



Cloudsplitter Foundation Grants Advisor Program

Cloudsplitter Foundation offers a Grants Advisor program to support the grants work of nonprofits and other organizations of the greater Adirondack region. The goals are a) to increase the number of grant dollars coming to nonprofits, especially from outside the Blue Line; b) to strengthen grants programs and nonprofits' appeal to donors via general organizational capacity building and fundraising professionalism. Participating nonprofits gain this coaching service – valued at approximately \$7000/org/year – gratis thanks to the Foundation's innovative leaders. Through this process, nonprofits may establish groundwork to secure more funding and foster new relationships with funders. Since it was launched in late 2019, the program has facilitated 1057 grant proposals valued at \$64 million, resulting in more than \$19 million in awards to 70 local organizations.

Cloudsplitter accepts applications from eligible organizations who wish to participate in the Grants Advisor program. Each organization commits to spending between 12-18 months working with the Advisor to apply for grants, focusing in part on more competitive and larger grants. Along the way, they discuss issues that may also enhance their ability to attract funding, such as good governance and board leadership, strategic plans, strong communications, and diversified funding streams. To support about 10 organizations at a time, the Grants Advisor:

THE CLOUDSPLITTER FOUNDATION'S GRANTS ADVISOR PROGRAM CAME TO ADIRONDACK ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE AT A PIVOTAL TIME FOR OUR SMALL NONPROFIT, AS THE FOUNDING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR WAS RETIRING. KARA'S INSIGHT, ASSISTANCE, AND ENCOURAGEMENT PROVIDED A CRITICAL BRIDGE IN THE TRANSITION, WHILE ALSO EMPOWERING EXISTING STAFF TO UNDERTAKE THEIR OWN GRANT WRITING. IN THE TIME THAT WE WORKED WITH KARA, AARCH RECEIVED OVER \$750,000 IN GRANTS FROM FEDERAL AND PRIVATE SOURCES. NOW WE ENCOURAGE COLLEAGUE NONPROFITS TO APPLY FOR THIS FANTASTIC CAPACITY-BUILDING PROGRAM. – ERIN TOBIN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, AARCH

1. Invites interested groups to apply, via the Adirondack Nonprofit Network (ANN) list and/or through past Cloudsplitter Foundation grantees.
2. Ideal candidates typically have one or two employees with limited fundraising experience. However, the broad program content can be adapted to serve a range of organizations with a focus on each group's stated needs. In addition, selected groups will have a mission serving Cloudsplitter Foundation (CF) key interest areas and populations, such as building community, enhancing quality of life, expanding opportunities for low-income residents, and more. Groups without the time to commit to the program, or whose mission differs greatly, or who need different services, may not be a good fit. We maintain a waiting list as well.
3. Before beginning the program work, new groups complete a "pre-program checklist" sharing basic information about their status and needs with the Grants Advisor, and an MOU spelling out the roles and expectations of the advisor and the organization. The organization identifies a small team to be part of the process; often an executive director or development director, board member, and additional staff person; this ensures that if one person leaves, others can carry on with best practices in their grants work. A new cohort typically starts meeting with the Grants Advisor in January or July, continuing every two or three weeks.
4. The Advisor guides this team as they:
 - a. Think strategically about grants as a part of overall fundraising
 - b. Research grant opportunities and find a "fit"
 - c. Cultivate foundations
 - d. Draft / edit grant applications
 - e. Submit online applications
 - f. Consider other grant-related issues and methods of sustaining a nonprofit organization

- In each meeting, the team reports on their tasks, shares the status of grants, identifies ways to strengthen their approach going forward, and discusses related issues. They use a “Grant Tracker” (table) to organize the discussion, focusing on the upcoming deadlines and application needs for each opportunity. Between meetings, they share drafts and questions by email.
 - The Grants Advisor provides resources including grant writing tips; templates for grant narratives, budgets, and letters of support; grant research; fundraising training; nonprofit development guidebooks; introductions to potential partner organizations; a subscription to the New York Council on Nonprofits; and so on.
 - As the team analyzes what worked and what did not with each grant, the group assesses related issues, such as how and when to follow up with donors, planning fundraising over the course of a year, reporting, board functioning, and more. If the organization determines that skill-building in one of these areas is needed, they may apply for the Foundation’s *Capacity Building Mini Grant* for additional support. The Advisor participates in the Adirondack Nonprofit Network planning group, so can also channel trending needs into free webinar training for the sector.
- ### Capacity Building Mini Grant - Pilot Program Early “Returns”

I. Adirondack Center for Loon Conservation: Training in Individual Fundraising

ACLC has had no formal fundraising strategy since its inception in 2017. Like many small nonprofits, resources were tight and staff did the best they could to keep the organization and its mission moving forward but had to rely on events to raise cash versus employing proven strategies to connect donors to our mission. This grant from Cloudsplitter Foundation enabled two staff members to enroll in Veritus Academy Classes: one for Major Donors and the other for Mid-Level Donors. Year-to-date donations are measurably improved from the same period last year; and, we now understand how to create a sustainable fundraising strategy that should help sustain the organization, reduce our reliance on events, and improve cash flow.

II. Adirondack Economic Development Corporation: Private Investment / Fundraising Training

Through Cloudsplitter Foundation’s support we were able to bring a professional consultant team to Saranac Lake to provide a half day training to our board of directors and team members regarding development of private investment dollars and resources into our organization. This came at a critical time as several of our long-standing publicly supported programs are under real threat. This was an important step in building our board culture toward private investment and individual participation toward these resources. Without Cloudsplitter Foundation we would not have been able to support the full cost of this activity.
- Periodically, the group revisits the MOU to discuss how the work is going and adapt as needed. Occasionally, it may be necessary for the Advisor or organization to “pause” their work together on the program; if appropriate, the Advisor can then fill this slot with another group from the wait list. To wrap up the collaborative work, the group reviews the body of learning and skill-building accomplished during the program and identifies any remaining questions. The Advisor supplies a full “Grant Tracker,” with hyperlinks directly to funder guidelines, covering the work period. This allows the organization to build relevant due dates into their fundraising calendar easily. They also receive all copies of draft and final narratives, budgets, and other grant materials, which can form the basis for future applications. Groups can reach out for occasional support thereafter. Finally, the Advisor checks in a year or so later, to assess outcomes over time.
 - Impacts of the Grants Advisor program, according to participants, typically include: increased and more diverse funding; a stronger understanding of the skills and investment needed to sustain a nonprofit through grants and individual fundraising; a regular habit of grants work built into a group’s annual calendar; a shift in perception about the funder-nonprofit relationship from one of supplication to partnership; clearer writing and budgeting abilities; and clarity on the importance of solid and strategic organizational development to funding success.