

# How to Build Capacity to Attract Funding for Smaller Kinship and Peer- Led Organizations



## Introduction

Within the continuum of kinship service providers – including government agencies and other large community organizations – smaller, peer-led groups and organizations play an important role in ensuring caregivers receive access to needed support and resources. Many of those smaller organizations are led by kin caregivers. While smaller, peer-led organizations are vital partners in an overall system of support for kinship/grandfamilies, they often face challenges with financial sustainability.

In 2023 and 2024, the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network at Generations United piloted a small learning community of four kinship organizations. Their leaders received training, individualized support, and group coaching to increase the internal capacity of their organizations so that they could gain funding and better track their outcomes. This toolkit includes lessons learned from that learning community and provides insights for other organizations on what to focus on to leverage their data and increase their funding.

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## Definitions

For the purposes of this brief, “**smaller, peer-led organizations**” generally refers to organizations with annual budgets of \$250,000 or less. Many of those organizations have budgets of \$100,000 or less. They are generally volunteer run or have limited paid staff.

The term “**kin caregiver**” refers to all individuals who are raising their grandchildren, other relative children, or other children with whom they had a preexisting relationship before taking on primary caregiving responsibility. The families they form with the children in their care are known as “grandfamilies,” “kinship families,” and “kinship/granfamilies,” and all three terms can be used interchangeably.

## Characteristics, Strengths, and Challenges Faced by Smaller, Peer-Led Organizations

Typical funding advice for nonprofits is directed toward organizations with established lists of donors, prior relationships with funders, and staff dedicated to fundraising. In most circumstances, smaller, peer-led organizations do not have that experience and are operating with a limited number of donors and funders. This brief recognizes that the capacity needs of smaller, peer-led organizations are unique and different from government agencies or organizations with larger budgets and established histories. Below are five important factors to acknowledge about smaller, peer-led organizations.

### Background and Nonprofit Experience

Smaller, peer-led organizations are often founded based on the vision of one person or a small group of people. Their desire to start an organization is frequently rooted in personal experiences. In the case of kinship-serving organizations, the personal experiences that lead people to create an organization are generally the challenges they faced when their communities fell short and did not provide ample guidance, services, and support to them. Founders make it their personal mission to help other kinship families in similar circumstances. As a result, many programs are started by individuals who have lived programmatic expertise, passion, and a variety of applicable skills, but who may lack nonprofit management expertise. Important issues like legal compliance, board management, strategic growth, organization management, and grant management require specific, technical skills that the founders of smaller, peer-led organizations generally do not have. Their activities are driven by their instincts to serve instead of a strategic plan.

## Limited Funding

Many small nonprofit founders use their personal money to fund their operations. Instead of operating from an operational budget that is funded with diverse income sources, they often rely on small, in-kind (non-cash) donations of items and volunteer time. Many organizations cannot afford to hire dedicated staff like grant writers or development directors. This limits their ability to scale up, because they are caught in a catch-22 – they need to raise money, but successfully raising money requires hiring people with fundraising expertise, which they cannot afford to do without raising money.

### Profile: Learn from the Experience of Others

Victoria Gray, with Grey Nickel, Inc. in Phoenix, Arizona, had a startup experience that was similar to those of other founders of community organizations. As a kin caregiver and an adoptive mother, she saw how families were being treated and began helping families with information and resources. “At that time, we thought we could start a nonprofit to help more families. Our passion to help other families took over and we should have done the research. We took money from our life insurance policies. Family and friends also helped financially, but we spent more money correcting things that had been done. We could have continued to help families while we got things in order and then begin the process for the nonprofit with the right information and funding.”

## Connections

Founders of small nonprofits are frequently well connected to community resources – including those grassroots services that are not often prominently marketed and may be hard to find, like food pantries and clothing banks. Many government social service professionals find it difficult to navigate the local community, while caregivers are masters at leveraging resources and finding local and neighborhood resources. This puts these smaller, peer-led organizations at an advantage. They are skilled at networking and connecting with key individuals in the community, such as faith-based organizations, women’s and auxiliary groups, and more.

