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Susan Diemert Moch

University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire

Debra A. Jansen

University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire

Rosemary A. Jadack

University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire

Phil Page

Performance Health Brands

Richard Topp

Marquette University

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Susan Diemert Moch

*University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire,
Eau Claire, WI*

Debra A. Jansen

*University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire,
Eau Claire, WI*

Rosemary A. Jadack

*University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire,
Eau Claire, WI*

Phil Page

*Performance Health Brands,
Akron, OH*

Robert Topp

*College of Nursing, Marquette University
Milwaukee, WI*

Abstract: Financial assistance is necessary for sustaining research at universities. Business collaborations are a potential means for obtaining these funds. To secure funding, understanding the process for obtaining these business funds is important for nursing faculty members. Although faculty rarely request funding from businesses, they are often in a position to solicit financial support due to existing relationships with clinical agency

administrators, staff, and community leaders. The economic support received from businesses provides outcomes in nursing research, research education, academic-service partnerships, and client health care. This article describes the steps and processes involved in successfully obtaining research funding from businesses. In addition, case examples for securing and maintaining funding from health care agencies (evidence-based practice services) and from a health manufacturing company (product evaluation) are used to demonstrate the process.

Keywords: business, research support, collaboration, financial support, nursing research, research and development, academic-service, university-clinical agency partnerships, evidence-based practice, undergraduate research education

Whether faculty members are working at a research-intensive university or a non-research-intensive institution, individuals conducting research need funding to engage in scholarship. Funding from businesses can provide an important stream of revenue to sustain a program of research. Collaborations with businesses such as health care agencies and product development companies can support faculty members in conducting research, provide funding for students as future researchers, and enhance the research mission of the university. A variety of different models for this collaboration exist, ranging from fee for service contracts through which private industry outsources some research and development projects to faculty researchers, to faculty researchers providing necessary services such as evidence-based practice activities for clinical agencies, to academics proposing unique ways to utilize industry products or services. Businesses can potentially support both large- and small-scale research projects, including pilot projects that make larger grants more attainable.

As federal funding has become increasingly more challenging to obtain, faculty at all types of settings are competing for federal and nonfederal sources of research support. Data provided by the National Institutes of Health (NIH; n.d.) indicate that in 2010, the total National Institute of Nursing Research (NINR) budget was US\$137,213,000 with 439 applications reviewed and 13.2% (58) of those projects funded for a total of US\$23.5 million. In 2014, the total NINR budget decreased by 6% from 2010 levels to US\$137,213,000 with 11.6% (53) of the 458 proposals submitted/funded for US\$22.5 million (http://www.report.nih.gov/success_rates/Success_ByIC.cfm).

Consequently, more researchers are seeking funding from nonfederal sources, such as small internal grants programs from universities; national, state, and local foundations, and condition/population-specific foundations; and various other community agencies and donors. Due to the increasing competition (Messmer, Zalon, & Phillips, 2014), some national organizations and foundations direct prospective applicants to local funding sources for smaller scale funding needs.

Although all researchers are vying for steadily shrinking resources, principal investigators (PIs) at non-research-intensive settings may be particularly disadvantaged for the large national grants. For instance, guidelines and criteria frequently assign weight to the qualifications of the PI and the degree of support available from the PI's home institution. At non-research-intensive universities, faculty may not have the degree of peer-researcher, leadership, and infrastructure support, including start-up research funding, statistical help, library resources, research space, as well as grant writing and management assistance available at larger research-focused institutions (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2006; Kim, Park, Park, Khan, & Ketefian, 2014; Maas, Conn, Buckwalter, Herr, & Tripp-Reimer, 2009).

With the increasing competition, local health care agencies and businesses need to be considered. Therefore, learning the process of obtaining funding from alternative sources such as businesses is essential. The purpose of this article is to describe the steps and processes for successfully obtaining research funding from businesses. Case examples for supporting research and sustaining funding from business collaborators are also detailed, including funding from health care agencies for evidence-based related services and from a health manufacturing company for product evaluation.

