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## Navigating Funding Mechanisms to Support Research: A Practical Roadmap for Speech Language Hearing Professionals

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When Maya, a second-year master's student in speech-language pathology, developed an idea for her thesis on bilingual language development, her first reaction was excitement. Her second was hesitation. She wondered how she would pay for participant incentives, transcription support, and conference travel. Across campus, an early-career faculty member was refining a pilot study on technology-supported aphasia treatment and asking similar questions about how to secure preliminary funding. In a local school district, a practicing SLP wanted to evaluate a literacy intervention but was unsure whether clinicians could pursue research grants at all.

These scenarios are common. Funding can feel intimidating and distant, as though it belongs only to senior investigators with long publication records. In reality, funding is a professional skill that develops over time. The individuals who consistently apply are the ones who eventually succeed. Starting early builds confidence, experience, and momentum that shape an entire career.

Seeking funding does more than providing financial support. It strengthens a curriculum vitae, demonstrates initiative, and signals leadership. Receiving an award, even a small one, offers meaningful professional validation. It provides the resources to complete projects that otherwise might just remain ideas. For students and clinicians, it can be the turning point between thinking about research and actually conducting it. The funding landscape becomes much less overwhelming when viewed as a pathway rather than a checklist.

**Starting Close to Home: CAPCSD, ASHA, and Professional Organizations.** One natural starting point is within our own professional community. CAPCSD offers awards that recognize excellence in teaching, leadership, innovation, and student scholarship. These honors elevate both individuals and academic programs, and they signal national engagement in the preparation of future professionals. For students and faculty alike, a CAPCSD award on a CV communicates commitment to advancing communication sciences and disorders.

ASHA provides additional opportunities, including student research travel awards, new investigator grants, clinical research grants, and leadership scholarships. Many of these are available to applicants affiliated with U.S. institutions, although specific eligibility criteria vary. State speech-language-hearing associations also offer research grants and scholarships. These smaller awards are often less competitive and serve as excellent entry points for first-time applicants. For a graduate student or clinician, securing a state-level award can be both affirming and strategically valuable.

**Growing Your Idea: University and Institutional Grants.** Universities themselves are often the most accessible funding source. Internal seed grants, graduate research awards, dissertation fellowships, and diversity initiatives provide critical pilot support. These funds are frequently available to anyone enrolled or employed at the institution, including international

students and faculty on work visas. Although the dollar amounts may be modest, internal awards generate preliminary data and demonstrate feasibility. They show external funders that an institution has already invested in the project.

**Stepping into Federal Funding.** As projects mature, many researchers look to federal agencies. The National Institutes of Health is central for speech-language pathology research. Institutes such as NIDCD, NINDS, NICHD, NIA, and NIMH support work related to communication disorders across the lifespan. NIH offers research project grants, exploratory awards, career development awards, and fellowships. Some mechanisms, such as certain fellowships and career awards, require U.S. citizenship or permanent residency. However, many research project grants allow non-U.S. citizens to serve as principal investigators if they are employed at a U.S. institution. It is essential to review each announcement carefully rather than assuming ineligibility.

The U.S. Department of Education, particularly through the Institute of Education Sciences and the Office of Special Education Programs, funds research and personnel preparation relevant to school-based SLPs. These awards are typically made to institutions, and eligibility is usually tied to employment rather than citizenship. The National Science Foundation supports foundational research in linguistics, cognitive science, neuroscience, and disability studies. Standard research grants are generally open to investigators employed at U.S. institutions, while certain graduate fellowships require citizenship or permanent residency. The Department of Defense funds research through programs focused on traumatic brain injury, autism, and rehabilitation. Again, eligibility varies by program, and institutional affiliation is often the key requirement.

**Private Foundations: Flexible and Impactful.** Beyond federal agencies, private foundations provide important opportunities. Organizations such as the Alzheimer's Association, Autism Speaks, the Parkinson's Foundation, the American Heart Association, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and Patient Centered Outcome Research Institute support clinically relevant and translational research. Many private foundations permit applications from non-citizens working at U.S. institutions, though some career development programs have specific restrictions. These funders often prioritize real-world impact, making them particularly appealing for clinician-researchers.

**Looking Beyond: International and Global Opportunities.** International opportunities also exist. Programs such as Fulbright support global collaboration and require U.S. citizenship. Other international foundations and global health partnerships may be open to U.S.-based investigators regardless of citizenship status, depending on the specific call. For international scholars working in the United States, collaboration across institutions and countries can expand eligibility.

**How to Approach Writing Grants and Scholarships.** Approaching grant writing strategically makes a difference. Begin by studying the mission of the funding organization and clearly connecting your project to its priorities. Write with clarity so that reviewers outside your specialty can understand the importance of the work. Frame your proposal as a story that explains the problem, why it matters, and how your project offers a feasible solution. Provide realistic timelines and demonstrate access to participants or mentorship support. Seek feedback early from advisors or grant offices and follow all submission guidelines carefully. Attention to detail signals professionalism.

**A Final Encouragement: Start Early, Start Small, Start Now.** For students, the most important message is that starting young works. Apply for university scholarships and departmental awards. Seek travel funding to present your work. These early experiences build grant writing skills and confidence. After securing internal recognition, expand outward to state associations

and disorder-specific private organizations aligned with your interests. Each application refines your thinking and strengthens your professional profile. Even unfunded applications demonstrate initiative and engagement.

Funding is not reserved for a small group of established investigators. It is pursued by those who are willing to learn the process and persist. Securing funding strengthens your CV, boosts morale, and provides financial means to move ideas forward. It builds a trajectory that compounds over time.

In communication sciences and disorders, projects that improve lives often begin with a single application. Start early. Start small. Keep applying. The professionals who seek funding are the ones who ultimately receive it, and in doing so, they shape the future of our field.