IECMHC Funding Tip Sheet: Engaging Foundations

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All Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC) service delivery programs or models require financing mechanisms, and finding relevant sustainable funding can be challenging. IECMHC is applicable to a wide array of service providers and settings, often crossing various child serving systems. While this can be beneficial in approaching a wide variety of potential funders, this also often requires that states and tribes piece together funding to support a comprehensive IECMHC service delivery system. This includes funding challenges that go beyond simply supporting the delivery of the IECMHC service, by requiring a unique infrastructure with a strong coordinating capacity. For instance, funding may be needed to support a centralized administration, state and local collaborations, workforce development activities, performance monitoring and continuous quality improvement, evaluation, program design, etc. When available, states may seek to leverage a mix of funds such as Child Care and Development Block Grants, federal efforts focused on maternal and child health, and state tax dollars for their IECMHC work. These funding combinations may have gaps in terms of what can be covered and each may function within different fiscal calendars, which can lead to infrastructure challenges or cause service disruptions.

The *Financing section* of the IECMHC Toolbox suggests additional funding resources.

Many states, tribes and communities have begun to explore private foundations as a source of funding to address funding gaps and support their efforts in building and sustaining IECMHC programs. This tip sheet outlines some key steps in seeking foundation funding:

- How to research possible foundations
- What most foundations ask as part of a review process
- Considerations for braiding or blending funding sources

OVERVIEW OF WHAT FOUNDATIONS FUND

Typically, foundations are interested in funding strategic planning, collaboration, capacity building, advocacy, policy development and evaluation. While foundations may be interested in supporting pilot projects or the development and early replication of innovative model programs, most foundations will want to leverage public funding to support and sustain the program over time. Foundations may be in a position to provide education to the government on the importance of the work, in this case, IECMHC. Foundations are interested in understanding how their support will further work on a broad scale,

Definitions

A *private foundation* is ". . . an independent legal entity set up for solely charitable purposes." Private foundations are funded and controlled by an individual, family, or corporation.

A *public foundation* is a charity that relies on fundraising from the general public to support its activities.

Source: "What Is a Private Foundation?" on the Foundation Source website.

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including partnerships with public entities. As an organization begins the process of seeking foundation funding, having a broad overview of how the foundation funding may leverage public funding over time, and how it will support the larger work is essential.

RESEARCHING FOUNDATIONS THAT MAY BE INTERESTED IN FUNDING EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH WORK

Many foundations have a stated interest in specifically funding mental health and early childhood initiatives. All foundations clearly identify their priority areas on their websites; use these categories to help identify the best fit with your IECMHC program. As foundations are not likely to state IECMHC as a specific interest, look for key words such as "early childhood," "mental health," "family wellness," "healthy children," "school readiness," and "workforce development" to help narrow down the possibilities. Every foundation is unique and has a different application process.

Additional tips:

- Identify exactly what you are trying to fund, and be clear on your concept. What aspect of your IECMHC program are you trying to fund, enhance, or evaluate?

- Ensure that your message is clear. Using an infographic can be useful.

- Have a well thought-out approach in terms of your logic model, theory of change, and performance outcomes.

- Think about the areas that are more challenging to fund, then seek others who have had success in this area, and learn from their examples.

- Identify how your IECMHC program addresses mental health from the same viewpoint as the foundation.

- Consider who will administer the program—the state, a community, or an agency—and how this is relevant to the foundation's work.

- Look for information on the foundation's interest in and support of equity issues, and tie IECMHC to equity and disproportionality.[1]

- Develop an internal document that can be customized for applying to separate foundations including the following areas:

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[1] Many national data sets are available to aid in this process, such as data on the disproportionality of expulsions of young children of color, especially boys. The Research and Evaluation section of the IECMHC Toolbox offers more information on using data to sustain your funding efforts.

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- An organizational profile

- Organization board demographics and expertise

- Description of organizational leadership and expertise

- Mission, vision and values statement for the organization as a whole and for IECMHC work

- Budget: revenues and expenditures for the organization and an overall program budget

UNDERSTANDING THE FOUNDATION'S SUBMISSION PROCESS

While many foundations have a less intensive application process than federal government Requests for Proposals (RFP), foundations will still require a proposal. Some foundations do not accept unsolicited proposals, while others have competitive application processes. Additionally, many ask for a letter of intent to be submitted as a first step, before a full proposal is solicited. Note whether the foundation reviews proposals on a rolling basis or has specified windows for submission. This varies widely by foundation and sometimes within foundations, depending on the type of funds requested.

Additional tips:

- Create a matrix with the foundation priorities identified, all relevant timelines, and what is required for submission. For example:

Foundation and Application Details	
Item	**Foundation Details**
Foundation Name:	
Foundation Mission and Priorities:	
Letter of Intent Due Date:	
Other Requirements (if applicable):	
Components of Application:	☐ Abstract ☐ Project overview ☐ Funding requirements ☐ Other:
Application Due Date:	
Internal Team Planning	

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Team Members	Roles and Responsibilities	Internal Due Dates	Additional Notes

- Develop a letter of interest that is strongly tied to the foundation's priorities and your proposal. Include:

  o The goals and objectives of the work

  o How your work ties to the foundation's mission

  o Recent supportive research

  o A capacity statement outlining your ability to complete the work

- If you're requesting that a single component of your IECMHC program be funded, such as training or infrastructure, describe how this work ties in with the broader program.

- Understand what data are needed to support your application. While this will be dependent on the type of foundation and the request being made, all foundations will want to see baseline data in terms of the population served and some outcome data, whether qualitative or quantitative. Describe how you will evaluate the impact of your efforts.[2] Examples of data-based outcome statements:

  o "The expulsion rate of our center decreased by 75% after having IECMHC."

  o "The turnover rate of our staff reduced by 50% as a result of IECMHC."

  o "Challenging behaviors decreased by 52%, based on teacher ratings on standardized measures."

EFFECTIVELY COMBINING DIFFERENT FUNDING SOURCES

Even programs with success in securing foundation funding will likely require more than one funding source. Your program will need to develop an overall funding plan to ensure its sustainability.

Issues to consider:

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[2] The Research and Evaluation section of the IECMHC Toolbox includes information on designing an evaluation plan. There are many different types of evaluation, and they can be woven into any budget.

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- Identify which sources of funding are being used or are available, and determine whether the funding will be braided or blended. In *braided funding*, two or more sources of funding are used to support program activities, and the allocation of funds is transparent. *Blended funding* combines all funds, and it is not possible to trace which funding source is connected to which activity. Often, a funding source will identify if blending is an option; if not, funding must be braided.

- Keep track of all timelines related to funding, and have a plan in place for bridging gaps in service if a funding source is ending.

- Clearly articulate what program components can be funded by the different sources, such as training, direct service, and evaluation.

- Have a dedicated person or team responsible for keeping tabs on the program's financial health and be constantly looking for additional funding.

- Understand how your program connects to the entire early childhood system, and examine the points of convergence. For example, can resources be shared among all the child-serving programs in the area, such as Head Start, Child Care, Home Visiting, and Primary Care?

ONCE FUNDING HAS BEEN SECURED . . .

After securing foundation funding, make sure that everyone clearly understands how to attribute the foundation's contribution in work shared with the general public. Work collaboratively to identify how to credit the foundation for supporting the work, and ensure compliance with the foundation's intellectual property regulations.

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