

THE AWESOME IEA Podcast

Episode 6: SCORE Grants

K: *Welcome to the AWESOME IEA Podcast brought to you by the Illinois Education Association.*

D: The podcast for curious well-informed association members.

K: I'm one of your hosts, Kelsey Harms, Computer Specialist from the IEA Program Development Department

D: And I'm Diana Zaleski, one of your Instructional Resource and Professional Development Directors from IEA Teaching and Learning.

K: The goal of this podcast is to educate our members about important new educational policy initiatives in a brief and *hopefully* entertaining format.

D: Today we are going to discuss SCORE Grants with our special guest Meredith Byers, IEA Early Career and Student Director. Meredith, thanks so much for being with us today.

M: Hi ladies, thanks for having me as a guest. I'm happy to be here.

D: So, tell us, what are SCORE Grants?

M: SCORE grants are grants of no more than \$1000 for IEA members that want to do a volunteering or community service project in their school or community and they have varied throughout the years, several different topics and proposals have been successfully funded.

K: Meredith, can you tell us what SCORE stands for?

M: Yes, that's a good question Kelsey. So the SCORE acronym is aligned to school and community outreach by educators.

K: So what does that mean? Who does these?

M: We have a project team that meets biweekly to help recipients and then especially in this period where the application window is open. We also have an advisory group that reviews the applications once they've been submitted. In terms of who might apply for a SCORE grant, any member within their first ten years of membership is eligible to apply. Pairs and trios have applied together as well and this is a great opportunity for people to collaborate within their buildings. We've have many great ideas that are featured on our website. So if you're thinking about applying I hope that you'll review those to see if something similar might be on your mind.

D: Great, so why is IEA encouraging early career members to create opportunities for community service and school projects?

M: SCORE grants first began in 2013 in response to member surveys. Since then it has been clear many members have creative ideas about how to make a positive impact above and beyond the regular school day. There are so many unmet needs today in public schools. IEA realizes members have unique talents that we want to recognize as association service; and members with various interests in meeting these community needs or school needs can make a difference. An additional benefit of earning a SCORE grant

is the positive publicity in that it helps the community understand what an educator's workday looks like. We do more than just spend our time in classrooms from 8 to 3 and many of these projects are happening after school or on weekends.

K: So Meredith, how do early career members apply?

M: We are so proud that many members have told us we are the first grant they've ever applied for and that they find the online application we offer very user friendly. The online application is posted on our website. It provides online fields for contact information and also for further description of the project you have in mind. There is also a video submission possibility as well and we've had several members submit YouTube videos and others have posted videos on sharing sites where they describe the project and feature testimonials from students or parents or colleagues; and that always catches the eye of the review committee.

D: Speaking of the review committee, who evaluates the applications and what criteria is used to evaluate them?

M: We have an advisory group that reviews the applications which includes members, leaders, and staff. I've recused myself from that role because I really do like to help members who are thinking about applying and sort of formatting their ideas or wanting to know if it would even be eligible. My roles has been to get the applications ready to review by that group but then really to serve as the contact for applicants and recipients once they've been selected.

We do have a rubric that's posted and anyone that applies we suggest looking at the rubric ahead of time. The rubric is divided into several parts around significance of the project to impact the community, making sure to share some data about the needs of the school that you'd like to meet as a result of this project proposal - such as knowing how many of the students receive free or reduced lunch in the building, that would be something helpful to list on your application.

The rubric also tracks the projected involvement of others. This really should be about a group initiative, we don't want it to be about a single teacher and their classroom. Maybe a grade level project or an entire association. For instance we've had an entire association volunteer before with a food pantry rather than a single teacher having students do the volunteering. Really spending time together as colleagues. Having the entire association do that was a very welcome idea. Communication is included in the rubric as well and then just following the overall directions and providing all the information requested in the online fields.

These are funded through the IEA Foundation and the Foundation receives grants and other donations from individual donors, but really your region council as members provides a lot of the donations to the Foundation. And that region council donation is really your dues dollars coming back to you. I really encourage you if you have an idea but you're not quite sure, spend some time thinking about it and contact me. Like you said Kelsey, I'm really happy to try to make sure that their project is eligible and selected by the committee.

K: So if there is someone who is not an early career member but they also want to get involved, how can they do that?