Business Funding Possibilities

Although the case examples in this article include health care agencies and a manufacturing company, many other sources of support exist. For instance, pharmacy, retail, engineering, and software companies represent possible sources of funding for research. Besides asking for monies to pay research personnel or participants, funding can be requested for services, including evaluation, program

development, and change implementation projects, in addition to requests for equipment, software, and health-related products.

Limited research in nursing is available pertaining to research funding with business collaborators. Some areas of health-related business collaborations described in the literature include wound care (Salcido, 2010), rehabilitation care, wellness promotion at work, and drug testing. Other creative descriptions of collaborations include academic–health service partnerships (Granger et al., 2012), entrepreneurialism in research and practice development positions (Darbyshire, Downes, Collins, & Dyer, 2005), and the NIH small business grants. Some funded small business grants include topics such as pain assessment documentation, end-of-life education modules, self-management of heart failure education, and family education for caregivers (McCann et al., 2011). Another idea for funding research includes the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC) model of “pay to participate” (Hickey, Koithan, Unruh, & Lundmark, 2014; Newhouse, 2013).

Securing and maintaining funding from business collaborators are important skills for researchers. Yet skills for obtaining business funds are not readily cultivated in current education programs or within orientation programs for faculty members. The process of securing funding from potential business collaborators involves communicating in a way that is different from the style of communication often engaged in by academics and researchers (Darbyshire et al., 2005).

Steps and Processes for Obtaining Funding From Businesses

The following section outlines five steps and processes involved in obtaining funding from businesses. They emphasize the importance of establishing a relationship, promoting effective communication, and creating mutually beneficial goals and outcomes. The steps are meant to provide guidance in supporting research and sustaining funding (see Table 1). The steps are also later utilized to organize the case examples.

Table 1. Steps for Obtaining Funding From Business Collaborators.

Steps	Processes
1. Establish a research relationship with a business collaborator	Consider businesses with existing relationships Consider creating new relationships with other potential business collaborators Cultivate the research relationships and learn more about the goals and needs of the business
2. Share a concise plan with the business collaborator	Identify own research goals Develop and share initial plan Clarify the priorities and goals of the business Modify the plan to mesh with the priorities and goals of the business Agree upon outcomes and due dates
3. Communicate regularly with the business contact person	Identify business contact person for communication related to the project Agree upon effective communication methods Maintain regular communication
4. Share outcomes in a manner preferred by the business collaborator	Disseminate outcomes in the format needed or desired by the business
5. Plan for the next collaboration	On an ongoing basis, seek feedback and share successes While the project is ongoing, continue to discuss possible future ventures

Step 1: Establish a Research Relationship With a Business Collaborator

Connecting with potential business or clinical agency collaborators may initially seem daunting. However, it is important to establish and create relationships to reach mutually beneficial goals. A researcher may already have a specific business in mind, or may need to explore potential partnerships in the region. For example, faculty members often have established relationships with individuals at businesses through student clinical placements/teaching, clinical work

experiences used to maintain nursing skills and certification, and professional service activities required for promotion and tenure. These existing relationships can be nurtured and grown into fruitful research partnerships.

Establishing relationships during the course of teaching, clinical work, and service allows potential collaborators to become familiar with faculty scholarship. These relationships are often the key to success in business partnerships. The collaborations and mutual interests can be easily negotiated while doing work-related teaching and service. Businesses and agencies are much more likely to fund projects with individuals with whom they are familiar. However, the researcher may need to reach out to businesses with no prior connections. Whether or not they are familiar with individuals at the business, faculty members often need encouragement when seeking funding due to discomfort in asking for money.

Prior to asking businesses or clinical agencies for funds, a degree of cultivation is frequently necessary. During this relationship-building phase, the researcher and business collaborator learn about each other's priorities and goals. Sharing of information can happen through formal and informal interactions, events, and meetings. Examples include bringing potential collaborators to special activities on campus, inviting them to faculty research/scholarship presentations, or being available to present ideas and areas of expertise to potential collaborators at the agencies and places of business. Other examples include providing services to the businesses such as organizing health fairs, creating educational materials, and conducting program evaluations. Cultivating relationships is ongoing and continues throughout the collaboration.

