

Locating Strategic Research Funds for Sexuality Science: An Exploratory Guide

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Introduction

The field of sexuality research comprises a wide array of both sensitive and less-sensitive topical areas. Many of these topics involve relatively uncomfortable issues, which cause some individual's considerable consternation as well as awkwardness. Added to this uneasiness are differing political views, social dynamics and of course morality.

Sexologist sexuality educators, counselors well as therapists all deal with this sometimes uncomfortable climate in their own fashion. Regardless of position or specialty interest individuals who wish to conduct research on sexuality normally must seek out support and funding. This pursuit can be not only frustrating but also challenging due to the political atmosphere currently prevailing in the country today. In order to effectively negotiate this political terrain researchers seeking funds need to search the internet with an equal measure of both perseverance as well as strategy.

Purpose

This paper outlines a variety of strategies for achieving this goal. Researchers both new and seasoned often have similar difficulties finding support for their research interests. Part of this difficulty is related to not knowing precisely where funding for different areas may exist. Moreover many investigators do not have a process or strategy configured ahead of time that would permit them to efficiently search the internet and web for needed support.

This paper attempts to provide researchers with a very general and basic process for conducting such a search. It needs noting that URL's (Uniform Resource Locators) regularly change and that following these modifications can be challenging. Relatedly, many sites often require computer capacity and compatibility which some individuals may not possess. Regardless, the basic information shared in this report is intended to help investigators locate an array of funding opportunities for their research interests. To this end and therefore to search efficiently individuals should ask themselves two crucial questions.

First Question: Sensitivity

Investigators should ideally start with the question: "what is the sensitivity level of my particular research area?" If a researcher wishes to investigate, for example, "health risks of engaging in BDSM", searching federal, or state and even local health sources is probably not going to be successful. Such agencies normally do not fund such relatively sensitive inquiry. Conversely, a wide variety of private organizations and foundations may be quite interested in such research if it advances knowledge and safer practices among the

population who practice such unique sexual activities. Federal, state and local entities do, however, normally have funds available for less sensitive topics such as preventive programs in the domain of teenage pregnancy. Regardless of sensitivity, fundors will award support only if the application demonstrates that a benefit will accrue to the designated recipients (i.e., families, parents, young people, community).

[Table 1](#) lists a brief and very generalized typology of selected entities, which have a philosophical division/orientation by level of sensitivity. As is shown and with the probable exception of San Francisco and a very few other municipalities (South Beach, Greenwich Village, Hollywood), most city government agencies are normally charged with supporting mostly less-sensitive topics. A search around their sites will most likely not turn up opportunities for grants addressing things like “transgender issues”, “gay/lesbian psychosexual research” or “paraphilia-related behavior.” However, such fundors will have links to sites with opportunities in areas such as “STD control”, “HIV prevention”, “abstinence education” and “condom usage.” Researchers may well enhance their search for grants if they first answer the question of their topics sensitivity level. While the gray area here is sometimes quite large, investigators need to get some approximation of how sensitive their specified area of interest actually may be. If they do not, they may spend time looking for grant competitions in an area (i.e., autoerotic control mechanisms) that is certainly not going to receive consideration.

Second Question: Scope

Once an investigator has estimated the relative sensitivity of their research topic, s(he) should estimate the size and scope that their research will entail. Small sample sizes ($N < 100$) and limited research scope (e.g., time, resources required etc) generally suggests targeting private philanthropics, centers, foundations, institutes and smaller scale agencies. Even though the research planned may be of small stature some larger governmental entities such as the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as well as the National Service Foundation (NSF), also routinely sponsor funding competitions for “new investigators” or “Early Career Awards” that support smaller-scale research projects.

While both these questions may leave a significant area of uncertainty in the eyes of the researcher, they do help get the search for financial support initiated. Additionally, researchers with access to major public universities, especially “Research 1” level institutions can go to the institutions research office and obtain a wide array of materials designed to help all researchers apply for funding. Unfortunately, for investigators not employed by the university there is rarely any support beyond sharing materials. Moreover, even if one is affiliated there are few administrative support staff knowledgeable about or comfortable with many sexuality topics. In the final analysis we are left with our own creativity, perseverance and collaboration in order to find and be awarded necessary research support.

