

HOW TO APPROACH A POTENTIAL DONOR GOVERNMENT IN EUROPE: SOME BASIC STEPS

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All archives, big or small, need more funds than they currently have. The principal source for funds for any archives is its parent organization, whether a government or a university or a religious organization. But other funds may be available for archival projects from public or private donors. In this article we suggest some steps to take if you are seeking funds from a government, particularly a government in Europe (country-to-country aid is often called bilateral aid). We will discuss shaping a proposal, preparing for an initial inquiry, and submitting a proposal.

As you prepare to seek funds, you need the support of a strong institution or other body (such as your professional archival association) to coordinate the efforts: writing applications, making contacts, and managing all practical details. Seeking supplemental funds is a demanding process.

You need to have a long-range perspective. Preparing a funding proposal is time-consuming, whether the application is to a national or international funder. It is necessary to be persistent. Do not underestimate the time involved.

Finally, your personal commitment to the proposed project is important. If you are not convinced of the value of the project you propose, it will be very difficult to sell that project to a funder.

With those general issues in mind, you can develop your project proposal.

Shape the proposal

Create a brief statement of what you want to do, who will do it, what it will cost, and what its importance is to your country. Make it short, because you will revise it later.

Think about your request in terms of a project or program. Most donors will not give money to support the basic operating costs of an archive or to build buildings, although some will. You are more likely to get support for a project that has a clear completion date, which may be some years

away, and a project that you can sustain after the project funds have been spent.

Think about what you really want to do:

- If it is a complex project, do you want to do a pilot project first?
- If this is to be a nationwide project, do you want to begin all over the country at once or do you want to start in one geographic area and then move to other locations?
- If the project will require the purchase of equipment, do you have the expertise to select the equipment, operate it, and maintain it?
- If your conception of project is vague at this stage (for example, "I want to rescue 19th century material in my country"), do you want to ask first for funds to bring in an adviser to help you plan the project?

Think about the strategy you want to use. Do you want to have a project funded by only one partner, or are you willing to take part of the funds from one donor and part of the funds from another? What strengths and weaknesses does your institution have and what expertise can you offer? Do you have a partner within your country for the project, either for funding (in which case you may be asking the donor country for matching funds) or for services, space, supplies or personnel? If you are not the national archives or the national archival school of your country, think about whether it could be an advantage if you have one of them as a national partner. Some bilateral aid donors encourage partnership programs, but you need to establish which of you has the mandate to negotiate and sign agreements and take full responsibility for carrying through the project, including filing any periodic and final reports the donor requires.

Identify a potential donor government

Read the website of the government development agency and any other literature. For a list of contacts see the Archives Solidarity website:

<http://archives3.concordia.ca/solidarity/what.html>

See if that government funds what you are hoping to do. See what they emphasize: good governance, human rights, transparency, infrastructure development. Check whether they fund only governments or also fund non-government organizations. In short, learn what kind of proposal they want to see.

Don't be discouraged if you do not find the words "records" or "archives" in the description of what the government funds. Development agencies are rarely that specific in their statements of funding priorities. On the other hand, archives and records management services exist in every

European government. Government development agencies know that efficient archives and records management is absolutely necessary for a modern state to function. Emphasizing this may help you “sell” your archives project.

If the web and literature search suggests that the country’s development program might be receptive to the type of proposal you want to make, you could contact the national archives of that country and ask the archives’ staff members to help you understand their government’s funding priorities. Some national archives are very familiar with the structure, priorities and other conditions of the government’s development program, while others are completely removed from the aid funding. You simply need to ask.

If you are having difficulty finding the right contact for a government within the European Union, you can ask for help from the European Network of Implement Development Agencies (EUNIDA). EUNIDA is a grouping of European agencies with a public mandate to develop, manage and implement development programmes. The link to its website is:

<http://www.eunida.eu/>

Revise your proposal

Now take the brief statement you created and revise it to share with the country you hope will give you funds. Use the words the country’s development program uses in its statement of priorities, such as “good governance,” “cultural heritage,” “administrative infrastructure.” Keep your statement short, perhaps only two pages, because you want the person you approach to read this quickly.