Step 2: Share a Concise Plan With the Business Collaborator

When requesting funding, a potential business collaborator needs to see the researcher's plan, which includes a description of the project, intended goals and outcomes, and proposed costs. Business collaborators frequently prefer plans that are short, approximately one page in length, and clear. Bulleted statements are often appreciated.

This concise style may be counter to the typical manner in which research proposals are written for granting agencies. Requesting assistance from business leaders or university business colleagues in writing the plan can be beneficial. In addition, consulting with the university's grant office in creating the proposed budget is essential, as the office can ensure that university procedures are followed. The amount of funds requested must at a minimum be sufficient to cover project needs and include a brief budget justification. See Table 2 for an example of a concise plan in which project funding was sought from a nursing home.

Table 2. Example of a Concise Plan: Evidence-Based Practice With Health Care Agencies.

Goal of meeting to discuss the collaboration: To describe benefits, outcomes, and necessary interactions for evidence-based practice collaborations in health care agencies and to learn the evidence-based practice needs of the health care agency.

Goal of evidence-based practice projects in health care agencies: To strengthen the use of evidence-based practice in the health care agency according to the needs of the agency.

Process: Meet with a business collaborator to determine needs, develop a plan, identify outcomes, and mutually agree on a plan with the agency. If approved, develop a timeline and agree on funding, and other necessary agreements (confidentiality, publication, data sharing) to proceed. Identify a business contact person and communicate with the person at least once a month.

Definition of evidence-based practice: Evidence-based practice is incorporating research, evidence, best practices, and/or expert knowledge into the care provided through the health care agency.

Examples of projects:

Improving orientation for staff

Decreasing rehospitalization

Individual staff–student collaboration with obtaining evidence

Presenting information requested by staff to all staff members

Measuring outcomes

Identifying creative methods to increase use of research evidence/standards/protocols

Outcomes identified through other collaborations:

Continuing involvement with clinical agencies for many years

Feedback from staff who request information is very positive

Staff anticipated the return of the students following summer break

Positive evaluations for teaching sessions related to dementia and medications

Positive feedback from consultation experts used in the process

Evaluation focus groups with staff members have yielded positive results

Cost:

The funding level is agreed upon between the clinical agency administrator and the researcher

Once the plan is drafted, consideration should be given in identifying the best means of sharing the plan with the business, whether that be through a letter, email, meeting, or a combination of all three. It can be helpful to email the individual at the business to arrange a meeting by a specified date and briefly indicate the purpose of the meeting (to discuss ideas on which to collaborate). At the meeting, the plan can be shared. Sharing the plan may involve a one-to-two minute "elevator speech" in which the most salient ideas are articulated. Having a college administrator present during the funding request meeting can lend support and demonstrate endorsement for the plan.

In the process of sharing the plan with the business, it is important to further learn about the businesses' priorities and goals. Through discussions, the researcher and business collaborator can negotiate modifications to reach a mutually agreeable plan for the project. This new plan includes specific outcomes, a budget, and a timeline.

Step 3: Communicate Regularly With the Business Contact Person

When funding is received, the appropriate business contact person regarding the project must be identified. This person may be different from the individual with whom the researcher originally negotiated. Agreeing upon effective communication methods with the contact person is important. For example, business collaborators may prefer biweekly reports, monthly meetings, email messages rather than telephone calls, or updates to involved staff. Regular communication must be maintained even though business collaborators may appear busy.

Step 4: Share Outcomes in a Manner Preferred by the Business Collaborator

Prior to sharing the outcomes of a project with a business, the researcher needs to identify the businesses' preferred means of communicating findings. Some options for sharing outcomes include written statements, a presentation to staff, or a formal written report.

Posters or publications may not be the preferred method of sharing outcomes by the business collaborators and could overemphasize the goals of the researcher rather than those of the business. In one situation, a business collaborator initially desired brief emailed reports but later requested presentations to staff, instead.

Step 5: Plan for the Next Business Collaboration

Throughout a project, on a regular basis, the researcher should seek evaluative feedback pertaining to the implementation of the project. For example, ongoing feedback can be sought regarding the quality and frequency of project communication. Adjustments can be made as needed. The researcher can use the regularly scheduled communications to share accomplishments and anecdotes that support the collaboration.

