

Ask the funder: The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation (Part 2)

Last month, Thurlow/Associates published the first part of our interview with Piper Kamins, program officer at The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation. Here, we share the second part of that interview.

What does the foundation hope to achieve through its funding?

The foundation purposely maintains a responsive approach that enables prospective grantees to come to us with a wide range of programs that serve, support, and inspire our community. We believe that community-based nonprofits have the expertise to identify challenges and implement solutions.

Recognizing that partnership is essential to making meaningful change, the foundation also supports special initiatives focused on organizational effectiveness, cross-sector collaboration, and systems change. While our responsive grantmaking represents about 80 percent of our work, the remaining 20 percent of our time is spent on these special projects and initiatives.

Over the past decade, we have launched, supported, or taken a leadership role in a wide range of these projects, in areas such as child welfare, the arts, public-private partnerships, and nonprofit sustainability.


The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation also invests in organizational leadership and professional development through a suite of training opportunities provided to inspiring local nonprofit executives. We are prioritizing access to these opportunities for nonprofits led by people of color.

How many proposals do you receive annually? How many do you typically fund? Have you received an increase in requests during the pandemic?

We typically receive around 600 requests each year, and make close to 300 grants. Since March 2020, we have seen a 30 percent increase in formal funding inquiries through our application portal, and our staff has noticed a significant uptick in inquiry calls and emails.

Do you have any pet peeves when it comes to solicitations/proposals/packaging?

Sometimes, organizations want to make sure they are competitive and relevant to the current funding moment, and will use buzz words or jargon — such as “innovative,” “unique,” “groundbreaking,” or “the best” — which can obscure the actual description of their work. We prefer that applicants describe their programs in clear and tangible terms, so that we can easily envision what they do. And if you do choose to use a buzz word, it is helpful to provide evidence for it — for example, describing what actually makes your program unique or innovative. As a funder of general operating support, we appreciate when organizations share their work just as it is, rather than feeling like they need to create a special initiative or program to catch the foundation’s interest.



If you are not sure whether your organization would be a fit with the foundation, or have any questions or feedback in general, you are always welcome to reach out to us at (213) 362-7600. We thank you for your commitment to serving Angelenos, especially during such challenging times!

To learn more about institutional donor relations, contact us at (310) 675-6497 or at hello@thurlowassociates.com for a no-cost consultation.