

Using Databases of Previous Awards to Understand What Funders Want

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Most federal funders, and many private foundations, provide information on projects they have previously funded. This information can be invaluable in helping you determine whether your project will be of interest to the funder. It can also help you determine where within the organization (which program or program officer) to apply. Some agencies, most notably NSF and NIH, provide extensive searchable databases, while others simply provide a list of funded projects.

What to Look For

If you're trying to figure out if a particular funder or program might be interested in your project, use the award database to see if anything roughly similar has been funded. If every project you see is very different from your idea, odds are that it's not a good fit. You can also look to make sure that the same idea hasn't already been funded by the program. Obviously, a funder won't be interested in funding the same idea twice.

You can also look to see who has been funded by the agency or program. Often, you may recognize a PI as a colleague or acquaintance. If that's the case, you should consider contacting the PI to ask her about her experience with the funder (often, previously funded PIs are also tapped to be peer reviewers). Even in cases where you don't personally know the PI, they may be happy to talk to you if they don't see you as a future competitor for funding at the agency.

In cases where the funder lists grant amounts, this information may give you a better idea of the customary amount to ask for (which is not always explicitly stated, particularly in the case of investigator-initiated grants). The number of grants awarded by a particular funder or program in the last year can also give you a better idea of your chances. (If only three grants were awarded last year, you know that the competition will probably be very stiff.)

Information on funded awards is particularly useful when you're researching small private foundations. Some of these foundations fund the same people or institutions most of the time, or they tend to fund grants in a specific geographic area, but they don't always explicitly state that on their websites. Checking their website or, if they don't include information on prior awards, checking the foundation's 990 form (see table) can help you determine if that's the case.

For links to awards databases, see the table on the next page.

Research Development & Grant Writing News

Agency	Where to Find Funded Projects Info	Comments
National Science Foundation (NSF)	Searchable database: http://www.nsf.gov/awardsearch/advancedSearch.jsp Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s7yqEXPaTdA	Powerful database searchable by key words, program, PI, and more.
National Institutes of Health (NIH) Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA)	Searchable database (RePORTER): http://projectreporter.nih.gov/reporter.cfm Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CrSXdRg2_c0 <i>New version released June 5, 2014; Release notes at</i> http://projectreporter.nih.gov/Release_notes.cfm	Extremely powerful database searchable by key words, program, PI, type of grant, similar grants, etc.
Congressionally Mandated Directed Medical Research (CDMRP)	http://cdmrp.army.mil/search.aspx	
Department of Defense Small Business Innovation and Small Business Technology Transfer (DoD SBIR and STTR)	http://www.dodsbir.net/awards/Default.asp	Limited to SBIRs and STTRs
US Department of Agriculture (USDA)	Searchable database (CRIS) http://cris.csrees.usda.gov/	
Department of Education Institute for Education Science (IES)	Searchable database http://ies.ed.gov/funding/grantsearch/index.asp	
US Department of Energy Office of Science (DOE SC)	http://science.energy.gov/ber/funding-opportunities/award-search/?adv=1 or http://science.energy.gov/ber/funding-opportunities/award-search/	
Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)	http://www.epa.gov/enviro/facts/igms/search.html	
National Endowment for the Arts (NEA)	http://arts.gov/grants/recent-grants	List (not searchable); search page not working at time of writing
National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH)	https://securegrants.neh.gov/publicquery/main.aspx	
Private Foundations (the Foundation Center)	First, check the foundation website. If they don't list recently funded awards, go to http://foundationcenter.org/findfunders/990finder/	Provides 990 IRS forms, which include list of funded projects (usually near the back)