

Environmental Research: Foundations

Research Methods & Process

Oregon Volunteers asked for help evaluating whether applying for 501c3 status for a partner nonprofit organization is a strategically sound option. In order to evaluate this option, information was gathered about foundations and grant makers' funding priorities and processes. Twenty-seven foundations were evaluated and ranked by their relevance and applicability to Oregon Volunteer's organizational focus to identify the strongest potential candidates for funding a partner nonprofit of Oregon Volunteers.

Evaluation criteria included consideration of geographic focus areas, limitations that would prevent Oregon Volunteers from being a viable candidate, compatible funder purpose and activities, and the application process. Foundations that support all of Oregon were given highest ranking, followed by funders with compatible purpose and activities as well as types of support provided. Any foundations that did not have an application process or did not allow any solicitation of funds were not considered here.

Out of the twenty-seven foundations considered, eleven were identified as funders that were most likely to be interested in an application from Oregon Volunteer's partner nonprofit. The top five most compatible funders are evaluated here to determine if there is strategic value for Oregon Volunteers to create a partner nonprofit and submit a 501c3 application.

Meyer Memorial Trust is the strongest candidate with fields of interest including community and economic development. Their Responsive Grants program emphasizes community development and provides funding ranging from \$50,000 - \$300,000 with a grant period of one – two and occasionally three years. Meyer Memorial specifies that “responsive grants help support many kinds of projects, including core operating support, strengthening organizations, building and renovating facilities” which would support the goals of Oregon Volunteers proposed partner nonprofit. Meyer Memorial also states that general and operating support is an allowable use of funds in addition to income development and management, capacity building and program development – all of which fit the specific needs of Oregon Volunteers.

However, Meyer Memorial also specifically states in the section on limitations that no grants will be made for “direct replacement for activities previously supported by federal, state, or local public sources, deficit financing.” Oregon Volunteers will need to examine whether the decision to create a partner nonprofit due to funding cuts would be a barrier to funding from Meyer Memorial.

Applications are accepted through the online GrantIS system in a two-step process that begins with an initial Letter of Inquiry and applications are submitted by invitation after review of the Letter of Inquiry. There is no deadline for the Responsive Grants and applications that pass the initial screening process receive notification in 4 to 6 months.

If Oregon Volunteers can satisfy the limitations on governmental funds, Meyer Memorial is a good fit for funding the partner nonprofit. Assuming funding is received, the grant would cover operations, capacity building, and program development. This grant would

give the partner nonprofit staff one – two years to establish ongoing financial support and funding.

The Oregon Community Foundation (OCF) is another strong candidate with no specific limitations that could adversely affect the Oregon Volunteers partner nonprofit's application. The stated purpose and activities are “to improve life in Oregon through effective philanthropy” which is in line with the mission and goals of Oregon Volunteers.

The Community Grants program “supports nonprofits that engage their communities in solving local problems” and is a good fit for Oregon Volunteers. An application from Oregon Volunteers' partner nonprofit must meet the three stated criteria for funding including; meeting at least one funding priority, in this case the fifth priority “To preserve and improve Oregon's livability through citizen involvement”, be preventative rather than remedial, and has community support through volunteers and dollars.

Grants from OCF are typically short term or one-time grants of \$20,000 - \$22,000 and can be larger or for extended periods of time if the project is determined to have long-term benefits for Oregon. New grants are given priority. An extensive list of items are required for the application materials and may be submitted from January – February 1 or July – August 1. Decisions are made in May and November each year.

Meeting the requirements for this funder is fairly easy, however the emphasis on one-time and short-term grants of a smaller amount presents potential challenges to getting the new partner nonprofit off the ground. The average grant amounts may not be enough to support a staff person long enough to build sufficient additional funding sources.

PacifiCorp Foundation is another strong candidate with no limitations that affect Oregon Volunteers' partner nonprofit and emphasizes “civic and community betterment”. PacifiCorp is open to funding general and operating expenses as well as program development and continuing support. They are looking for applicants who can describe a long-term plan that includes networking and offers PacifiCorps Foundation the opportunity to be a partner in the work.

