making the Most of the Funder Roundtables



One of the most popular aspects of Rural Philanthropy Days, the Funder Roundtables, will occur on Friday morning. During that portion of the conference, representatives from funding organizations and nonprofit organizations like yours will have an opportunity to meet face to face to discuss whether there are possible matches between the funder's giving or grant priorities, and your nonprofit's needs.

How the Roundtables Work

- On Friday morning, breakfast will be available in the MUC Espino Conference Center starting at 7:30 a.m.
- At about 8:45 a.m., the different funders will split up and sit at separate tables in the ballroom. Most funders are sending one person; some are sending two. Each table will have a sign on it identifying the funder at that table. There will also be a map available telling you where each funder is sitting.
- Beginning at 9:00 a.m., nonprofit representatives will fan out and sit at the tables of the funders they want to visit. (*More on this below.*) There will be five "rotations" over the course of the morning (that is, opportunities to meet with five different funders). Each rotation is about 30 minutes long in total: 25 minutes for the table discussions, and 5 minutes to regroup for the next rotation. If your favorite funder's table is full at first, don't despair. You will have another chance. If your agency is bringing two people, you might consider splitting up so you meet with more funders.
- Each funder might "run" his or her table a little differently. But the basic approach is that the funder will ask each of the nonprofits at the table for their "pitch": that, is to explain, in about two minutes, what the nonprofit does, and whether it has any specific grant needs right now. The funder might also explain a little about that funder's grants process and priorities.
- In response to each brief pitch, the funder will say either that (1) there is a fit between the funder's priorities and your nonprofit's needs, ("green light"), (2) there might be a fit but the funder needs more information ("yellow light"), or (3) there is not a fit either because your nonprofit or your specific need doesn't match up well with the funder's giving priorities ("red light").
- If a funder gives you a "red light," don't be offended. It is not personal. Thank the funder for listening and let the conversation move on to the next person.
- If a funder gives a "green light," that is not an obligation or commitment from the funder to award a grant to your organization. It is simply the funder saying that is worth your time to submit an application.
- When the next rotation starts, the funder stays at the table, and you will move on to the tables of other funders that interest you.

How to Prepare for the Roundtables

- Spend some time with the other leaders of your organization thinking about your highest priorities for outside funding. What do you really need? For example, is it operating support you can use for any purpose? Capital support to fix, build, or buy something? Whatever your needs are, decide which ones are the most important. Come prepared with up to three suggestions. (If you don't understand the difference between "operating support," "capital support," and similar terms, look at the glossary on the King Foundation website, www.kingfoundation.com/resources-1)
- Research the funders who will be participating in WTXRPD. There are multiple sources of this information.
 - The website has a page that lists the participating funders: www.wtxrpd.org
 - For many funders, the funder name on this web page is a hot link to the funder's website. Go to the section of the site that describes their grant process.
 - For others, there is a profile that describes what they fund.
 - For some, there is both a link and a profile.
 - Keep checking the WTXRPD website for updates until the time of the event.
 - If you have time, you can also research the funder through additional web-based sources. For suggestions about sources, look at the King Foundation's website, www.kingfoundation.com/resources-1
- As you read the profiles, look for matches in the following areas:
 - Geography. Does this funder provide funding to benefit residents of your county? Some of the participating funders work statewide, and others are limited to specific counties.
 - Type of support. Does this funder support all kinds of needs, or just one or a few, and how does that support compare to what your organization needs? For example, if a funder's guidelines say that it only provides capital support, then you should not talk to that funder about unrestricted operating dollars for your organization.
 - Focus areas. What charitable giving areas is the funder interested in? For example, if the funder is interested only in animal welfare, then you should not approach that funder about funding your childcare center. But if the funder's expressed interest is broad, like "education," then it might be worth exploring with the funder during the Roundtables whether that interest includes early childhood education.
- Relax and have fun!