



# A GUIDE TO APPROACHING FOUNDATIONS

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Society of Saint Vincent de Paul - National Council of Canada  
January 2022

## Plenty of Money Available from Foundations

Foundation search engines would have us believe that Foundations award over 5 billion dollars annually in Canada, a number that can really be appealing. However, it is actually not as simple as that. The first aspect to be recognized, based on Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) information, is that there are over 160,000 non-profits and charities in Canada. This implies that there are a lot of organizations chasing after the same money.

You may ask what are the underlying capabilities of foundation search engines? Their first source of information is coming directly from the data provided to CRA on a yearly basis, as part of filing to retain their Business Number (BN) / Registration status. This information is public and, as CRA points out on its web page “The CRA is not responsible for the use and manipulation by any persons of this information.”

From that public information, foundation search engines, leveraging algorithms, are able to provide profiles and donation patterns of these foundations/organizations as a lot of information is made available from their CRA T1236 submissions.

When paying for access to foundation search engines, they provide a “fully searchable, online database of foundations for the serious prospect researcher, containing vital information about the funding history, preferences and contacts of Canadian foundations.

Approaching foundations for funding is very time consuming, and the success rate is about one in every 20 to 25 requests submitted. This is very common in the philanthropic arena, and nothing specific to the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.

Prior to approaching a foundation, there is first a need for a well-defined project. Foundations do not like to fund the operations side of a project; this is usually the first filter out of any requests. The second filter is to determine if the well-defined project fits into the mission of the foundation; this requires an understanding of their interest and disbursement pattern. There is no point in approaching a foundation if the project is not even close to its mission. The third filter is to understand their disbursement pattern in their fiscal year; some give early in the year, while others give later in the year. A foundation search engine would be able to assist with some of these questions to determine a probability of fit, not success. It would remove some of the guesswork out of determining which foundation to approach and also the amount and when to ask from a foundation prospect.

Some foundations will request a letter of inquiry before you are invited to submit a full proposal.

# Making a Good First Impression

#1 Rule...You won't get a second chance to make a good first impression so make sure that you do your homework upfront. Many foundations explain that the main reason they say no to a funding request is that it doesn't match what they care about most.

You're wasting time and effort--for you and the foundations--if you call a foundation or write a proposal without doing your research first. It's also unprofessional, and that's no way to make a good first impression.

So, what is the first step to building a lasting grantee-foundation relationship? And what can you do when a foundation says it doesn't accept unsolicited proposals?

## Research

The more you know about your foundation prospect, the better you can tailor your proposal to their philanthropic interests.

The National SSVP office has access to an online directory of foundations (both private and public) as well as corporate foundations who support charitable organizations in Canada. Please reach out to us first ( [national@ssvp.ca](mailto:national@ssvp.ca) ) and we will develop a profile of the potential foundation and provide advice on how viable they are based on our findings. You also want to ensure that another SSVP Council is not approaching the same foundation. Other resources you can reference to learn more about a foundation include:

- Its web site, if one exists
- News sources, like [Imagine Canada](#), [Philanthropic Foundations of Canada](#), local media and business journals
- Internet searches
- Insight from your networks of peers and colleagues

## Build Relationships

After you have researched your prospects, reach out to them! Before you start that first phone call or email:

- Follow the foundation's instructions.
- If the foundation has not stated any preferences, it generally is safe to call them.
- Use your research and be ready with your talking points i.e. your case for support.
- Show that you have spent time learning about them.
- Your research means you can ask deeper, detailed questions, beyond what's readily available online. That's a better use of time for both you and the foundation. It also makes for a better first impression.

## Use Your Personal & Social Media Networks

If a foundation's network intersects with yours, ask your colleagues/peers if they are willing to introduce the Society to that foundation. This is the most effective way of getting the foundation's attention. Social media is a very easy way to interact with a foundation, keep up with their activities and interests, and share highlights of your work with them.

## Build Your Engagement & Solicitation Skills

Learn how to be more strategic in building meaningful and professional relationships with foundations. There are a number of FREE professional development courses offered such as Grantseeking through [Charity Village](#) and Fundamentals of Fundraising through [AFP Canada](#).