While working with a business collaborator, continue to plan for the next stage of the collaboration. Suggest future ideas with the business collaborator and engage the collaborator in discussing the ongoing needs of the business. During this planning for the future, reassess how the business collaborator wishes to learn about possibilities for further collaborations.

Case Examples of Business Collaborations

Health Care Agencies

Accreditation and certification processes often demand attention to evidence in the practice environment. In these next two health care agency examples, a faculty-led team of undergraduate student researchers worked with a community health care agency and an acute care hospital to provide research literature support for topics identified by the agencies. Each of the examples described below are outlined according to the steps and processes for obtaining funding from businesses.

Community health care agency

In this example, the community health care agency is a health and social service agency that enables clients in need of care to remain as independent as possible in their homes. The agency engages interdisciplinary team members in efforts to reduce hospitalizations. The following steps were followed in obtaining funding from the agency.

The researcher had long-term relationships with many staff in the agency due to having graduate student clinical placements in the agency. The researcher had also been asked by agency administrators to provide informal consultation on topics within the agency and thus the researcher had knowledge about the agency. Learning about the agency, however, continued after funding was received through attending staff meetings and collaborating with staff.

Using information about the clinical agency and the researcher's goals, the researcher developed a concise plan for working with the business. The researcher's goal was to develop and evaluate a model for undergraduate student involvement in evidence-based practice (Moch & Cronje, 2007, 2010; Moch et al., 2008). The agency administrator had expressed interest in conveniently and affordably providing access to research evidence for staff. The faculty researcher contacted the health care administrator regarding the desire to discuss a plan for collaborating. Accordingly, the agency administrator arranged a meeting with the total agency administrative team and the faculty researcher for sharing the concise plan and for obtaining more information about the needs of the agency. The researcher invited the nursing dean to attend the meeting. Plans for the collaboration were discussed during the meeting, and after the meeting, the administrative team decided to provide funding for evidence-based services. The details of the plan, however, were further developed through subsequent discussions between the researcher and the agency administrator. Decisions about signing confidentiality statements, arranging for use of data from the agency for publications, and determining dates and processes for communicating were also made.

The business contact person for this agency was the administrator. The administrator appreciated having undergraduate students in the clinical agency and readily arranged for student visits and for email and verbal communication between the students and the agency staff. Students also met with both the business contact person while at the agency and the researcher when at the university to share information.

The plan for outcome sharing was determined each year during the multiyear collaboration when the concise plan was developed for the year. During the first year, four meetings were held with the agency administrator, student leader, and faculty member. Information about evidence-based requests received from staff and summaries provided by students was reported. During the second year, students assisted with an evaluation project for the agency and those outcomes were shared through meetings with administrators. The third year involved collaborations with other researchers involved in chronic obstructive pulmonary disease research for policy development. Outcomes for the following years included joint business collaborator and researcher presentations at conferences, a publication that included a discussion of the outcomes (Moch et al., 2012) and a publication that discussed continued funding for the projects (Moch, Quinn-Lee, Gallegos, & Sortedahl, 2015).

Throughout the continuing years of collaboration with the business, different business needs emerged. The staff interest in working with students was a major incentive for continued funding as staff members regularly shared their satisfaction with student assistance in evidence-based practice.

Some challenges encountered with this project included communicating with staff other than the administrator and the need for content-specific expertise. Although students had the ability to communicate with the administrator, students sometimes needed to obtain more information about the evidence-based request from the staff member requestor. Although the administrator wished to guard the time of the registered and advanced practice nurses at the agency, often it was necessary to seek clarification about the request for evidence. Therefore, a plan for how best to contact staff and to discuss the request in an efficient manner was identified. In addition, students

were invited to staff meetings to encourage relationship building between staff and students. Regarding the other challenge, the need for more content-specific expertise for the various evidence projects, a plan to engage other faculty members and consultants was put into place. For instance, when information about medications related to the geriatric population was requested, the researcher encouraged students to ask a faculty member with expertise in this area to assist with this request. In another situation, the agency wanted to implement policies regarding a specific illness, and a content expert known by the researcher was asked to provide consultation.