Selected URL's

The following section lists a wide variety of URL's and describes what relative sensitivity and size/scope each funder may be soliciting. It is in no way meant to be exhaustive or even authoritative. Rather it is offered as a first starting point for sexuality researchers to explore financial opportunities related to their work and inquiry. Note: less sensitivity implies the fundor has a conservative orientation toward certain sexuality topics.

* Centers for Disease Control & Prevention : <http://www.cdc.gov> The home page lists numerous categories for research. At SEARCH box : type in “sexuality education grants” and 334 hits show in .2 secs. Sensitivity level is relatively low but the range of topics they will support in the generalized area of sexuality is very expansive. Beginning investigators should always consider the CDC because of its range as well as its flexible scope: there are numerous opportunities for smaller-scale projects.

* The Chronicle of Philanthropy : <http://philanthropy.com> Lists a wide range of funding areas mostly conservative in orientation. Researchers will need to explore this site with an eye out for areas that improve social conditions. While sexuality is not specifically emphasized creative researchers may find a way to link improvements in sexuality to improvements in human social conditions.

* The Gates Foundation : <http://www.gatesfoundation.org>

While the priority areas here are many aimed toward educational research and training, there are program opportunities for areas in sexuality that link with improved academic success. Foundations like Gates tend toward less sensitive topics but not exclusively.

* Kinsey Institute: <http://www.kinseyinstitute.org/resources/grants.html>

As the pioneering Institute for progressive sexuality research in the nation, Kinsey remains a strong source for all varieties of sexual inquiry. Its site links researchers to a wide array of opportunities across a wide array of scope and size.

* The ISIS Fund : <http://www.womenshealthresearch.org>

An innovative and progressive entity focusing mainly on “sex-based biology” topics. As might be inferred this type of orientation leaves a significant amount of latitude for describing research aims across a wide area (i.e., homosexual research, hormonal influences on behavior, gender role & identity ...). Scope and size are also flexible.

* American Foundation for Addiction Research : <http://www.addictionresearch.com>

This foundation sponsors their own “Research Grant Program” where a variety of topics are funded: sex offending, sex addiction inquiry and related topics with a progressive orientation. Requested size and scope are varied.

* Athena Institute : <http://www.Athenainstitute.com>

Another less well known entity with a strong and progressive orientation toward women’s health, sexual health and vital sexual functioning.

* National Institutes of Health : <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide>

NIH is so massive that most beginning researchers will probably shy away from trying to locate grant support. Yet many of the less progressive federal agencies DO have early career awards competitions and/or new investigator awards which have more flexibility in what they’ll fund.

* National Science Foundation : <http://www.nsf.gov>

The National Science Foundation has been a mainstay for physical scientists searching for grant support for many years. In the past five years, however, it has expanded its normally conservative orientation to support more sensitive areas of science, including biological, behavioral and educational hypotheses in the area of human sexuality. It has a vast listing of grant competitions that include both small and larger in scope.

* CastroOnline.com : <http://www.ggba.com/>

The "Castro" in San Francisco is many regards the premier gay social activist community in the nation. Despite the fact that they do not appear to have a formal grant support system for researchers, they do list a "Doing Business" link where various "members" and "politics" links are shown and who have interests in helping with specific GLBT initiatives. Sensitivity here is irrelevant of course (the conservative among us will not want to open this site), but scope of support is quite small. Go to "Doing Business" -> then to "Politics" and follow the links.

* Yes Institute of South Beach Miami : <http://www.gaysouthbeach.com>

The east coast counterpart of Castro is Miami’s South Beach area. Their site lists the Yes Institute which supports small-scale efforts in the areas of suicide prevention and related topics. Go to the SEARCH box and type in your interest area and see what they turn up. If that does not work, go to the links "statistics & research" and/or "resources & referrals".

Both Castro and South Beach are community-based organizations with little financial wealth or endowment to share with researchers. Despite their austerity there are small opportunities from time to time that beginning researchers in GLBT areas should canvass. One can never tell where support networks may emerge and lend some kind of support.

