




Strategically Achieving Funding Success

By Stacy Kindopp

An illustration on the left side of the page shows a stylized tree with brown branches and green leaves. Several green dollar signs are scattered around the tree, appearing to be falling or floating. The background is a gradient of blue and green.

Creating equal learning opportunities

Shannon Donovan is known for extending her teaching beyond the four walls of her classroom by involving her science students at [Scituate High School](#) in Rhode Island in a variety of applied learning projects.

Students explore environmental science concepts by restoring the walking trail behind the school, share their physical science knowledge by showcasing energy efficiency and renewable energy concepts to the community and discover more about plant propagation by growing plants in the greenhouse for a community plant sale.

So when Donovan was named Rhode Island Teacher of the Year in 2011 and received a [Teaching Excellence Award \(TEA\) Technology Classroom](#) from SMART, she could further expand learning in her classroom through interactive lessons and easily gauge student understanding with formative assessments.

The TEA Technology Classroom included a [SMART Board 685ix interactive whiteboard system](#), a [SMART Response PE interactive response system](#), [SMART Notebook collaborative learning software](#), [SMART Notebook Math Tools](#), a [SMART Slate™ wireless slate](#) and a [SMART Document Camera](#).

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"I loved it and the students loved it! Other people in my department were stopping by to explore the features of SMART Notebook software. They saw the great response from my students," says Donovan.

"I find that using SMART Response for interactive assessments is highly effective. Now when my students are learning new concepts, I can quickly get a sense of where the issues are, and the students are more engaged," she says.

The visual, interactive features of SMART Notebook software help Donovan better clarify concepts, such as dimensional analysis. "Having the ability to change pen colors frequently and move items around really helps my students visualize the dimensional analysis," says Donovan.

The science department at Scituate High School has six classrooms, and with the addition of the SMART Board interactive whiteboard that Donovan received,



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Scituate High School, Scituate, Rhode Island

two of those classrooms were outfitted with SMART Board interactive whiteboards. Donovan then began looking for opportunities to bring SMART products to the other four science classrooms.

She'd had previous success with grant applications, so she started looking for funders that were aligned with her goals. Wanting to ensure that every science student could experience the same collaboration and interactivity that she offered in her classroom, Donovan was determined to close the equity gap that now existed in the science department.

She saw a call for proposals from [Champlin Foundations](#) and shared her story in a single-page grant request. "I knew that I had to be able to tell a compelling story as I tried to get my objectives and reasoning across to the grant reviewers. I tried to be concise, clear and powerful with my words," explained Donovan.

In her application, Donovan said how formative assessments using SMART Response provide the instant responses that enhance her teaching and help her students direct their studies more effectively. She talked about how all Scituate science

students should have this opportunity, no matter which science classroom they were in.

Her grant application was successful and the science department was awarded a US\$59,000 grant. With the funds, the department was able to purchase SMART products for every science classroom and acquire laptops with geographic information systems software.

“We are all excited now! We’ve only had the new products for a few weeks, but the kids are ready to go. They want to jump in!” says Donovan.

Although Donovan has had success with grant applications, she isn’t ready to apply for every grant opportunity she sees. “Grant writing takes a fair amount of time and effort. Time is better spent carefully selecting which grant opportunity is right for your needs, rather than doing a broad approach,” she explains.

Donovan encourages educators to carefully research funders before completing a grant request. “You have to read between the lines and figure out what they’re looking for. Visit their website to see if they list past projects that they’ve funded. If so, read them and see if your project matches up,” she suggests.

“To find grant opportunities, my advice is network, network, network! I’ve found opportunities through listings provided by the National Science Teachers Association, communications from the U.S. Department of Education and other professional organizations and groups related to my fields of study. Have your ear to the tracks and in as many different realms as you can,” says Donovan.

Making the most of your budget

In addition to seeking out grants and looking for fundraising opportunities, many schools and districts are now streamlining processes and systems to help them do more within their existing budgets.



At recent statewide school administrator association meetings in Mississippi and Michigan, SMART has sponsored sessions to help administrators find ways to make the most of their resources.

“We know it’s a difficult economic time, and we want to do our part to help move education forward,” says Rae Mugnolo, Education Policy Manager at SMART. “We want to be active in helping schools and districts discover new strategies for getting the most from every budget dollar.”

Eric Peterson, President and CEO of [Peterson Public Sector Consulting](#), has presented at the SMART-sponsored sessions. He regularly works with schools and districts to help them generate funds through cost-avoidance strategies and resource redeployment.

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Peterson is also on the management team of **Project Red**, a national research and advocacy plan that is identifying what works in technology-transformed schools and demonstrating how classroom technology can help schools save money while enhancing learning for students.

“There is so much opportunity to tighten processes, cost avoid and resource redeploy. If you were to tell me the size of a district, I can almost guarantee how many dollars in cost avoidance that you can generate,” says Peterson.

For example, he suggests that in a district with 1,200 students, between \$100,000 and \$250,000 could be generated through cost-avoidance strategies. Best of all, many of Peterson’s strategies are straightforward, easy to implement and low cost. And when strategies do have a substantial implementation cost, they often provide a return on investment in less than a year.

Following are some of Peterson’s easy-to-implement strategies to help schools and districts free up funding:

Accept payments online – Many web-based systems are designed for schools and districts, and with online student, parent and other district funds’ receipts, no one has to count physical money or leave the office to make bank deposits.

Pay vendors electronically – Most financial institutions forward payments directly from school districts to vendors’ bank accounts, so districts no longer need to print checks, stuff envelopes and use postage to make payments.

Use digital copies of information whenever possible – To significantly reduce printing and distribution costs, post handbooks, welcome-back packets, school newsletters and similar types of information on the school or district website and provide printed copies only upon request.

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Post direct-line phone numbers for all staff – The time that a receptionist or switchboard operator spends answering and directing calls can be reduced by approximately 50 percent.

Enhance your wireless network – Provide a secure and fast wireless network so that staff and students can bring their own devices, reducing the number of laptops and other portable devices that the school needs to provide.

Implement a learning management system (LMS) – Teachers can post homework, lesson notes and any other relevant class information on the LMS daily. The quality of the educational experience is improved for students while the cost of delivering services is reduced. Students and parents are also able to access important information without calling the office or teacher.

Connect student information systems with the use of middleware – Peterson admits that while this may sound difficult, it is actually quite easy to do. Many schools have separate information systems for the library,



transportation services, food services and more, but typically none shares data with the others. The cost of hiring a middleware provider to connect the systems can be as little as \$5 per student. A 5,000-student district can save approximately \$15 per student by using middleware.

Implement scheduling software for facilities and technology equipment – A centralized reservation system for every classroom, technology item, sport venue and auditorium can save time and prevent miscommunication. If your school or district accepts reservation requests from the community, you can also automate the invoicing, and the cost of the system will likely pay for itself within 12–24 months.

Develop staffing projections based on educational development plans – When you work on educational development plans with students, insert the courses that will be required. Your school or district can then create course projections that will help assess future staff and course-offering requirements. Districts with enrolments in excess of 2,000 students can easily save a minimum of \$80,000 per year with this strategy.

In Peterson's sessions, attendees receive a toolkit with one-page strategy outlines and interactive spreadsheets that give administrators insight into the return on investment they can expect from the implementation of different strategies. If you would like more information about these sessions, contact SMART's education policy and practice team at advocacy@smarttech.com.