Acute care hospital

Establishing connections with an acute care agency began with existing ongoing relationships with staff at the facility. The health care agency provided clinical experiences for students and employed alumni from the graduate and undergraduate programs, and the university involved staff members on committees. The faculty researcher and many other nursing faculty functioned as clinical instructors, content consultants, and/or served on hospital committees and boards. The researcher also previously collaborated with the agency staff through graduate scholarly projects and university-funded, faculty-undergraduate student research grants. In collaboration with staff members, graduate and undergraduate students had also led research discussion groups (Moch & Cronje, 2007; Moch et al., 1997) and conducted evaluation research at the hospital.

Using the information from previous connections with this business, the researcher considered her own research goals related to evidence-based practice and identified some of the needs of the organization. A concise plan was developed and, through discussion with university colleagues, the researcher identified the amount of funding to request. Then, to share a concise plan for funding with her business collaborator, the researcher arranged a meeting with the nursing director. The nursing director invited two mid-level administrators to attend the meeting and the researcher invited the nursing dean to participate as well. The group discussed the plan, and more needs of the business were shared by the business collaborators. A decision was made to pilot the collaboration for a year using funding provided by the health care agency.

Several different units were identified for possible involvement in evidence-based practice, and thus the manager for each individual unit was the identified contact person for each project. The researcher recruited other faculty members with expertise on the topics to lead student groups for the projects, and those faculty members met with the contact person regularly (Moch et al., 2015). Some teams connected by regular email messages, online meetings, or through hospital-based meetings. Throughout the years of the collaboration, many different projects were developed.

Outcome sharing for this agency was very different for each of the various projects. Some unit managers preferred that information be given directly to the manager in written form. Others requested that students present the findings through staff meetings.

Planning for future collaboration was challenging with this agency. Future collaboration required involvement of upper-level hospital administrators. Yet, business contacts were typically the unit managers. Due to the complexity of communication patterns, an outside business consultant was utilized to help the researcher facilitate communication among the hospital administrators and contacts. This resulted in improved patterns of information exchange. For example, the researcher ensured that information shared with the unit managers was summarized and concisely communicated with upper-level hospital administrators.

Health Care Manufacturing Company

A productive, collaborative relationship began and has been sustained between Hygenic Corporation (<http://hygeniccorp.com/introduction.aspx>) represented by Dr. Phil Page and university researchers represented by Dr. Robert Topp. This 16-year partnership has evolved to the mutual benefit of both Hygenic Corporation and the academic researchers. The process of establishing a research relationship between these two parties began by Dr. Topp needing to employ a mode of resistance training that could be done in the home as well as in the laboratory setting. Dr. Page recognized that TheraBand elastic bands (produced by Hygenic Corporation) could provide a mode of resistance training that met these two criteria.

As part of establishing a research relationship, the business's Director of Education and Research was presented with a concise plan that outlined a study utilizing TheraBand as a mode of resistance training for older adults. This plan described how the proposed outcomes of the study would support the efficacy and marketing of Hygenic Corporation products. This collaborative plan also clearly indicated the contribution of each party and time lines when project goals would be met. The plan dictated that the business would provide monetary and material support to the project and that the academic team would provide the infrastructure to conduct the research. During the project, regular communication was maintained, particularly during study milestones, including Institutional Review Board approval, receipt of support from the business, termination of data collection, and dissemination of the results (Mikesky, Topp, Wigglesworth, Harsha, & Edwards, 1994; Topp, Mikesky, Dayhoff, & Holt, 1996; Topp, Mikesky, Wigglesworth, Holt, & Edwards, 1993).

To minimize any possible conflict of interest, the Hygenic Corporation agreed not to be informed of the findings of the project until the results were published in the public domain. Once the results were published, parties from both the business and the university consulted on how the findings could be used in future marketing of Hygenic products to ensure that the company's marketing did not extend beyond the findings of the study.