## Anecdotal Success

Many of these organizations can tell countless stories of how their participants have obtained resources or addressed the needs of the children in their home due to the guidance and services they received from the organization. However, they do not have the infrastructure to track their data and outcomes in a formal way. The ability to conduct ongoing evaluations and track outcomes helps attract more funding. This introduces another catch-22 – it is important to show positive outcomes in order to

attract funding, but you need funding to have the capacity to track data and outcomes and hire independent evaluators to show success.

## Seven Important Steps to Build Capacity to Secure Funding

With limited internal capacity, it takes creativity, resourcefulness, planning, and time to gain funding, but there are concrete ways that even small organizations can raise money. Smaller, peer-led organizations hoping to increase their capacity to attract funding can follow these seven steps.

### Step 1: Have the Right Mindset

Fostering the right mindset is the essential first step of any fundraising. Negative associations with money can lead to misguided and harmful perceptions about asking for money. For example, if a person's childhood experience with money included stress, worry, or shame because money was not abundant in their household, then they may feel guilt about asking others to donate, or may avoid conversations about money. To be successful, it is important to embrace certain beliefs:

1. Believe that the organization brings value. Securing funding requires understanding the important role the organization plays in the overall system of support available to kinship families in the community. Many of these organizations are the only one in their area that provides services exclusively to kinship families. In order to persuade donors and funders to support the cause, the first step is to believe that the cause is worthy of support. Do not be afraid to identify and play up the strengths of the organization and its leaders.

“You can't ask for a million dollars if you don't believe you're worth a million dollars. Fundraising success starts with the belief that what you're doing is valuable and that you can achieve your goals.”

– Joan Garry, nonprofit expert

To learn more about the fundraising mindset, see [“An Abundance Mindset: Your Secret to Success in Fundraising”](#) and [“The RIGHT Fundraising Mindset: Abundance and Optimism Win Every Time.”](#)

2. Believe that there is enough money. Although it is common to believe that there are limited resources available, it is likely that there are untapped funding

sources to learn about and consider. Additionally, it is important to develop a diversified strategy to obtain money. Nonprofits have multiple options to secure funding, including individual donations, grants, earned income strategies, and more. However, believing that there is not enough money can be a self-fulfilling prophecy that prevents organizations from taking the necessary steps to secure the money they need.

3. Believe that fundraising is not begging. Many people have a hard time asking for money. In certain cultures, it can be deemed disrespectful or rude to talk about money outright. Some people feel that fundraising is begging for money, and this sentiment can fill a person with distaste for the fundraising process. However, that is a misguided perception. Fundraising does not have to feel uncomfortable – in fact, when people give, they generally do it willingly and joyfully. Fundraising should not have a negative connotation – it is extending an opportunity for someone to provide funds to help a family or child in need. Fundraising is about opening other people’s eyes to the possibilities of what their gifts and money can do. It is not necessary to raise money from a place of desperation. It is possible to fundraise from a place of abundance, expecting that the money and resources will be available.

Peer-to-peer fundraising is one of the most effective ways for smaller, peer-led organizations to raise money. This strategy involves recruiting supporters to fundraise on the organization's behalf. This [article](#) provides an example of a successful campaign and pointers for organizations.

### **Action**

In the learning community, the organizations addressed some of the money mindsets that may hinder their fundraising. As an exercise, we wrote out mindsets that are obstacles and then rewrote those statements into affirmations to provide encouragement. One member wrote the affirmations on a sticky note as a reminder that her organization is doing great work and they are just as deserving of funding as other organizations.

