

Strategy Funders Want to Fund

How to build a strategy funders see as clear, credible, and worth investing in — for faith-based ministries and nonprofits

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Three questions decide the gift

1 · Is it clear?

What will change, for whom, by when — and how your work causes it.

2 · Is it credible?

Track record, the right people, partners, clean finances, systems to deliver.

3 · Is it worth it?

Measurable results, a fit with their goals, a life after their grant ends.

Write your strategy sentence

Because **[the need, with a number]**, we will **[your strategy]**, so that **[who]** **[changes how]**, measured by **[one indicator]**.

Ministry example: Because [__]% of families near our church report skipping meals, we will pair our food pantry with benefits enrollment, so that 150 households become food-secure within a year.

Nonprofit example: Because [__]% of young adults in our county are out of work and school, we will add paid internships to our job training, so that 60 graduates are employed at 6 months.

Examples are illustrations; bracketed figures are placeholders for your own local data.

Your sentence:

Outputs vs. outcomes

Outputs prove you were busy: boxes given, classes held, people served.

Outcomes prove you mattered: households food-secure, graduates employed, lives changed.

Funders buy outcomes. Show how your outputs get you there.

Three measures to collect from day one

Measure	How you collect it
Reach — who we served	Intake sign-in, ZIP code
Change — who's better off	Same short survey, start and end
Story — what it means	2-3 consented testimonies

Faith-based? Funders invest in the program, not the pulpit.

Give the community program its own name, budget and lead. With direct federal funds you keep your religious identity, but the funds can't pay for worship, religious instruction or proselytizing — offer those separately and keep them voluntary. Check each funder's eligibility rules and confirm with counsel; this is not legal advice.

Fundability scorecard · circle 0 = no, 1 = partly, 2 = yes

#	We have...	Score
1	A one-sentence strategy our board and staff can repeat	0 1 2
2	Local data that proves the need	0 1 2
3	Outcomes (not just outputs) with targets	0 1 2
4	A simple way to collect results from day one	0 1 2
5	A program budget that matches the narrative	0 1 2
6	At least three revenue sources for this program	0 1 2
7	Partners with signed letters or MOUs	0 1 2
8	A short list of funders that pass our go / no-go	0 1 2
	Total	___ / 16

13-16: ready to pitch · **8-12:** tighten first · **0-7:** build the strategy before the ask (*a practical guide*)

Go / no-go: six questions before you apply

- ☐ **Mission:** Do they fund what we already do well?
- ☐ **Place:** Do they give in our city, county or state?
- ☐ **Proof:** Have they funded groups like us? Check their 990.
- ☐ **Eligibility:** Faith-based groups, or only 501(c)(3)s?
- ☐ **Size:** Is the typical award right for our budget?
- ☐ **Capacity:** Can we meet the reporting load?

Three or more “no” answers? Walk away. Saying no is part of a strategy.

Watch for money looking for a mission

Repair and restitution: state and county settlement funds, such as opioid settlement dollars.

Reinvestment obligations: bank community reinvestment; nonprofit hospitals’ community benefit spending.

Community commitments: corporate pledges, developer benefit agreements, “good neighbor” funds.

How settlement funds are distributed varies by state and county.

Your next 30 days

Week 1: Finalize your strategy sentence with your board chair and finance lead.

Weeks 2-3: Fix your two lowest scorecard items — usually outcomes and budget.

Week 4: Screen five funders; pick the two that pass go / no-go.

After the award: report on time, thank personally, invite funders to see the work.

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