## Funders Who Don't Accept Applications

You will probably come across some foundations that are good matches for your work but they don't accept unsolicited proposals. You should still approach them. Here's why.

If you don't have personal connections, send a letter that introduces the Society:

- Explain how the Society connects with the foundation's giving interests.
- Do NOT ask for money.
- Ask how the foundation selects who receives its grants.
- Ask if you can meet with them or give them more information about the Society.
- Helpful Tip: Make sure you are connected to your fellow board/committee members on LinkedIn and check to see if they have any ties to board members of prospective foundations. If you find that a foundation would be interested in funding the Society based on their interest in your subject area and location, and you also find that they're connected to someone you know, discuss with your fellow board/committee member the best way you can reach out.

## Sample Outreach Letter to Foundation

Below is an example of an outreach letter of a board member's connection to a board member of a grant making foundation/organization:

Dear Ms. Jones,

My name is ????. My colleague/friend, ???, is a director on your board and suggested that I connect with you regarding your work to increase food security in the ??? area. My organization, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, helps people in need by providing food, clothing and basic necessities throughout the ??? area.

Last year, we were able to help ??? adults and ??? children in the community with the provision of food/food cards and basic necessities. As a result of the pandemic, the number of people and families needing food assistance and support with basic necessities continues to increase.

Given your excellent work throughout ??? in supporting food security and your support of programs that complement our work, I was hoping we might be able to meet to discuss how we may be able to partner on this issue. Please let me know at your earliest convenience if and when you might be available. I look forward to the opportunity to speak with you and learn more about your work.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely yours,

# Sample Proposal Letter to Foundation

Below is an example of a proposal letter to a grant making foundation/organization.

Dear Mr. Smith:

**Subject:** Grant proposal for North of 60 project

Food prices in communities north of the 60<sup>th</sup> parallel can be exorbitant and further enshrine communities in poverty, which is a major concern in the north. Over the years, as part of its mission, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul (SSVP) has developed an innovative approach of:

- reaching out and establishing contacts in remote communities north of the 60<sup>th</sup> parallel;
- identifying their needs;
- gathering non-perishables, day-to-day household supplies and other articles as required;
- arranging for sea containers to deliver the products gathered.

As part of SSVP initiatives north of the 60<sup>th</sup>, there is the enablement to create food banks and used clothing distribution centers, staffed by volunteer local residents; this enablement allows to:

- build skills and knowledge in the community;
- effect self-determination;
- cultivate community leaders;
- bring sustainable social change.

Such initiatives contribute to food safety and support social integration, further working towards a people-driven, equitable and evolving north. They also develop and support communities for the benefit of children and youth, especially in the context of providing students with proper nutrition, and assist to improve student focus and ability to complete classroom tasks with more efficiency.

In June 2018, fourteen (14) sea containers with goods gathered by volunteers of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul are targeted to be shipped to communities north of the 60<sup>th</sup>. A grant of \$10,000 would assist to cover the cost of acquiring two (2) sea containers and shipping them to a community in the north.

Every sea container contains supplies with an estimated value ranging from \$25,000 to \$100,000, depending on the size of the community for which it is intended. Food, clothing, bedding, household articles and other basic necessities are shipped, along with specific articles requested by the contact people in the northern communities. That may include construction materials for special projects, prefabricated sheds, handiwork tools, sports equipment and several other articles. Most often, those

## Sample Outreach Letter to Foundation (cont'd)

supplies are given to the SSVP, and items which are missing will be purchased to fill the order of each northern community. In 2018, communities identified to be recipients are:

- in the Northwest Territories: Tsiigehtchic, Aklavik, Tuktoyaktuk, Inuvik, Paulatuk, Sachs Harbour, Ulukhaktok;
- in Nunavut: Gjoa Haven, Taloyoak, Rankin Inlet, Whale Cove, Naujaat, Chesterfield Inlet, Kugaaruk.