- Development agencies ask themselves a number of questions about proposed projects, such as:
- Does the program need to be at a bigger scale or a smaller (such as a pilot) scale?
- Does the capacity to implement the program as proposed exist, or does it need to be developed through training?
- How will the participants or sites be chosen?
- What is the feasible timing for replication or expansion?
- What support will the “stakeholders” (individuals and institutions who have an interest in or can affect the project) give to the project? Will they provide some of the funds?
- What is the outcome of the project?
- How will the outcome be sustained over time?

You do not have to answer these questions in your brief statement, but you need to have the answers in your mind before you make contact with the country's embassy or development agency.

Contact the country

Now you are ready to contact someone in the country's embassy or development agency. You can make the first contact through e-mail, but you need to follow that with a personal contact. Telephone or visit the embassy in your country and make an appointment to meet with the person handling development funding matters. If the potential donor country does not have an embassy in your country, see if the European Union has a representative in your country who can talk with you about the donor country's priorities. You can also find out where the nearest embassy is located (countries often have an embassy in one capital that serves several surrounding countries, which they visit regularly). Send an e-mail to that embassy, asking to meet with a staff member of the embassy the next time he or she visits your country.

If you work in your government, determine whether you can go alone to the embassy or whether someone from the foreign ministry has to go with you. Some archivists have found themselves blocked from requesting foreign development funds because the government has priorities for foreign aid that do not include archives. If this happens to you, your efforts will have to be directed to persuading your government that there are funds potentially available and that you have a proposal that would appeal to the donor government.

Meet with the donor country representative

Before you go to the meeting, think through what you plan to say. Be able to summarize your proposal in a few sentences. The potential funder may ask you about your organization's capacity to carry out the project you have proposed. If you have a brochure or annual report for your organization, bring some copies with you. If you don't, prepare a simple description about the work you have done in the area of your proposed project.

When you meet with the embassy person, give him or her a copy of your project proposal and explain that it is for information only. Your formal proposal will come later. Ask the embassy representative if your proposal generally fits into the government's funding pattern.

Remember that a donor country's government usually decides on the major, high-cost projects in a country, while the country's local diplomatic and development agency staff may be able to commit modest amounts of

funds themselves. During your meeting, you should ask who decides which programs to fund and what decisions are made locally and what are made in the headquarters of the development agency.

Whether or not you get a positive response during your meeting be sure to follow the visit with a letter thanking the person for the meeting and inviting cooperation in the future.

Develop the full funding proposal using the format the country requires

Some countries require proposals to be in specific formats, include a number of copies of the proposal, and have formal signatures from members of your government or your sponsoring institution. Other countries require a less complicated format, and small amounts of funds may also require less extensive applications. Nevertheless, funders typically require a proposal with the following parts: summary, need and rationale, goals and objectives, project description, implementation plan, costs and resources, sustainability, and issues and risks. At the end of this article is a discussion of these elements.

It is essential to submit the proposal in precisely the format the potential donor requires. Donors reject proposals that are not in their format or that do not have all the required parts. Some donors accept on-line proposals or proposals submitted as an email attachment, while others require the submission of a paper original plus a number of copies. Check and double-check or have another person check the proposal package before it is submitted to make sure you have included all the required elements.

Submit your proposal, either directly or through your foreign ministry

If you have previously contacted the national archivist in the potential donor country, send a courtesy copy to the archives. Take the opportunity to remind the archives' staff members that this is a revision of a proposal you previously shared with them and to thank them once again. In some countries it is quite usual for the development agency to ask the opinion of the archives on a proposal in the archives area, so a little reminder of your previous contacts might help.

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Approaching a European Union institution

Most of the steps described above are the same whether you approach a national government or one of the central institutions of the European Union. The EU has a representative in many countries, and the staff members in that office can be of assistance. Your government may also have a formal liaison officer for dealing with the EU, who can make contacts for you. EUNIDA, too, may give you information on EU sources for funds.

