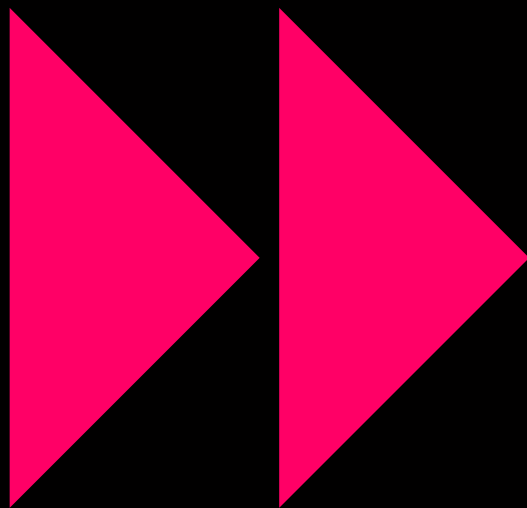


The Awesome Foundation
New Chapter Handbook



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Introduction

Greetings! You've received this short little packet because you've asked us about starting an Awesome Foundation, or are curious about how go about doing what we do.

We're thrilled to have you aboard. Since we started in 2009, the Awesome Foundation has given more than \$500,000 in grants and established more than seventy chapters around the world in places as far out as Mongolia, Brazil, Australia, Israel, and beyond.

You hold in your hand (or your screen) the collective culled knowledge of over four years of grant giving and supporting awesomeness at the Awesome Foundation for the Arts and Sciences.

We're hoping this will be a useful document of guidance for people trying to get a chapter started or with questions about the care and feeding of an existing chapter.

What is the Awesome Foundation?

Mission

The Awesome Foundation for the Arts and Sciences exists to forward the interests of awesomeness in the universe.

In Practice

We are a global, distributed network of individuals experimenting with simple, lightweight funding structures that foster the creation of surprise and delight globally.

Organizationally

Each chapter in the Awesome Foundation community operates as a fully independent entity: there is no actual organization “in charge” of Awesome Foundation. We aren’t a real foundation at all!

So, everything in this document should be treated as a guideline – chapters are allowed (and actively encouraged!) to change up the basic model to best achieve the core purpose of fostering awesomeness. We’ve found the most successful chapters are ones that take the tips that you’ll find in this document and make the Awesome Foundation their own.

How does it work?

At its core, the Awesome Foundation is very simple. An Awesome Foundation chapter consists of a group of ten to twenty (sometimes more!) “micro-trustees” who make all the decisions and are responsible for guiding the organization. When they join, trustees make two key commitments:

- 1) To commit to donating \$100 a month to form a single \$1000 grant to forward the interest of awesomeness in the universe.
- 2) To participate fully in the monthly grant selection process of the chapter.

There generally are no “term limits” to the duration that trustees can spend on the board. They serve life terms until they resign or are incapacitated. Chapters should decide at their formation how to replace trustees that resign: some allow the resigning trustee to nominate a successor, others have open applications and an interviewing process.

Also: according to tradition, chapters generally grant the first person holding a trustee slot in the chapter the right to title that position for all future occupants of the slot on the board (e.g. The Tim Hwang Chair for Awesomeness).

Almost all chapters also include an additional position for a “Dean of Awesome,” who does not make the financial commitment of the other trustees. Instead, the Dean commits to serving as the logistical lead and main point of contact for the chapter to the public, helping to coordinate meetings and plan events. Chapters vary on the position of the Dean relative to the trustees – some serve life terms similar to the trustees in the chapter, others have terms of set length, and others serve at the consensus of the trustee board.

The reason for the Dean is that it is often the case that really awesome trustees are also extremely busy, so having someone who has more time than money who takes on the basic work of herding everyone is really helpful.

Step 1: Gather your trustees

Once you've had a chance to talk with someone at the Awesome Foundation, the initial big task will be to bring together the core group of trustees and the Dean.

Some advice here: the powerful thing about the Awesome Foundation is that it creates a meeting point for many local communities that would otherwise not be connected. Each of the trustees also plays a role in promoting the chapter, so the type of applications a chapter receives will be at least partially dependent on the composition of the board. Choose wisely!

