

# FINDING FUNDING

Check out these dozen daring ideas for generating extra cash.

BY GWEN SOLOMON

**A**s state coffers continue to shrink this year, there is less money for education, and much of what is available is earmarked for mandates. Yet the money is out there if you know how to find, create, or borrow it; the trick is to be creative. Here are a dozen ideas that are so crazy, they just might work.

## BORROW from PETER

The highest-profile strategy this year is leveraging: using information, systems, technologies, funds, or other resources earmarked for one purpose to support a more pressing priority.

**Training educators.** The No Child Left Behind Act encourages leveraging federal funds by allowing the movement of money from one Title to another. Thel Kocher, executive director for assessment and accountability for the Blue Valley School District in Kansas, says leveraging means that the district can move money between Title II (professional development) and Title V (innovative programs). With a fairly stable workforce, a priority is making sure that the staff is highly qualified. Blue Valley provides professional development to help educators use proven practices that are content specific, promote good pedagogy, and integrate technology.

**Delivery.** From Alabama to Alaska, states leverage State Improvement Grant funds

to help with the delivery of services to students with disabilities. For example, the Alabama agency worked with reading initiatives to implement K-3 reading assessment on handheld computers statewide. Alaska is combining SIG funds to develop training for a new online IEP system and is designing a Web site for parents to access information, too.

## CREATE a VIRTUAL CHARTER SCHOOL

Virtual charter schools are public entities funded by tax dollars, chartered by local school districts, and enabled by using technology for instruction. A district contracts with a for-profit company to provide the curriculum for virtual school students to use at home and for the certified teachers who monitor student progress electronically. These schools are cost-effective because the districts receive state aid for students even though they never set foot in traditional school buildings. In addition, districts can charge a premium when enrolling out-of-district students. The Center for Education Reform reports that there are now 82 online public schools in 19 states.

**Online cost savings.** In Wisconsin, three of the largest virtual schools—the Wisconsin Virtual Academy, Wisconsin Connections Academy, and iQ Academies

at Wisconsin—received more than 2,000 applications during the open enrollment period this spring. A five-year cost simulation, which administrators say was based on the company's experience elsewhere, shows that even a single school could bring nearly \$3 million to a district in 2008-2009. For example, the Waukesha School District will pay \$2,785 for every student enrolled to cover costs for the curriculum and technology needed. It will receive more than \$5,000 in state aid for every student who enrolls.

## INSTALL COST-CUTTING INFRASTRUCTURE

As with business, education can benefit from installing infrastructure that supports administrative and instructional applications. For example, access infrastructure software improves performance, manageability, and access to applications that administer student records and generate compliance reports for NCLB requirements. Thin client computing provides students with an avenue to online resources and software from any computer, even from outdated or donated equipment. End-to-end IP-based networks, in which voice, data, and video information technology converge, offer application flexibility, scalability, and the capability to consolidate processes and systems to contain costs.

**It's all about access.** The Bellingham School District in Bellingham, Massachusetts, didn't have enough staff to maintain the more than 1,000 computers spread across the district and didn't have the time and resources to install and update software on each desktop. Needless to say, there was no money to hire more people. With the goal of providing and upgrading the latest applications that the schools needed, the district standardized access to the latest computing resources with a Citrix MetaFrame Presentation Server. Now it can guarantee that all the schools have access to the software they need at a lower cost.

**Thinking thin.** Arizona's Snowflake Unified School District reduced its IT budget by 20 percent when it switched from traditional PC labs to server-centric computing and thin clients in the classroom. The district added 1,000 thin clients to its installed base of 700 PCs and reduced the technical staff from six to two. The Wyse Winterm thin clients with Wyse Rapport software provide access to learning tools for the 2,400 students in this rural school district and centralize technology support.

### SEEK a FOUNDATION— or START ONE

Grant seekers often check the [www.techlearning.com](http://www.techlearning.com) database for foundation grants or visit the Foundation Center. Yet competition for these grants is fierce and often limited by conditions such as location, economics, and purpose.

Another way to acquire funds is to connect with a foundation that's more closely tied to your priorities—for example, by linking up with local corporate giving efforts or creating a nonprofit foundation yourself.

**Off the shelf.** Education in Idaho has a friend at the supermarket. The J.A. and

Kathryn Albertson Foundation, the donation arm of the Albertson supermarket chain, is located in Boise and supports educational initiatives in the state. For example, five years ago, state leaders wanted to design a student information management system. They approached stakeholders such as the legislature, the governor, and local associations of educators, school boards, and school administrators. The legislature declined to fund the initiative, so they went to the foundation with a proposal for a pilot program. They obtained a two-year, \$3.5 million grant to implement the system in 13 districts. Then they went back to the legislature, which again declined to fund the project. The foundation agreed to give another \$35 million over three years for all 115 districts under the condition that the legislature would provide another \$18 million after that. The legislature then agreed to the deal.