As a result of this initial collaboration, the leadership at Hygenic Corporation recognized the value of collaborating with academic partners to develop empirical evidence to support the efficacy of their products. Furthermore, as a result of this initial project, the academic team also recognized the potential of collaborating productively with Hygenic Corporation in supporting future research projects. The recognition of the mutual benefits of the collaboration led to further planning and implementation of similar studies with other academic partners at various academic institutions around the world. Hygenic Corporation currently supports a wide variety of collaborations with academic scientists and has a repository of research that can be accessed by researchers and clinicians (<http://www.therabandacademy.com/research/Default.aspx>). The academic team's continued collaboration with Hygenic Corporation, including research involving their products, has resulted in numerous publications and

research experiences for graduate students (Brown, Loprinzi, Brosky, & Topp, 2014; Topp, Brosky, & Pieschel, 2013; Topp, Ledford, & Jacks, 2013).

Although this collaboration between the Hygenic Corporation and the academic researchers has been largely successful, a number of issues needed to be resolved as the collaboration matured. First, as a condition of the contract, any intellectual property developed as a result of the project must be negotiated in the initial contract before any data are collected. Second, a timeline for conducting the study must be mutually agreed upon and include contingencies for unanticipated delays common with human subjects' research. Third, supporting facilities and administration (F&A) costs also need to be negotiated because budgets requested by private industry rarely allow for infrastructure support. Thus, the budget may need to reflect the cost of F&A items not commonly listed individually in federal proposals. Initially, these issues have the potential to inhibit collaboration but continued communication between the partners offered insights into the reasons for each agency's position on the particular issue. With this greater understanding came a more effective negotiation for the resolution of the issue.

Discussion

Steps and processes for obtaining funding from businesses were outlined using examples from health care agencies and a health manufacturing company. These steps, along with case examples, identify a potentially useful pathway for researchers to obtain funding during a time of limited resources through grants and other traditional sources of research support. The process outlined can be used to encourage dialogue with entities not normally sought out for research support.

The process for obtaining funding from businesses varies from those used in obtaining grant funding from traditional governmental or foundation sources. First, the process with business is most often predicated on an ongoing relationship or previous collaborations between the faculty member and the business partner. A business proposal is also different from a grant proposal as the business proposal is less detailed with less emphasis on scientific methodology.

Even though less time may be involved in writing a business proposal in comparison with a federal grant proposal, much more time is devoted to developing and maintaining the collaboration with the business partner. The business partner, sometimes only one person, is the decision maker about whether funding will be secured or maintained. Therefore, the academic in search of support needs to focus on communicating how the project outcomes will benefit the business collaborator.

Although the preceding examples pertain to instances in which projects were supported by health care agencies and a manufacturing company, researchers are not always successful in obtaining funding from businesses. Projects are not funded for a variety of reasons. For instance, the faculty member may have had difficulty in cultivating a trusting relationship or in describing how the outcomes would clearly benefit the business partner. Building and maintaining business relationships take time, and when funding is obtained, faculty members must consistently report their progress to the business collaborator.

Many challenges exist in developing and maintaining the relationships with businesses. The most successful collaborations have been established with prior connections between the faculty member and the business contact and provide a direct benefit for all members in the collaboration. If a potential business collaborator with whom a prior relationship exists is not available, then the faculty researcher must be willing to take the time to cultivate a relationship with a new agency, over a period of months to years, prior to making an initial request for support. Another challenge relates to funding levels changing from year to year for some long-term projects. In those cases, the level of financial support may be determined by the funding available within the business cycle and thus may have no direct relationship to the project timeline or outcomes. Another challenge is different approaches to reporting the outcomes. Academics may prefer to report project findings through a peer review process while, depending on the nature of the results, business partners may wish to "frame" the findings to benefit the marketing efforts of the company. Thus, negotiating the dissemination of business collaborations is essential during the early phase of the project.

In conclusion, communication is key to supporting research and sustaining funding through business collaborations. Adapting communication to fit the goals and preferences of the business is essential. Negotiating mutually agreed-upon plans for research, process, and outcome sharing is key to successful collaborative relationships. Ongoing dialogue, strategic sharing of outcomes, and enthusiasm facilitate new ideas for future research support.

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About the Authors

Susan Diemert Moch, University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire, Nursing 279, 105 Garfield Avenue, Eau Claire, WI 54702-4004, USA. Email: smoch@uwec.edu