## **Step 2: Recruit a Strong Board**

Having a diverse board of directors helps attract more funding opportunities. Some founders may struggle with founder’s syndrome, a scenario in which a nonprofit founder

feels that they have ownership over the organization and therefore is not willing to consider other perspectives beyond their own. Nonprofits are not set up as one-person shows. It is important for nonprofit founders and leaders to acknowledge that in order to grow, they have to seek help, and they have to invest time in recruiting the right people to their team.

In the beginning, many organization founders and leaders recruit their family and friends to serve on their boards. Those individuals may not be as passionate or loyal to the organization's mission as the founders and leaders are, and they may lack knowledge about nonprofit board member responsibilities.

Nonprofits need a board of directors made up of individuals who understand their legal and fiduciary roles. A board member's role is to ensure the financial sustainability of the organization through both internal and external support. They are responsible for helping with internal visioning and long-term planning within the organization, which includes approving internal planning documents such as budgets, fundraising plans, and strategic plans. Board members are also responsible for ensuring the organization's financial health and fundraising on behalf of the organization. Their role is to share the organization's mission with their personal and professional contacts and to participate in all fundraising campaigns and efforts.

Board members should financially contribute to the organization. It shows their commitment to the mission, and funders often expect nonprofits to indicate that 100% of their board gives to the organization. Board members should pledge a set amount each year to the organization, and board giving should be a line item on the organization's budget. For those board members who may not have additional income to donate, there are alternatives. For example, board members can opt to raise the money they pledged for the year, rather than donating from their own funds. When board members make a financial commitment to the organization, it shows the seriousness of their role and their willingness to not only dedicate their time, but their financial resources.

When recruiting board members, find individuals with diverse professional and personal experiences, including lived experience in kinship families. Inventory the skillsets and connections that the organization needs and, with the existing board, vet and evaluate your prospective list of new board members. For example, an organization that would like to have a stronger connection with the local education community may seek a member of the local school board to serve on the organization's board. Consider board diversity on multiple levels, including:

- ▶ Race and ethnicity
- ▶ Gender
- ▶ Professional background and experience

- ▶ Previous board experience
- ▶ Age

It is also important to consider specifically recruiting board members who have proficiency in managing finances and in accounting, ideally nonprofit accounting, as well as a member with a legal background or connections to an attorney.

#### **Action**

To find board members, strengthen connections with community associations and groups such as the local chamber of commerce, the United Way, a local association of nonprofits, and other professional or social clubs and associations.

### **Step 3: Have a Clear and Defined Program Structure**

The next step is to have a defined program structure. Donors and funders need to understand the activities they are funding, so it is important to organize the organization's services into programs to make them easier to fund. For example, an organization may operate one service, such as a support group for caregivers, or an organization may provide multiple services, such as respite services, food assistance, and youth mentoring. Each of those services can be identified as their own program.

Programs are typically carried out using a program model. A program model is the framework organizations use to provide consistent activities that produce consistent results. Organizations can choose to create their own program models or adopt models created by other organizations.

Having an organized program structure has benefits for both budgeting and branding:

- ▶ **Budgeting** – Most grant funders provide program grants, which are grants that fund specific projects or programs, not the entire organization. In addition, each program has its own set of activities and staff that need to be budgeted in order for the organization to understand the cost of running the program from year to year.
- ▶ **Branding** – Having the work organized into programs helps provide a succinct way of describing what an organization does. This can be helpful for sharing more information about an organization's services with prospective or new participants and funders. Encapsulating the program(s) under a name allows for the creation of a brand and facilitates communication with potential, new, and

existing participants and funders and the community at large. Also, program branding makes it easier to identify the work as a model or a structure that the organization can build on and teach to others to carry out the work.