For the truly intrepid -> <http://www.top-grant-sites-reviewed.com>

It goes without saying that a large number of entrepreneurs exist on the Internet who claim to be able to get us all "funding". This site is one of many that state "apply for government grants, free, on any topic worthwhile". One hundred and forty-eight grant programs are reviewed for beginning investigators who wish some "free money". There are numerous federal grant programs evaluated by these individuals and multiple links to others. It is always worth a look to see what such sources are claiming and how their links sort out. One never knows.

Key Search Descriptors

The search for grants in our area of science is not easy. Many of our topical areas are less-than-well received in conservative sectors and they frequently are the ones who have the financial support. This paper has hopefully provided investigators with some new insights on how to possibly enhance this pursuit. While individual researchers have their own ways for searching the internet the following descriptors may help their search.

Admittedly, ones specific area of interest (i.e., erotic tendencies in the disabled) will often dictate the first descriptors entered. However, since no perfectly effective and reliable set of descriptors exist across all areas, the following may be of assistance:

- sexual science
- sexuality research ...+ grants
- sexuality research funding
- sex research
- sexology .. + grants
- sexuality + biological + grants
- sexual response + behavior + grant
- sexuality education research
- sexuality information research + funding

Table 1 Selected Funding Sources I > Sensitivity , II < Sensitivity

I. > Major Universities; Gay/Lesbian/TG orgs; Sex Counseling orgs; Sex Therapy orgs; Sex Education & Information org ; Liberal Philanthropics / Institutes / Centers; Liberal City / State gov; Liberal Religious orgs ..

II. < Federal agencies; State / County agencies; school districts; Conservative Philanthropics / Institutes / Centers .. Conservative Universities, Colleges

Additional Sources to Assess

It can be assumed that sexuality researchers intuitively know to search the following web sites to locate possibilities for support :

Federal Register (< sensitive) Right To Life (< sensitive...www.rtlc.org) Planned Parenthood and Right To Choose (> sensitivity.. www.plannedparenthood.org/vox and same /global -> for international research exchanges

SSSS .. AASECT .. SIECUS ...

Numerous others exist of course but these sites are easily navigated with minimal time and effort. If the investigator knows what s(he) requires to conduct the research (and its sensitivity & relative scope), these sites allow a quick assessment.

A Note on Private Benefactors & Funds

Planned Parenthood recently reported on the awarding of a \$2,000.00 grant to a team of sex educators from the "ANDRE WAGNER PEACE TRUST ", to conduct research and preventive sexuality outreach in St. Kitts, Carribean. While this amount does not appear significant, to beginning investigators focused on getting a research record started, it is a sound beginning they can expand from in future applications.

Philanthropics abound in the country but not many appear interested in sexuality research and prevention unless it is relatively mainstream (< sensitive). Still a number of these are worth surfing. Among them are :

Open Society Institute, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Levi Strauss Foundation, Global Fund for Women, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation ...

Moreover, if one has a research idea of considerable scope and sensitivity is not too far "left", the nations Research Centers are an excellent source of funding support. Among the most diverse and flexible are the University of Michigan's Survey Research Center (SRC) in Ann Arbor (www.isr.umich.edu/) and the University of Chicago's National Opinion Research Center (NORC) (www.norc.uchicago.edu/).

The SRC offers, for example, the Charles Cannell Fund in Survey Methods. More established sexuality researchers interested, for example, in the difficulties of conducting sound surveys of "unique sexual populations", could possibly find support with a strong proposal to this group. Added to this is the A. Regula Herzog Young Investigators Award. Newer researchers should see what types of competitions this group routinely offers. Sample competitions as of March 06 include :

“Youth & Social Issues” , “Social Environment & Health” , “Life Course Development” , and “ Social Indicators”.

In the final analysis, locating funding support for sex-related topics is not an easy journey. The team that puts the final application together should keep in mind that competition for grants is keen in nearly all sectors and having “sex” in the title only makes it more of a gamble. Despite these caveats sexologists, sex therapists, sex counselors and sex researchers across a wide expanse of sexuality have continued to find financial and other support for their work. The principle four correlates of successful grants procurement have historically been and will continue to be:

perseverance, creativity, networks and strategy.