Generally, someone starting a chapter will gather together a few friends to form an initial base of trustees, and put out an open call online to fill the remaining slots. This allows the board to already have a pre-existing community between members, while allowing the board to be open to communities that an insular group of friends would not have access to.

The global awesome community can also help out with this. The Awesome Foundation has a significant presence online to let lots of people know you're looking for trustees. Between all the chapters, it is also likely that someone who is running an Awesome Foundation somewhere in the world knows a person who would be great for the chapter you're trying to start.

Many people starting chapters discover that there are more people interested in serving as trustees than there are trustee spots, and consider increasing the number of spots accordingly. This is fine, but remember: the main purpose of keeping the trustee count low is to make it easier for the chapter to build a tight-knit community and to reach consensus around funding a project each month. Chapters increase the number of trustees with that caveat in mind.

If you're having some trouble finding trustees, here are some tips that have worked for other chapters in the past, and some general points to keep in mind:

It Can Take Time

While some chapters quickly organize, others have taken as long as six months to a year to gather all the trustees together. Don't give up! And, take the time to find the right people: with such a small group, having a fun dynamic of people who genuinely like to hang out with each other is a key part of having a successful chapter. You'll also find that many of the people who initially said "no" will come back once the chapter gets off the ground.

Natural Friends

There are certain organizations and groups which are natural allies for Awesome Foundation. Makerspaces (see: http://hackerspaces.org/wiki/List_of_ALL_hackerspaces) tend to be communities that are very responsive and excited to collaborate on starting a chapter. Other places that chapters have had success in hunting for good trustees include:

- Local city or town governments
- Local journalists and newspapers

- Chambers of Commerce
- Libraries
- Community Service Organizations
- Colleges and universities

In-Person Socializing

Get socializing! Many chapters have reported more success in using face-to-face get togethers to recruit trustees, rather than simply soliciting people over e-mail or over the phone. Plus, it's a fun way to meet new people in your local community (and who may become applicants as you get the chapter off the ground, in any case).

Tailoring The Commitment

A number of chapters have tailored the commitment of being a trustee to make it more accessible for people who might not be able to make the time or financial commitment. This includes “guest” trustees – who only serve for a set period of months, as well as “shared” trustee seats – where two members will alternate months or otherwise share the financial commitment.

Assemble a List / Do An Event

Sometimes it's helpful to get organized. AF-Seattle was started by creating a list of 40+ organizations and individuals that the founder wanted to get involved. He then did a post (<http://nathanieljames.org/blog/2011/05/30/seattle-needs-awesome-and-awesome-needs-you/>), which encouraged people to get in touch if they wanted more information. This eventually led to an invite to a community information session for people who wanted to get involved.

Before finally confirming that a chapter is ready to launch, most groups meet together in person as a group to finalize planning. Afterwards, you're off to the races! The Dean schedules and brings together monthly meetings to choose grantees and grant awards (some tips on how to organize your meetings are below – [Running Your Deliberation Meetings](#)).

Step 2: Get connected with Awesome worldwide

OK, at this point, you've probably gotten your initial trustee group together and you're ready to go. Congratulations!

Let us know the good news by emailing us at join@awesomefoundation.org. We'll get your chapter connected with the global community of Awesome Foundation chapters around the world and let the world know that you're open for applications. Here's a few ways that the Awesome Foundation chapters worldwide are connected with one another – take a look at the menu below and let us know which of the options you'd be interested in.

Since the chapters operate independently of one another, chapters can elect to participate in this common infrastructure as much or as little as they want, but we've provided some useful resources. These are:

Website and Grant System

The Awesome Foundation website (awesomefoundation.org) has a built-in system designed for our chapters to use. The standard usage includes an application management system, a customizable chapter page, and a blog. Everything is localizable to your preferred language.

The application management system allows trustees to easily view and vote on applications received through the website. Deans can also easily publish a winning project to the chapter's page (and our front page!). Most chapters use this to manage the applications that people submit to them.

The chapter page displays all funded projects, the pictures and names of the trustees, basic contact information for the chapter, an "Apply" link, and a feed for your blog (whether on our system or elsewhere).

The blog is a separate system (requiring separate logins and passwords) running on Wordpress. Tag all posts with your chapter's designated tag so that readers can quickly find the latest information about your chapter.