For each program, identify the following:

- ▶ **Target population** – Identify who the prospective or target participants are for each program. For example, this may be kinship families in which the child is not in the custody of the local child welfare agency. Are the target participants caregivers only? Do they include children and/or birth parents, as well?
- ▶ **Recruitment** – How do participants find and join the program? Is there open enrollment into the program or does it require a referral or an application of some kind? What are the eligibility requirements, if any?
- ▶ **Program activities** – What are the key activities that the program encompasses? How often do those activities occur? Who is responsible for carrying out those activities?
- ▶ **Program outcomes** – How does the organization measure the program's success? In what key domains are program participants experiencing changes or success? Be sure to identify outcomes that program activities can directly affect or determine.
- ▶ **Staffing** – What staff or volunteers are required to carry out the program activities and what are their specific duties? Are they part-time or full-time? Are they employees or contractors?

### Action

A great exercise to outline a program is to think about the important elements: who, what, where, how, and when. Write out the answers to those questions for each program.

### Profile: Learn from the Experience of Others

As the executive director of Generations Together in Georgia, Karen Gillespie organized and restructured her programs to position her organization for more funding. On the next page, she shares her experience.



“Funders, whether foundations, government agencies, or corporate sponsors, are looking for organizations that have clearly articulated and measurable programs. By breaking our work into distinct programs, I can directly align our initiatives with the specific priorities of potential funders. This makes it easier for them to see how their investment will address the needs of kinship families in a concrete, targeted way. Restructuring our work into programs also allows me to clearly define and focus our efforts. Instead of operating with broad, generalized goals, we’ll be able to outline specific programs that address key issues for kinship families—whether it’s caregiver support, advocacy, food security, or providing educational resources. Whether it’s our board, staff, volunteers, or community partners, programs provide everyone with a clear understanding of where they fit into our mission. This kind of alignment strengthens our collective effort and makes us a more cohesive, focused organization.

“Restructuring our work into programs isn’t just about securing funding—it’s about creating a stronger, more sustainable Generations Together. This will allow us to better demonstrate our impact, attract a wider range of funding opportunities, and ensure that our work continues to meet the evolving needs of kinship families.”

#### **Step 4: Track and Report on Data and Outcomes**

Once an organization has identified its different programs, the next step is outlining specific outcomes that the organization hopes to achieve as a result of its programming. Tracking data is important for multiple reasons.

First, it is important to determine whether the work the organization is doing is actually producing the desired results. Having stories is helpful, but organizations need a systematic way to track whether or not their programs are running as intended, and if they are actually making a difference with their participants.

Second, data is pivotal to fundraising, because donors and funders often see their donations as an investment. They want to know that they are investing in a program that will actually produce results for its participants. When donors and funders give their money, they are expecting the organization to carry out the work to achieve the expected outcomes in good faith. However, it is difficult for an organization to demonstrate its good faith and success if it is not tracking its progress and monitoring data.

Small organizations often find it difficult to keep track of data, but they can do so in very simple ways. Focus on four crucial steps: identify, collect, analyze, and report.

## Identify

First, identify the data elements that are important to track for internal purposes, as well as those that are important for external stakeholders (which include participants, donors, and funders). When deciding what data elements to collect, it is important to first identify what the organization wants to measure. The organization must set the tone and determine the outcomes that it should track. Questions to consider include: What does success look like for each program? In what areas can each program move the needle the most? How do others define success for the organization and, from that, what outcomes are important to measure for those individuals? Once the organization has determined its desired program outcomes, the next step is to develop a logic model that shows in a graphical form how the program leads to the proposed outcomes. See this [resource](#) for how to develop such a model, and the [Foster Kinship logic model](#) for a great example.

For each program, develop a logic model that details the following:

- ▶ Inputs (the resources needed to implement the program)
- ▶ Program Activities (the main activities carried out in the program)
- ▶ Outputs (the number of services/activities carried out in the program)
- ▶ Short-, Medium-, and Long-Term Outcomes (the changes in behaviors, skills, knowledge, and/or perception that the organization believes will result from the program activities)

## Collect

The next step is to understand the type of data the organization needs in order to show success with the expected outcomes and determine how to gather it. Questions to consider include: What are the best ways to measure whether there are changes in outcomes? (Think about both quantitative (numeric) and qualitative (narrative, story, and word-based) data.) Who is responsible for collecting the data? How often does the organization need to collect data? What format should the organization use to systematically collect the data?