M: We have had several veteran members be interested in a project, maybe something that has happened over several years that's a tradition of the school or district, something like that and then they meet a newer member by being his or her mentor and they collaborate together on the project. Sometimes the newer member has the idea and is looking for association support around it. But the more work members have done in advance to get buy-in around the project, the more likely it is that the committee selects them because they want to see as much involvement as possible to make a difference in that volunteering activity or whatever it may be.

K: Do you have any projects off the top of your head that you'd like to highlight? Or great ideas that you've seen throughout the years that might spark ideas. I know there are videos on the website but I didn't know if you had anything else for people who are driving and interested that you want to share too.

M: Sure, I'll describe a couple of projects. I do encourage people to go to the website because the projects are organized by local association and by topic of the project into a few main ideas such as community partnerships, this would be a member or association that partners with a not-for-profit in the community such as providing after school tutoring or a Boys and Girls Club.

We also have some fine arts or outdoors projects, STEM projects, and what we call enrichment projects. One of my favorite projects has to do with purchasing musical instruments. A choir or band teacher may apply for money to purchase a class set of ukuleles and then the ukuleles are used by students not just during the instructional day but then are used to perform community concerts maybe at a retirement home or in a park or something like that. So there must be a community component, it can't just be the teacher teaching ukulele in his or her music class. There has to be some component of then taking that equipment out into the community and making it useful so that there is that intergenerational aspect that I mentioned with the retirement home or working with the park district to try and get featured on their summer concert agenda or something like that.

I think that's a great way to lay the foundation of teachers being visible in the community to show our work as educator goes above and beyond an 8 to 3 type of schedule. Another project that we had helped fund in the past would be association members sponsoring either some sort of Girls Who Code club or Girls On The Run club. There were several association members together who volunteer their time to be a club sponsor but then use the funding to either have the students be entered into contests and things like that. Almost like the educators are mentoring the female students, not profiting themselves obviously from the grant money, but spending the money on the students to be able to participate in coding activities or learn about that or also participate in a sort of Girls On The Run contest initiatives and fitness.

K: So when somebody wins a SCORE Grant, I think I've seen them in pictures with giant checks. Does that happen all the time?

M: We do like to take pictures of our members with that life size check, similar to if we were presenting you with Publishers Clearing House winnings or something like that and it's been very positive press. From bringing the checks to school board meetings or having that group who applied together be featured. Parents love that big check photo op. It's just something to sort of give the pat on the back to the recipient but also to help the larger school or community understand what the program is all about and see that this is the association investing back in the school and community. This is a way of

partnering and a way of making that school or community better off as a result of the teacher earning those grant dollars.

K: So really raising awareness of what great work our members are doing.

M: And they are. We've had teacher members, ESP members, higher ed members all earn grants in the past with very unique ideas. More than 300 grants have been earned at this point, it's been such a privilege to review the applications, get to know the recipients, and then really have the recipients get to know each other. Once you earn the grant we ask that you connect with other members around the state.

K: Awesome. Is there anything else you think our members need to know about SCORE Grants?

M: A couple things, so we are going to have an open application cycle. Applications are open now. They are being accepted through the 2018-19 school year but the first time we'll review the applications is at the end of July. Any applications submitted between today and July 15 will be reviewed and the news will be back to you before the school year begins, so you'll know if your proposal was accepted. If you have an idea into the fall or after the school year begins we encourage you to apply anytime from July 15 when that first window closes to and January 21, 2019. They'll be another review cycle then at the end of January and we hope that there will be other opportunities to work on applications together but more importantly this gives us time to help members understand this great opportunity and apply.

One more thing I would add in that looking at some of the descriptions there really does have to be some sort of partnership in advance. We've turned down many applications simply because they were request for field trips or instructional materials. There's even a part on the application that asks for documentation of if you've contacted a not-for-profit or other colleagues that would be participating so that the committee knows there is an assurance that other people will be involved. It's not simply a single individual's idea that it's really about IEA members volunteering together.

So if you're thinking about a field trip or instructional materials, we know there is a lot of need for those, but this probably isn't the right match for you unless you can somehow tie it to a community event or create some sort of service or volunteering event, and I would be happy to brainstorm those kind of ideas with you.

D: Great, thanks so much Meredith. If you have any questions, comments, or feedback, please check out the contact section on the Podcast page on the IEA Website.

K: We will also post some helpful links about SCORE Grants in the show notes section on the Podcast Page.

D: Thanks so much for being a member, and thanks for joining us!