ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY FUNDING SOURCES FOR SCHOOLS

Once an educational team has determined a student's assistive technology needs, they are often faced with the dilemma of how to fund both the AT products and AT training needed.   Although schools receive federal funding for students who qualify for special education, AT needs may surpass the available budget.   Schools are free to seek out and use funding from other sources including Medicaid, vocational rehabilitation and community funding as long as the process does not delay the provision of services needed. Parents may have a desire to assist in seeking additional funding sources; however, according to IDEA, school districts may not require parents to pay for AT, or require them to seek out Medicaid, private insurance or other funding sources.

The University of Washington's *Center of Technology and Disability*, has written an extensive funding manual, which is available online at:
uwctds.washington.edu/resources/legal/funding%20manual/index.htm

Abledata has also developed *The Funding Resource Center*, which lists organizations at the national, state, and local levels that provide funding for the purchase of assistive products or are sources of funding-related information.
www.abledata.com/abledata.cfm?pageid=113573&top=16040&ksectionid=19326

The following is a list of possible funding sources that may be available to schools independently or in coordination with families:

Philanthropic and Community Organizations:

Nearly every community has local resources that may provide funding for technology. It may take some creativity and patience, but with some persistence, these "hidden treasures" can be found. Organizations are usually eager to help those right in their own backyard.

- **Church affiliated groups**
- **Elks Club Lodges** - www.elks.org/lodges/default.cfm
- **Easter Seals** - www.easter-seals.org
- **Lions Clubs International** - www.lionsclubs.org/EN/index.shtml#
- **Foundation Center** - www.foundationcenter.org The Foundation Center's mission is to strengthen the nonprofit sector by advancing knowledge about U.S. philanthropy. The center is said to maintain the most comprehensive database on US grant-makers and their grants.
- **United Cerebral Palsy** - www.ucp.org
- **Muscular Dystrophy Association -** www.mdausa.org

The local business community and private foundations can also be another excellent source of grants and donation of reliable, highly usable technology. Making connections with local businesses, taking students to visit local businesses, as well as expressing the needs of our students may spark more community involvement in funding AT.

State and Federal Funding

- **Safety Net Funding -** www.k12.wa.us/SpecialEd/SafetyNet.aspx
  Safety-Net Funding is available to districts that have a greater percentage of children with special needs, or children with special needs who have higher-cost programs.   Assistive Technology is often critical to the education of these students. There are specific guidelines on the allocation of Safety Net Funds which can be viewed on the website of the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI).
- **Department of Services for the Blind (DSB) -** www.wa.gov/dsb
  206-721-4056 (TTY)
- **Medical Assistance Administration (MAA) -** fortress.wa.gov/dshs/maa
  maa.dshs.wa.gov/index.html - 800-562-3022

Additional consideration for funding AT for students 18-21

The transition planning process begins around ages 14-16. IEP teams can begin gathering information relevant to a student's future vocational interests. By age 18 the team may assist the students with connecting to agencies such as DVR and SSA, agencies that may assist with AT purchases as they relate to employment for self-support.

- **Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) -** www1.dshs.wa.gov/dvr
  800-637-5627
  DVR is a division of the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) that assists adults with disabilities in obtaining and maintaining employment. DVR works in partnership with community and business to develop employment opportunities and provides work related training and support to individuals. DVR may pay for assistive devices for graduating students whose disabilities result in substantial barriers to employment**.**
- **Social Security Administration -** www.ssa.gov
  800-722-1213
  The Social Security Administration (SSA) is a federal program set up to provide financial assistance to persons who are disabled and have little or no income.   If the SSA approves a Plan for Achieving Self-Support (PASS), the student is then able to set aside income to be used toward a specific vocational goal, which may include AT equipment.

Funding Tips

- Know your funding Source: Many funding sources have a unique set of funding criteria, as well as language that may be useful in requesting funding. To improve your chances of success, research your funding sources prior to writing a request.
- Make personal contact: If you happen to know anyone in an organization, making personal contact is the best way to tap into community resources. If not, a well-constructed letter, describing what you need, why you need it and how it will benefit the student is the next best way to get your foot in the door. Include photos with the letter.