Business Grants for Women

I started researching business grants for women when I decided to start a small home based business in late 2008. I wasn’t sure how long it would take me to create a steady income so I wanted to know what my options were.

I found that most government grants, as well as those funded by non-profits that are tagged as being for women, are often made available only as part of a need to reach an underserved population (like the disabled, minority serving institutions, etc.). For example, when “women” is used as the search term on the government’s national grant website (a great place to find a full list of government grants) the grant titles in the search results rarely have to do with women or business. If women are mentioned specifically, it’s usually for a study related to pregnancy.

Further digging revealed that different counties and cities may offer grants to locally owned businesses, without regard to ownership, that have some payback in terms of economic development. These funds become available fairly randomly, and usually carry some expectation about the improvement of “Main Street.”

I learned that the Small Business Administration hasn’t had any start up grant programs for women since the 1980s. It soon became apparent that “business grants for women” were usually specially packaged and marketed loans for “for profit” initiatives.

After just a few phone calls, I learned about several local resources for entrepreneurs that could not only help me make my way through all the funding options, but would also help me grow my business, provide me with a mentor, and connect me with other small businesses who might need my services. Wow, I thought, maybe all that would get me to a place where I could be self sufficient and wouldn’t need “free money,” much less borrow it.

Here are some of the national and local resources I found:

**The Government funded Small Business Administration (SBA)**, is not a funding source for grants, but does a tremendous amount of financial assistance through a variety of loan programs, including loan guarantees with participating lenders and micro loans. We have several locations here in the Kansas City area.

The Small Business Administration created the Women’s Business Centers specifically for female entrepreneurs. They also are not a funding source, but do provide advice on business planning, financial needs assessment, and information on the different kinds of funding available in the local marketplace. In my town, we have two Centers.

**SCORE** – The Service Corps of Retired Executives a national organization with many local offices that matches industry experts with startups. The mentors are matched with an entrepreneur in their area of expertise.

**KC Sourcelink** is a local non-profit business resource center. It currently being used as a model for a number of national networking organizations.

**The Business Information Center** affiliated with the SBA, is another resource for people trying to build a business. They provide over 200 sample business plans and information on dispelling myths of funding.

For more information on writing grant proposals, consider joining the **Grant Professionals Association**.