**Home grown.** Some school districts create foundations to support programs that fall outside of budgetary line items or that would suffer cuts in these tough economic times. In the Poway Unified School District, for example, the foundation does all the major fundraising. Through its Partners in Education program, businesses have worked one-on-one with schools, funded wireless communication for 8<sup>th</sup>-grade science, provided the computer support technician program at the high schools, and more.

### PARTNER to WIN a GRANT

Although grant writing is not a new idea, districts are using partnerships as an effective way to win lucrative, competitive grants.

**Learning from each other:** When the Palo Alto Unified School District in California wanted to install a video

production and journalism center in each high school, it looked to its neighbors and partnered with four nearby districts, including the high-poverty East Palo Alto schools. They applied to the Cable Cooperative, which had franchise fee funds to award, and won \$785,000 for a three-year grant for equipment, training, and support. There were more benefits than the money. According to Marie Scigliano, Palo Alto's director of technology, "The collective voice created synergy as the five directors worked together and learned from each other."

**Power partners.** In Beaufort, South Carolina, the school district wanted to explore one-on-one computing in the classroom using handhelds. The district partnered with SRI, the nonprofit research institute that had previously studied handheld use for a Palm-funded grant. Together they won a grant from the National Science Foundation to demonstrate how handheld technology can help students improve learning in hands-on science activities. Researchers and educators in Project WHIRL are designing and testing software to help students improve the quality of their scientific questions, their procedures for data collection, recording, and analysis, and their understanding of complex sequences and processes in nature.

### ASK the COMMUNITY

You'll never know the answer if you don't ask the question. While some communities are tightening their belts, others are saying yes to additional spending for schools.

**Bond caveat.** Approving bonds can sometimes have unforeseen consequences. In Sewell, New Jersey, the Washington Township Public Schools received \$50 million from a bond referendum in 1996. It funded new schools,

new infrastructure, new wiring for voice, video, and data, and 22,000 new computers. Perhaps the town saw that as a long-term fix; subsequent bond measures have been unsuccessful.

**The T word.** Another option is to raise taxes. In South Carolina, the state allows each district to create individual taxes for technology, and the districts allow each school to decide how to spend its share. In Manatee County, Florida, citizens have approved two sales tax initiatives for technological growth. Through these funds, the district built a network infrastructure for each school, and each classroom has Internet access and a base number of desktop computers for teacher and student use.

### APPLY for E-RATE and OTHER FEDERAL FUNDS

The FCC's Schools and Libraries Division could end up committing close to \$3 billion to last year's E-rate applicants, thanks to the rollover of \$420 million that was not used in previous years. That means the SLD is approving requests for networking equipment from schools eligible for a discount rate up to 70 percent. It's the lowest that threshold has been since 1999. For help with the process, use Funds For Learning's free E-Rate Manager tool.

**Outside of education.** Some districts build on their E-Rate funds by combining them with grants not traditionally considered education sources. Mississippi's Jones County School District won a grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and uses this award together with E-Rate funds to build on previous state and school district expenditures for networking infrastructure. The state installed connectivity from the capitol to each school district. The districts, in turn, used E-Rate funds to connect to

each school. The county is using this new money—a half million dollars from the USDA's Rural Utilities Service, combined with \$719,000 of new E-Rate funding for eligible classroom and networking equipment—to provide distance learning for 25 schools in nine rural school districts.

### PARTNER with BUSINESS

Asking businesses to help schools is fairly common practice, but some districts have honed their skills to a very profitable end. Building trust over time with both local businesses and the vendor community can solve budget shortfalls. For example, working with a telecommunications provider can reap financial benefits, not only in getting discounted services but also in building profits for both. Because technology companies today need to prove the effectiveness of their products, some districts think ahead and partner for testing purposes or as beta sites with an eye to permanent discounts.

**Building for a rainy day.** The Poway Unified School District in California knows about relationships. Local merchants provide quarterly donations to support programs like Reading Recovery for 1<sup>st</sup> graders. And Charles Garten, Poway's technology director, works with technology companies such as the SAS Institute and Gateway over the long term. For example, Poway pays \$40,000 a year for data warehousing maintenance for 33,000 students. When budget woes struck, SAS cut its fees by 50 percent for that year. When a new school opened and the district couldn't afford computers, Gateway donated used PCs.

**Revenue sharing.** The Plano Independent School District in Texas has a co-marketing agreement with Verizon

that provides the district with monthly revenue for every subscriber to the myPISD.net services if they order Verizon DSL through the district. Because \$10 per subscriber per month comes back to the district, the program pays for itself and adds to the district's general revenue fund.

### PUT IT ONLINE

Once technology is in place, changing services from face-to-face to virtual may provide resources anytime and anywhere at lower costs.

**Research from afar.** In previous years, California's Palo Alto School District received \$20 per student for library services. When that figure was lowered to \$1.80 because of cutbacks in the state's Library Protection Fund, switching to electronic access allowed the district to provide services at reduced costs. And in Washington Township, the entire field trip budget was cut. Technology leaders responded by finding virtual field trips that are linked to curriculum.