Develop data collection tools that ask the same question(s) of all participants to enable across-the-board measurements of success. If the organization is already collecting data, make sure that there is an organized system to regularly collect and track it. For example, organizations typically have an intake or assessment process that collects baseline data on the families' demographics, characteristics, and needs. Keeping and organizing this data to compare it with future data collection efforts will make it possible for the organization to measure changes in families' needs at different time points to see how the program has improved their circumstances.

Measuring change requires the collection of baseline data (data at the start or before the start of the program) and data at certain intervals after families have begun receiving services. A simple way to do this is to ask the same questions at different time points and see what has changed. For example, an organization that provides trauma-informed caregiver training and wants to track how participants' knowledge increases as a result of the training might ask participants about their awareness or understanding of trauma-based concepts before the training. After the training, they would ask the same questions and then compare the results of the two sets of answers. If the understanding or awareness improves, then they have data showing that their organization contributed to an increase in their participants' knowledge.

### **Analyze**

To analyze data simply means to make sense of the data. Before analyzing the data that the organization has identified and collected, think back to the key questions the organization is seeking to answer about its work. The analysis should answer those questions and allow for further investigation that uncovers the reasons behind the answers.

It may be helpful for the organization to develop benchmarks to show its expectations or goals. Then, the data analysis can show how well the data matches up to the benchmarks. For example, an organization might have identified that participants' food stability is an important metric to measure and collected data by asking participants if they have to worry about obtaining enough nutritious food. In this scenario, the organization might set a benchmark that 90% of its program participants would have food stability (meaning they do not worry about food). They could then use data analysis to see if they met their benchmark.

A key part of analyzing data is staying curious and asking questions. Questions often come up as part of this process. Something in the data might inspire wonder and prompt the organization to dig deeper. It is a good idea to follow these leads to learn more.

It is important to review data analysis as a team. Present the information to the board. Ask the board if anything surprised them about the data. Inquire about what they believe the data is saying about the organization's work. Discuss what the organization should continue to do and what it should change as a result of what the data shows. Engaging a group in this interpretation, analysis, and brainstorming process is helpful because it allows for the consideration of multiple perspectives and ideas.

### **Report**

One of the biggest struggles of small nonprofits is doing the work and reporting on the work at the same time. Most nonprofits do not think about how to market their work, or

they believe that talking about their success may be boasting. Organizations should have a regular process for sharing the information from their data collection processes. Report the final data to the board. Share the information with donors and funders.

Use the data reporting process as a way to stimulate conversation with a local partner or potential funder. For example, if an organization has data showing that many families are getting denied for TANF child-only payments, it can use that information to schedule a meeting with local officials to develop a solution that ensures caregivers can access financial supports.

### **Action**

Schedule a webinar to share data showing what the organization has learned about the people who participate in its programs. A webinar is a great, low-cost way to attract prospective donors and supporters, for them to learn more about an organization's programs, and to initiate a relationship for possible future support. This can also be done using live video tools on social media platforms such as Facebook and LinkedIn.

### **Profile: Learn from the Experience of Others**

Angela Tobin, of Kinship Caregivers Connect in Ohio, understands the importance of research to show an organization's impact. "Evaluation and research is key for an organization in multiple ways: for understanding caregivers' experiences, measuring program impact, supporting continual improvement, and sustainability with funding. Kinship Caregivers Connect has conducted annual evaluations with questions around caregiver demographics, participation and preferences ... [about] the useability, feasibility, and accessibility of our program. Demographics are key to understanding the unique population we are serving, and can be very helpful information when applying to grants. Going beyond basic demographics can be helpful. For example, we recently learned that over half of our kinship caregivers are caring for children with disabilities, which could support a grant for a program focused on this subpopulation specifically.