The European Union is made up of members from 27 countries, and aid from the Union is multilateral aid. Funding from EU programs is generally allocated to those priority sectors that have been formally identified by the recipient government in consultation with the European Commission. European Union programs often require the receiving country to put in some resources. Working with an international organization can give you substantial funds, access to professional consultants and specialists, and increased recognition from other donors that you are a good organization to fund. However, the application process is often difficult, the paperwork may be extensive, and the competition for resources is great. Be prepared for a long process.

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Think of a grant as a partnership between your organization and another one. You and your donor are partners who have agreed on a purpose, a project, the tasks that will be carried out within the project, and the desired outcome. Donors want the projects they fund to be successful because that reflects well on their judgment about people and programs. When your project is completed, you and your partner should recognize your mutual contributions and the work you accomplished together. Celebrate a little: you did it.

THINKING THROUGH A GRANT PROPOSAL

As you develop a written proposal or an oral presentation of a proposal, it is useful to ask yourself a number of questions. The questions that follow are some to consider.

PROJECT SUMMARY

What is the essence of your proposal?

This element is listed first because a summary usually is placed at the beginning of a proposal. You should prepare it last, however, after you have thought through all the other questions. Take time with this summary, because a number of people who review your proposal may never read anything more than the summary and will make decisions based on it.

NEED AND RATIONALE

Why do you want to do this project?

What need or problem are you addressing?

Are there other programs or projects in this same area? If so, how does your proposal relate to them?

This is the part of the proposal where you can explain the background, include information you have assembled about the problem or issue, and clarify the assumptions you are making about the problem. Here is your opportunity to link the work of the archives to the broad category of funding that the donor uses, such as "good governance" or "preservation of cultural heritage."

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

What are you trying to achieve?

Donors want to understand the overall aim, and they also often want measurable outcomes (for example, a survey completed in 6 towns, ISAD(G) entries completed for all still photograph holdings). Here you should be as specific as possible. You need to explain not only what you will achieve but also what impact completing this project will have on your institution and its programs.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

What are the activities that make up your project?

If the project includes selecting participants, such as for a training course, how will they be selected?

This is the part of the proposal where you demonstrate your professional competence. You should show that what you propose is archival best practice, and you might refer to similar projects that have been undertaken in other archives. If, instead, you are proposing a new, path-breaking initiative, you need to explain how this is an advance on current archival practice. This is the part of the proposal that may be reviewed by archivists on behalf of the possible donor, so it needs to persuade the profession.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

How will the work of the project be organized?

What are the steps?

What is the time frame?

What are the benchmarks at intervals during the project?

If you are sharing the work with another organization, who is responsible for what?

In this section of your proposal, you may want to use tables or an outline style of writing. The reviewers will be looking for the logic of the presentation and what step must happen before another step can be completed. This is especially important if a donor decides to fund only a part of the project, because this will allow the donor to draw an imaginary line and say, "We will fund this part."

COSTS AND RESOURCES

What are the overall costs?

If there is cost sharing, who will pay for what?

Are there in-kind contributions? If so, what are they?

Who are the personnel who will carry out the project? How will they be chosen?

Like the implementation plan, this part of the proposal may be presented in tables or outlines. It is the key section for the budget reviewers, who are rarely other archivists but who have seen many proposals. You should make sure that you show what local pay scales are (for example, the average salary of a government archivist doing roughly the type of work you propose) and the local costs for things like hotels if a training course involves over night stays or supplies like toner for copying machines (particularly if these items have to be imported). Your donor will probably allow you to build in some overhead costs for administration by your parent organization, and you should specify what percentage of the total that represents.

SUSTAINABILITY

How will the product of the project be sustained?

How will the impact of the project, such as the impact of training, be sustained?

What are you and other cooperating institutions doing now to ensure sustainability?

How committed is your parent institution to sustaining the product?

Donors want to know that a project will not die when the funding ceases. They will expect realism from you.

ISSUES AND RISKS

Are there contingencies that must be resolved before the project can take place?

What is the likelihood that risks external to the project will jeopardize its success?

What can be done to address these issues and risks?

Any project can run into difficulties, and donors know that. What they will be looking for here is an assessment of plausible problems and what can be done about them.