### BUY NOW, PAY LATER

School districts know that their budgets could suffer year after year. Committing money in advance—and gaining sizeable discounts because of it—can make a difference.

**Longer subscriptions.** When Palo Alto's budget cuts impacted its libraries, the district negotiated two-year contracts for eLibrary resources for the 2003–2005 school years. That meant reduced rates ranging from 15 to 30 percent for services such as SIRS, World Book, and Gale Group.

**Five-year plan.** Washington Township's school-business administrator Margaret Meehan negotiated a five-year payment cycle for hardware. The district wanted to reduce the costs to taxpayers and

regulate expenditures over time. It negotiated a lease-purchase contract for \$1.2 million worth of equipment from Dell through a state hardware contract and borrowed the funds to pay from the lowest bidding finance company at 1.9 percent interest. The district pays back one-fifth of the total cost each year.

## RAISE FUNDS ONLINE

Many schools reluctantly send students out into the community armed with candy, gift wrap, and holiday gift catalogs. Some do silent auctions and sell raffle tickets. What these methods have in common is that parents are tapped to donate extra money. Some districts have found an alternative that's safer for students, less costly for parents, and easier to manage for teachers: raising money through online fundraising sites.

**Spend to earn.** Through eScrip, partner merchants reward customer loyalty by donating a percentage of purchases to the school. Parents register their credit and debit cards with the eScrip program

and a percentage of all purchases made with partner merchants goes to the school. The Schoolpop service has a Web site that links to its participating merchants, and when parents click on a link, the resulting purchase automatically contributes a percentage. Parents also are signing up for Auction & Earn, a program in which Schoolpop sells parents' cast offs on eBay and sends a check to the school.

## FIND FREE STUFF

Educators are great at finding free stuff. Many articles, materials, and lessons are available 24/7 at no cost. Districts are also following suit.

**Training.** Maryland's Prince Georges County Public Schools trains master teachers at no cost with Intel's Teach to the Future program. According to Tia Washington Davis, the information technology coordinator, these trainers use what they've learned to help their colleagues in the schools to integrate technology, and the district saves on

professional development costs for its trainers.

**Interstate offerings.** When one state has a great idea, others often follow. In this case, rather than using the California Learning Resource Network as a model, other states tap into its free resources themselves. As a state-funded, free software and materials review consortium, CLRN provides evaluations of software, videos, and Web sites, ties them to standards, and provides original resources as well as links to existing online resources. CLRN's director Bridget Foster says the center helps save California districts money by doing compliance reviews for products, mandated standards alignments for classroom resources, and conducting research. It maintains databases of electronic learning resource reviews, content standards, Web links, and training materials.

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## Link Up

Alabama Department of Education  
[www.alsde.edu/html/home.asp](http://www.alsde.edu/html/home.asp)

Alaska Department of Education  
and Early Development  
<http://eed.state.ak.us>

Blue Valley School District  
[www.bluevalleyk12.org](http://www.bluevalleyk12.org)

California Learning Resource Network  
[www.clrn.org/home](http://www.clrn.org/home)

Center for Education Reform  
[www.edreform.com/charter\\_schools](http://www.edreform.com/charter_schools)

Citrix Systems  
[www.citrix.com](http://www.citrix.com)

Council on Foundations  
[www.cof.org](http://www.cof.org)

E-rate Manager  
[www.eratemanager.com](http://www.eratemanager.com)

eScrip  
[www.escrip.com](http://www.escrip.com)

The Foundation Center  
[www.fdncenter.org](http://www.fdncenter.org)

Intel Teach to the Future  
[www97.intel.com/education/teach/index.htm](http://www97.intel.com/education/teach/index.htm)

J. A. and Kathryn Albertson Foundation  
[www.jkaf.org/index.html](http://www.jkaf.org/index.html)

Palo Alto Unified School District  
[www.pausd.palo-alto.ca.us](http://www.pausd.palo-alto.ca.us)

Poway Unified School District  
Foundation  
<http://powayusd.sdcoe.k12.ca.us/partners/foundation.htm>

Project WHIRL  
[www.projectwhirl.org](http://www.projectwhirl.org)

School District of Manatee County  
[www.manatee.k12.fl.us](http://www.manatee.k12.fl.us)

School District of Waukesha  
[www.waukesha.k12.wi.us](http://www.waukesha.k12.wi.us)

Schoolpop  
[www.schoolpop.com](http://www.schoolpop.com)

T&L Grants database  
[www.techlearning.com/resources/grants.jhtml](http://www.techlearning.com/resources/grants.jhtml)

USDA Rural Utilities Service  
[www.usda.gov/rus/telecom/index.htm](http://www.usda.gov/rus/telecom/index.htm)

Washington Township Public Schools  
[www.wtps.org](http://www.wtps.org)

Wyse Technology  
[www.wyse.com](http://www.wyse.com)