"Additionally, we survey both those who have attended a support group meeting, and those who have not yet engaged, to learn about barriers to participation and

[continued]

compare outcomes over time. Longitudinal research looking at changes in quantitative outcomes overtime can be a strong way to show program impact. Qualitative data can help tell the story of a program’s impact and pathways for growth. Research sounds intimidating but is meant to build on itself. Starting small and then working toward higher levels of evaluation can be helpful. When applying for research funding, including compensation such as a gift card or gift card raffle for participants can be key for harnessing engagement and valuing caregivers’ contributions.”

## Step 5: Proper Planning

Most small, peer-led kinship organizations operate in direct response to the needs expressed by families. Whenever a need emerges, they respond. Often, they respond without considering how they can fund their efforts to address that need long-term. However, at some point, in order to grow, they will need to invest in a planning process. The organization, including the board, should be considering where its program(s) is(are) going to be in one year, three years, five years, or even twenty years. This type of planning makes sure the board is on the same page about the intended direction of the organization, and it allows the organization to set a direction and a pathway for the future. Strategic planning like this allows the organization to forecast for the future, assess its ability to address future challenges and opportunities, and plan specific actions to ensure that it is ready for those challenges and opportunities.

There are three essential plans that a smaller, peer-led organization should have:

- ▶ **A one-year plan** – An organization that is small may not be ready for a full strategic plan created with an involved process of fact finding, research, and assessment, but the board should have some kind of mechanism to plan from year to year and anticipate what is next. Organizations can do a simplified version of a [SWOT analysis](#) where they identify the organization’s **strengths** and **weaknesses** and assess any external **opportunities** and **threats** to the organization’s success. Using that framework, they can identify goals to determine how they want to grow in the next year. When the organization has the funding to do more intense planning, they can do a deeper dive into that SWOT analysis by involving thoughts and feedback from funders, community members, participants, volunteers, and the board.
- ▶ **A budget** – A budget is a pivotal tool to secure funding. An annual budget outlines the anticipated expenses and income for the year. Many small organizations do not have budgets at all and do not write one unless requested by a grant proposal. However, in the business world, a budget is a projection. An

organization does not have to have financial resources in order to have a budget. Creating a budget is about looking to the future to determine anticipated costs, so the organization can be prepared to cover those costs. The budgeting process is the next step after the development of a one-year plan; it assigns numbers to the organization's goals. For example, if an organization would like to serve 30 families with its food assistance program, it can use the budgeting process to estimate how much food, staffing, and administrative support it needs, and then fundraise in order to cover those costs for the year.

When budgeting, it is important to identify direct costs as well as the administrative costs of running the organization. If the organization has an executive director, part of their work involves meeting with partners and supervising the work of the organization, which needs to be accounted for as administrative costs. It takes effort to administer a program – it requires overseeing staff/volunteers, helping with planning and accounting, and conducting other administrative tasks that are not always associated with direct program work. This [template](#) can be used to create a budget.

- ▶ **A fundraising plan** – A fundraising plan, sometimes referred to as a development plan, is a document that outlines the fundraising strategies the organization needs to employ to reach its fundraising goal. The budget outlines the amount the organization needs to raise for it to reach its goals, and the fundraising plan explains how the organization expects to get to that number. Start with the overall goals and then break them down by the types of funding the organization wants to raise to meet them. Nonprofits have many options to raise money, but, for small nonprofit organizations, there are some strategies that are more attainable than others.