PacifiCorps states that continuing support is available but their online materials do not indicate any time limit for on-going support. Grant amounts are less than \$10,000 and usually between \$2,000-\$5,000. Applications are due by June 15th of each year and the application materials required are involved. Final notifications of awards are sent out in September.

This funder is a good match for a partner nonprofit of Oregon Volunteers in terms of program and funding goals, however the small award amounts may mean this option would not support the goals of the Oregon Volunteers' partner nonprofit.

The Jeld-Wen Foundation is a potential candidate with the only potentially limiting requirement that applicants may not be “programs that duplicate services provided by other government or private agencies.” They support community and economic development as well as allowing funding for general and operating support and program development.

Although this funder was initially rated highly, closer inspection of their website showed that their focus is on capital improvements rather than programmatic or community capacity building and development. This funder may not be a strong candidate for Oregon Volunteers' partner nonprofit in the initial stages but could be a strong option for renovating or creating volunteer center around Oregon.

The Standard Charitable Foundation has no limits that would adversely affect an application from Oregon Volunteers' partner nonprofit and has some compatibility through an emphasis on community development. Specifically, they are looking for programs that focus on increasing community member "abilities, knowledge and aptitude for successful futures" and that "strengthen job skills and opportunities."

This funder supports general and operating expenses as well as program development. None of their materials indicate funding amounts but 2008 grants were made in the amounts of \$10,000 - \$25,000 all payable over one year. The application process begins with a Letter of Inquiry using their online form by May or October 1. Organizations submitting letters will be notified within 30 days of receipt of their letter if they are eligible to apply for funding. Additional application materials and instructions will be included in the notification.

The Standard Charitable Foundation could be a good candidate for funding if the Oregon Volunteers' partner nonprofit can find additional funding after the first year as there is no indication that this funder provides continuing support. There may also be some concern for degree of compatibility for this funder's area of focus and Oregon Volunteers. While it can be argued that capacity building for a state-wide volunteer network is community development that can lead to job skill development, it is a more indirect relationship and may not result in a strong application.

Key Findings:

Each of these funders presents definite possibilities for an Oregon Volunteers partner nonprofit and there are other organizations not included here that may also be viable candidates. However, there are also challenges and limitations to these funding options that must be taken into consideration. Among the limiting factors that could present funding challenges is: the grant amounts typically awarded, the short-term nature of grants, and the specific limitations on duplicate services and organizations affiliated with governmental agencies. Oregon Volunteers should also consider the time-frame involved in applying for grants over and above the time to set up a nonprofit and receive notification of 501(c)3 status. Given the uncertainty of receiving a grant and the time input required to do so, this may not be the strongest immediate option for Oregon Volunteers.

Grant-maker Name	Limitations	Purpose & Activities	Types of Support	Application	Ranking
Meyer Memorial Trust	Oregon, no funding to replace activities previously supported by federal or state government	Improve life in Oregon	general, operating, income development, management, capacity building, program development	online process	10
Oregon Community Foundation, The	Oregon	Improve life in Oregon	Community Grants, general, operating, program development, seed money	application process	9
PacifiCorp Foundation	Oregon	Civic, community, community, economic development	General, operating support, program development	application process	9
Jeld-Wen Foundation, The	Oregon	Community, neighborhood development	General, operating support, program development	application process	8
Standard Corporate Giving Program, The	Oregon	Community, economic development	General, operating support, program development	application process	8
Clark Foundation, Ltd., D. E. and Jane	Oregon	Community, economic development	General, operating support	Letter of interest	7
Ford Family Foundation	Rural Oregon - Douglas & Coos County, No indirect or overhead expenses	Community building, public convening spaces, lasting change to systemic issues	general, operating support, management, capacity building	online process	7
PGE Foundation	Oregon, no general operating funds	promote community livability	Continuing support, program development, seed money	application process	7
Rose E. Tucker Charitable Trust	Emphasis on Portland	Community, economic development	General, operating support, program development	application process	7
Wessinger Foundation	emphasis on Multnomah, clackamas, washington county	Community, economic development	General, operating support, program development	application process	7
Harry A. Merlo Foundation Inc.	Emphasis on Portland	Community, economic development	General, operating support, continuing support	Letter of interest	7