

Assistive Technology Funding Search Tips



Many of the funding inquiries that [JAN](#) receives deal with assistive technology. Questions range from people looking for product distributors to finding resources to purchase products. JAN is committed to providing up-to-date information on funding and product resources; however, the cost of some assistive technology can be surprisingly high. Sometimes the best or only way to fund the purchase of assistive technology is by relying on more than one source. The following information summarizes some helpful hints for funding assistive technology and obtaining specialized services.

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY FUNDING SEARCH TIPS

**This information has been edited with permission from its original source:
Assistive Technology Project of United Cerebral Palsy of Chicago, IL
Infinitec, Inc.'s "Finding the Money"**

- The number one tip when searching for funding is to know your rights under the law. Laws passed by the national and state legislatures, court decisions, and agency regulations have impacted assistive technology funding sources.
- Learn about the best strategies for approaching funding sources. Recognize that you must become your own best advocate or the best advocate for your child, patient, employee, friend, etc. Knowledge is power and the deeper your involvement, the better chance you have of finding resources.
- Know your specific and exact technology needs. You may need the help of a professional or assistance from a cross-disciplinary team of professionals who can assess your needs, suggest an appropriate device, and clearly describe in writing how that device would be effective. You are looking for an occupational therapist, physical therapist, speech pathologist and/or rehabilitation engineer who is qualified and experienced with assistive technology. You can find these experts by asking other people in similar situations. You may even ask your doctor or hospital, contact a professional society, and attend support groups. Local, state, or national non-profit disability organizations may provide referrals.
- During the process of assessing your needs, ask questions, and offer plenty of input. A trial of a recommended device is essential. If you can borrow the device for a "real-life" trial at home, school, or work, you can determine its effectiveness. There are technology resource centers that may loan equipment. Some equipment suppliers or manufacturers also make "try-before-you-buy" equipment loans. A local Independent Living Center may also assist you with referrals.
- If one piece of equipment works better for you than another, document the superiority of the preferred device. Take notes and take photos. You may even want to make a video. You should also document functioning with and without the recommended device, showing how it makes a difference. You may need this "evidence" when seeking funding.
- Sources of funding for assistive technology may be public or private. Public sources include all agencies that are funded and operated by national, state, or local governments. Private sources include private insurance companies and special no- or low-interest loan programs from private lenders. Loans may be arranged by a government agency or by a technology manufacturer.
- In addition to the most common sources of funding for assistive technology, other sources might include: the US Veterans Administration which serves armed forces veterans, the Social Security Administration's PASS (Plan To Achieve Self-Support) program for people receiving SSI or SSDI, your state's Workers Compensation program if the disability was caused by a work-related injury, non-profit disability organizations, and civic or service organizations serving your community (Lions Club,

VFW, Rotary Club, etc.). Some individuals have also had success working with local service groups, churches, labor unions, or school organizations to stage fund-raisers in their communities.

- The way in which you plan to use a device will dictate your funding options. If a device is necessary to a student's highest functioning in the least-restrictive school setting, then the school should write the need for the device into the student's IEP (Individualized Education Plan) or IFSP (Individualized Family Service Plan) and fund the device. If the device is necessary for work, your state's division of vocational rehabilitation should help. If the device is medically necessary (essential to attaining or maintaining health or to replace lost or non-functioning body parts), private insurance, Medicare, or Medicaid come into play. If a device is necessary to enable a person to live outside an institution, a different government program may be the source of funding. There are many overlapping funding sources; tailoring your needs will increase your probability of success. For example, you are more likely to get a school rather than an insurer to fund an education-related device.
- Each funding source has its own requirements and eligibility rules. Learn the rules and follow them. Funding can be denied simply because an applicant forgot to sign a form. If you find a funding source's rules confusing, seek help from an experienced advocate or insist on a complete explanation.
- Supplement funding application forms with additional information, such as a brochure, video, or photo. It may be a good idea to hand in your application package in person and have an agency or insurance company employee check your submission to make sure you have covered everything.
- Document contact names and call regularly to check on the process of your application for funding. Write down the date, the name(s) of the person with whom you spoke, and what was discussed.
- Keep copies of all correspondence. If an appeal process becomes necessary, your records will be important. Be patient; however, make it clear that you are very involved and serious about your application. Be persistent. If a funding request is denied, ask the agency or insurance company for the reason for denial in writing. If the denial was based on a mistake, misunderstanding, or lack of information, fix the problem and resubmit your application. If you are still denied funding, determine what you must do to appeal the denial and stick with the process. If needed, work with an advocate. If you are dealing with a government agency, you may contact your state or federal legislators and ask them to contact the funding agency on your behalf.
- Find an outside advocate, especially if you are new to the funding game. Many assistive technology manufacturers employ funding coordinators who can be quite helpful. Disability groups, advocacy groups, parent support groups, other people with disabilities or their family members, teachers, and therapists can help you determine your best course of action. If necessary, these contacts may help you find someone to speak on your behalf.
- If you feel a funding source is not giving you a fair hearing and that your rights are being violated, obtain legal counsel. If you cannot afford an attorney, contact your local Legal Aid Society. In the best of all possible worlds, the process of locating funding for assistive technology would not become adversarial. In reality, however, it may. Do not be intimidated. Get someone on your side who knows the law.

The GOLDEN RULE OF FUNDRAISING is that YOU NEVER KNOW UNTIL YOU ASK. Good luck with your search and please call the Job Accommodation Network for additional funding resources and general disability-related questions.

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