Funding sources to consider include:

- *Board giving* – Earlier, this document referred to the importance of having board members financially commit to the organization. Consider having them give a set amount each month to help with cash flow. The organization should decide what makes the most sense based on the board's abilities.
- *Grants* – Grants are often the go-to resource for nonprofits because many believe that they are the only way to financially support their nonprofits. Grants should be only one part of a larger fundraising strategy. Small nonprofits have a difficult time securing grants of more than five figures when they are first starting out. Seek local and regional grant funders and develop connections with the local community foundation to learn about their resources. Think about major companies that employ people in the area – banks, credit unions, stores, utility companies, insurance

companies, etc. They typically have a community responsibility agenda and will fund local nonprofits through grants. Smaller nonprofits that want to pursue larger grants can also partner with other organizations as a subcontractor to help build their momentum and start raising funds.

- *Individual donors* – Financially sustainable nonprofits have a strong donor base. There are multiple ways to obtain donors. Common strategies include organizing time-limited fundraising campaigns around specific asks or needs, hosting information sessions to invite people to learn about the organization’s mission and invite them to support it, and recruiting a group of volunteers who can raise money on the organization’s behalf using a peer-to-peer fundraising campaign. The best way to secure donors is to focus on building relationships by educating individuals about the organization’s mission, thanking donors often, and keeping them updated about the organization’s work.
- *Earned income* – Many nonprofit organizations do not realize that nonprofits can earn money by selling products or services. Nonprofits can secure contracts with businesses or government agencies and be paid for their work. One of the most tangible ways to do this is to provide training. Many nonprofit organizations have expertise in engaging kinship families, a skill other agencies struggle to master. Small kinship nonprofits can provide training to case workers at local agencies or other businesses on how to engage and work with kinship families. Organizations should develop an inventory of their strengths and identify those skills that are marketable so that they can be paid to do contracted work such as speaking, workshops, or other training opportunities.

See the Network’s [funding toolkit](#) for more detailed advice on seeking funding.

### **Action**

Consider hiring fractional staff, in which consultants assume the role of employed staff for a temporary period of time to help the organization scale in certain areas. For example, fractional fundraisers can be hired for three to six months to help the organization develop a fundraising plan or to execute a fundraising campaign or event. The benefit is that they bring expertise and can teach important skills and create the infrastructure and back-end processes so that the nonprofit can replicate the processes and assume some of that role when the contract ends.

## **Step 6: Focus on Messaging**

In order to attract funding, it is not enough to run a good program. An organization also has to be proficient at showcasing the good work that it does every day. Without visibility, it is difficult to get funding. Good marketing and clear messaging are essential in gaining the credibility the organization needs to attract donors and funders.

There are important steps to ensure that an organization's message and marketing are concise and compelling.

### **Make a Strong Case for Funding**

Develop an internal document, sometimes referred to as a case statement, that outlines a persuasive argument as to why the organization should be funded. This document helps the organization to organize the narrative and language that it uses in fundraising efforts, including grant proposals. The case statement should include:

- ▶ The mission and vision
- ▶ The target population for services and what their biggest challenges are
- ▶ The core set of services
- ▶ Program outcomes
- ▶ The organization's "it" factor – a narrative as to why the organization's services are unique and different than other available services

### **Understand the Organization's Key Audiences**

When making a case for funding, it is important to understand who the target audience is. Develop a donor profile that indicates the characteristics of the types of organizations and/or people that would be interested in supporting the organization. Examine the language the organization uses in its messaging to ensure that it resonates with those who are in the target audience. For example, the word "kinship" may be well known in child welfare conversations, but it may not be a term that is familiar to donors or other funders. Think about how to simplify the message and make it compelling so that everyone understands the need for financial support for your participants.

### **Develop Consistent Communications**

Develop a marketing strategy that includes consistent communications in the local community and online so that potential donors and funders are aware of the organization's services and their value. Use technology to amplify the message. Invest in an email marketing system, such as Mailchimp or MailerLite, and use social media, such as Facebook or Instagram, to attract new followers and to develop relationships



with them. Work on developing a solid contact list to which the organization sends regular communications sharing stories and updates about its work.