You can further appreciate the impact to these communities by reading stories on our web site [North of 60 - Society of Saint Vincent de Paul - National Council of Canada \(ssvp.ca\)](#), or viewing this video [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jhv5dRYQ\\_r4&t=7s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jhv5dRYQ_r4&t=7s)

Since 2008, the SSVP has been active in Canada's far north. The SSVP is a charitable organization that has served people in need across Canada for the past 170 years; the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, National Council of Canada charitable registration number is 132410671 RR0001.

The SSVP volunteers seek people in need, wherever they live, in their homes, on the street, in shelters, in hospital or in prison. The activity of the Society is always based on the love of neighbour in the local community. Volunteers work in their own area, and respond to local needs. This means that the Society's work is extremely varied: health, agriculture, education, housing, employment support, help for elderly, disabled, isolated or excluded people, and more. Funded by donations, it also provides emergency assistance and rehabilitation for victims of natural or humanitarian disasters, and finances development projects.

SSVP works in Canada include:

- home visits;
- friendly visits (sick, elderly, prisoners);
- food aid (food bank, soup kitchen);
- material help (clothes, accessories and furniture);
- educational support (school supplies, scholarships);
- help to refugees and immigrants;
- shelters (homeless, single mothers, abused persons);
- summer camps;
- twinning with conferences in another country;
- international and national emergency relief (natural disasters and humanitarian disasters).

We look forward to your partnership assistance in this community development project.

Sincerely yours,

## IN SUMMARY

As a general rule of thumb, know that good grant writing is simply good writing.

While the tips outlined can help strengthen your grant-winning odds, even outstanding written proposals sometimes get declined. If this happens, instead of getting discouraged when you receive a rejection notice, turn it into a growth opportunity. Ask the foundation for feedback and listen to their advice for improvement. Statistics show that when writing new grants to a Foundation for the first time, the success rate is about 4 - 5% (1 out of every 20 to 25 proposals submitted). The success rate is higher when submitting grants to Foundations who have supported you in the past.

Requesting grant dollars can be quite intimidating, especially when you're new to the grant seeking process. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to requesting grant dollars. In other words, do not create one generic proposal and then "shop it out". Instead you need to highly personalize each proposal you craft.

Summary of what you need to do:

- Tailor your writing and the format of your proposal according to the requirements of the foundation;
- Communicate content clearly;
- Convey a core, compelling idea - a unifying narrative thread that takes the potential donor on a virtual journey so to speak as they read through the document;
- Write to persuade:
  - Ethos: The Gut - Ethos is an appeal to ethics.
  - Logos: The Head - Logos is an appeal to logic.
  - Pathos: The Heart - Pathos is an appeal to emotion.
- Let your efforts be guided by the checklist on the next slide before applying - if you feel you don't stand a chance, then place your efforts more strategically elsewhere.



## Factors to Consider When Deciding to Go (or Not Go) for a Grant Opportunity.

When determining if you should go for a grant opportunity, check the following.

If you answer "GO" for each factor on the list, go forward with confidence!

If you answer "NO-GO" for up to 1 or 2 factors, proceed with caution.

If you answer "NO-GO" for 3 or more factors, consider moving on to the next funding opportunity.

GO	NO-GO		
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Alignment	Your goals for the proposed project align with the vision of the foundation and grant opportunity.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	History	You have a history of funding from this foundation.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Relationship	You have identified a connection (staff, board, volunteer) to an influencer at the foundation.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Invitation	You have contacted the foundation and received a warm invitation to apply.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Preparedness	There is sufficient time and the right team to prepare a thoughtful application and required supplemental materials including a budget.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Need	There is evidence that the proposed initiative fills a need.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Odds	Your proposal is competitive relative to the number and credentials of others.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	ROI	The potential gain warrants the costs in time/effort/money to apply.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Vision	The project/initiative you are proposing is in line with your organization's strategic plan and goals.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Expertise	You have internal experts or committed partners with credentials to lead the proposed initiative.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Requirement	If the grant is awarded, the future reporting requirements are achievable.