

Ask the funder: John Gogian Family Foundation

The John Gogian Family Foundation is committed to providing a positive and lasting impact in the lives of developmentally disabled children and adults, vulnerable seniors, and abused and/or neglected youth, by contributing to a safe and stable environment in which people can live and grow.

www.gogianfoundation.org

Thurlow/Associates sat down with Lindsey Stammerjohn, executive director at the John Gogian Family Foundation, to discuss the foundation's process, philosophy, preferences and peeves.

Here's what we learned:

How many proposals do you receive annually? How many do you typically fund?

The foundation has two grant cycles per year, with decisions made in May and November. We use a two-step process that begins with a letter of inquiry (LOI) and is followed by a grant

application. Past grantees can skip the LOI and are automatically invited to submit a full grant application. However, we practice a three-year funding cycle, after which grantees must take a one-year break prior to reapplication.

In 2017, we received about 55 LOIs from new organizations and invited proposals from one of these. We also received 37 grant applications from eligible returning grantees. We were able to fund about 50 grants, which includes our annual responsive grants, Armenian Initiative, and Impact Grants.

In total, we distribute around \$2 million annually.

Tell me more about your grantmaking and philanthropic philosophy?

We strive to provide "deep touch" philanthropy: We work closely with grantees as partners. We listen to their needs and provide what we can to help meet those needs.

We've been a member of Exponent Philanthropy [the largest association of funders in the United States] for more than 20 years and we echo their philosophy. We aren't interested in transactional grantee relationships; we want to help transform the sector.

For example, to ensure our grantees have access to capacity-building resources, we hold an annual grantee forum, where experts in the field lead thoughtful and relevant trainings and discussions. Topics range from full-cost budgeting to implementing a culture of sustainability.

What are some elements that set a solicitation apart from the rest?

Clarity! Please tell me what you do in ways that I — and my board — can understand. Be concise. Use bullets! Relate your data to people.



We still use a mail application. If there's something not covered in the application (an unusual budget change, for example), please note that in the cover letter. Use the cover letter to tell me anything else I'd want to know when reviewing your application.

What are some common "mistakes" that nonprofits make while trying to solicit funding?

Many organizations make their program information so confusing — when it is really not. Again, I emphasize the use of bullets. Tell me what you do in a clear way.

Regarding budgets, this may seem obvious, but please give me the full cost of providing services. It's obvious when you're not reflecting the full cost. Also, a budget should include both revenue and expenses.

Any pet peeves when it comes to solicitations/proposals/packaging?

We have a small application; we don't need too many data points/statistics regarding your mission. Our staff and board understand the needs well. (That's why we're here). Summarize the need in a sentence and then spend more time telling us about your wonderful work!

Also, don't get too carried away with stories/case studies. Yes, I want to know whom you serve, but I often read stories that actually confuse my understanding of the program information — or that raise more questions and concerns.

What does the foundation hope to achieve through its funding?

John Gogian's vision for the foundation was to serve individuals. The foundation is dedicated to raising the capacity of grantees in ways that in turn enable them to impact the individuals they serve — in a more robust, sustainable and meaningful way. We feel that if you're going to move the needle in this field, there is no better way to do it.

Does your organization need help with institutional donor relations? Contact us for a no-cost consultation. You can reach us at (310) 675-6497 or at hello@thurlowassociates.com