### **Action**

Email marketing is a powerful tool for fundraising. To prepare donors to give, use email marketing to share the organization's impact. Collect stories from participants, donors, and board members regularly so that the organization can use the stories in email communications. That way, when it is time to raise money, the audience is already bought in and engaged in the organization's success because of the power of the stories.

### **Show Up as a Thought Leader in the Local Community**

When people associated with the organization (founders, leaders, board members, etc.) become thought leaders in the community, respected organizations and stakeholders begin to look to the organization as a go-to source for information, opening up opportunities for partnerships. Being a thought leader means speaking on topics related to the organization's work and sharing and elevating the stories of its everyday work. Thought leaders share their opinions on issues or elevate information that is typically ignored, using the lens of a unique perspective, namely kinship families. To develop as a thought leader, identify the things that people are ignoring or unaware of or the parts of the work that people have misconceptions about. For example, a thought leader focusing on kinship might share the lessons they have learned about fostering relationships between birth parents and kin caregivers or address a misconception that all kin caregivers are involved with the child welfare agency. Many organizations lack services that address caregiver and parent relationships, and regularly providing knowledge on that topic can begin to attract funders who want to fund that expertise.

### **Share Data and Impact**

Interested funders and donors want to know that programs are effective and produce great outcomes. It is important for organizations to have a process by which they regularly report their outcomes internally and externally. Staff, volunteers, and the board need to understand how to talk about the organization's success and good outcomes, so they can show donors and funders that their funding is a good investment. Organizations should release important data and information on an annual basis, at a minimum, and share information about program goals; participant outcomes; and important qualitative information from client stories, focus groups, and feedback surveys.

## Step 7: Seek Partnerships

An important way for smaller organizations to access funding is by partnering with other agencies. A small organization may be able to access funding opportunities for larger, more established organizations by subcontracting for a portion of the project. Developing partnerships is also a way for the organization to increase its visibility and find people who may potentially have an interest in funding the organization.

Conduct an inventory of important partners, like federal, state, and local government agencies; faith-based organizations; philanthropic partners such as foundations or corporate funders; and corporations or businesses. Use this to produce a list of prospective partners and develop a strategy to build deeper relationships with them. For example, an organization may reach out to the manager at a local bank and talk more about the bank's community interests and funding opportunities for their organization. As another example, a local grocery store may have an interest in supporting a community organization by donating fresh produce. However, these partnerships may not be publicly mentioned or advertised. It often takes having a one-on-one conversation in person or by phone and brainstorming ways to work together.

Organizations should actively conduct outreach and interest meetings with potential partners. Before meeting with them, think about how the organization's work aligns with the potential partner's goals and interests. After securing a partnership, make a note to check in regularly with the partner. In those meetings, provide updates on the work the organization is doing, the success it has had, and programs or proposals it is considering. Be prepared to ask them what they are working on and to have discussions about opportunities to work together. From these conversations, funding opportunities will present themselves. While this is a long-term strategy because it takes time to build up trust in order to partner successfully, it is a strategy that will pay off eventually.

### Action

Organizations can [conduct a mapping activity](#) to identify potential partner organizations that align with their work in one or more of the following three main areas: shared interest in supporting the organization's participants/clients (e.g., older adults or youth), shared interest due to geography, or shared interest due to the type of work (e.g., kinship, mental health, food distribution, tutoring, etc.).

## Conclusion

Smaller, peer-led kinship organizations tend to start as a personal mission of their founders, with much of the work being self-funded. In order for these organizations to be

financially sustainable, they need to invest in an infrastructure that supports long-term growth. Following the steps in this toolkit will help these organizations lay the groundwork for fundraising so that their vital kinship services can continue to exist and expand.

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The Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network: A National Technical Assistance Center (Network) helps government agencies and nonprofits in states, tribes, and territories work across jurisdictional and systemic boundaries to improve supports and services for families in which grandparents, other relatives, or close family friends are raising children whose parents are unable to do so. For more information, please visit [www.GKSNetwork.org](http://www.GKSNetwork.org).

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