Four ways to broaden your search for tech grants

I'm often asked to name the grant opportunities available to fund technology. While I can name several off the top of my head, in fact there are numerous grants that will fund technology. Don't make the mistake of searching only for the grants with the word "technology" in the title—for if you do, you'll be missing out on several other opportunities.

First, a word of caution. If you are looking for money to purchase technology, but you have no idea how to use the technology in the classroom to benefit students, then your search will be a short one. There are very few funders willing to give you dollars to purchase equipment so you can figure out how best to use it. Funders typically will want you to discuss a project idea that will have a direct and measurable impact on teaching and learning. You will be allowed to ask for funds to cover the cost of technology, as long as you can show that it is an integral tool for carrying out the project to achieve the desired results.

How can you broaden your search for grants to fund the project you have in mind? Obviously, you'll want to look for funders who list "education" as a field of interest. However, you should also examine your project idea closely and use some creative thinking to come up with a longer list of potential funders. Here are four questions to ask that will help you broaden the scope of your search:

1. What is the subject matter of your intended project? Are you planning to do a science-related project, for example, or maybe it's a project that is related to school reform? Using the subject matter as a guide, you can find funders who support these types of projects.

2. Who are the participants in your project? By identifying the types of students who will be involved in the project, you can discover funders who are interested in specific target groups. You might be planning a project that will help girls choose professions that typically are dominated by men, or a project designed to assist low-income students in affording the cost of postsecondary education. I have seen many funders who have identified target groups of individuals as their field of interest.

3. Who are the partners in your project? Ask your partners for a list of their common sources of grant funds, and search them for potential funders. Or, use the type of partner as a guide to identify funders. For example, if you're working with a local museum, identify funders who support museums and see if your project might be of interest to them.

(Recognize that in this situation, the partner might have to be the lead applicant, rather than the school district.)

4. Where is your project taking place? Geographic location often can be a means of identifying funders, especially private ones such as foundations and corporations. Most of these private funders restrict their giving to certain communities, a specific state, or communities where a plant is located. Use your location as another way to identify potential funders.