If you'd like to be set up on any part of this system (applications, chapter page, and/or the blog) or have any questions, just drop a line to webmaster@awesomefoundation.org and we'll get you set up.

Once you're in the system, we've also written up a handy little guide on how to use all the features of the website, available here: http://wiki.awesomestudies.org/index.php?title=Website_Manual. We also have a guide on how to localize the website for use around the world here: http://wiki.awesomestudies.org/index.php?title=Localization_Guide.

Opting out:

You may elect to have your own separate application system or blog. That's totally fine and other chapters have done so before, but we encourage you to still create a chapter profile on the main site

to stay connected with the global community. And let us know where all of your stuff is so we can point people towards it if they ask!

Awesome Foundation Social Media

The Awesome Foundation maintains a global Twitter account and Facebook page. Chapters get access to these outlets, and are good places to make general announcements of interest to the community (recently awarded grantees, new trustees, and the like).

You can also get an official @awesomefoundation.org e-mail address for your chapter if you're interested - again, just drop a line to webmaster@awesomefoundation.org.

Many chapters find it useful to set up their own chapter-specific online presence to coordinate events and announce news of interest locally. We encourage it!

The Global Awesome Foundation Discussion List

All the chapters are connected by a community discussion list. Many trustees have at least their Dean subscribed to the list so they can stay in touch with events happening globally with the Awesome Foundation. However, any trustee of the Foundation in the world is welcome to subscribe and contribute. If you'd like to join, please mention it in your email to join@awesomefoundation.org.

If you'd like to volunteer your skills to the global Awesome network, there are also a number of mailing lists set up for various working groups, including maintaining and improving our website, graphic design, and organizing meetups. For example, Deans have their own support group mailing list.

Like the website, Twitter, and blog, chapters generally set up their own internal e-mail list (using Google Groups or similar services) to help coordinate meetings, discussions around proposals, and the like.

Trustees and Deans Facebook Page

While we have a public-facing Facebook page to let the world know about what Awesome Foundation is up to, we also have a private group for trustees and Deans to share the things they've been funding and to communicate with one another. You can request access to this here: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/awesomefound/>.

Logos and Visual Assets

Many chapters enjoy printing up stickers or posters to help them promote that grant opportunity to others. We've uploaded a bunch of these resources to: http://wiki.awesomestudies.org/index.php?title=Resources_and_References. You're free to use these, and change them up however you like.

The Institute on Higher Awesome Studies

As of 2011, the Awesome Foundation has also spun up a separate, official non-profit called the Institute on Higher Awesome Studies. It works to increase awesomeness in the world by experimenting with new, community-driven ways to incubate, fund, and promote awesome individuals & their projects. It takes on many projects that it would be difficult for chapters to handle on their own: it built the website that all the chapters now use, and also held the first-ever Awesome Summit in 2012.

IHAS' primary function is to serve as a common organizational infrastructure for chapters that want to partner with traditional institutions or who want to organize something across chapters. If you have a question or a project that you think IHAS should be tackling, please contact Christina Xu (Chancellor, IHAS) – christina@awesomestudies.org.

Step 3: Getting started

The Launch

Initial Outreach

Once you have your core trustees, you need to raise awareness so that awesome people can find out about this great new resource. This is an ongoing challenge, but launching with a boom can help you get off to a great start.

Word of Mouth – If you’ve done a good job selecting your trustees, many of your chapter members will be well connected to communities that will be interested in the grant opportunity. Get them to help spread the word! The most successful chapters are ones where the members help to build bridges with groups that can consistently provide fresh ideas to the group. Look for hackerspaces, art galleries, educational institutions, and community organizations as promising places to spread the word.

News and Blogs – Local television, newspapers, and blogs often are very excited by the opening of the Awesome Foundation. Reaching out to them and let them know that you are open for applications. Try to see if a local newspaper column or radio show might be interested in highlighting each month’s winners as a regular segment.

City Proclamation – A few chapters (Pittsburgh, Austin, and Portland in the United States), have been able to get their cities to declare an official “Awesome Day” in honor of the chapter launching. This has been a good way to spread the word, and also bring local government into supporting and sending projects towards the chapter.

Awesome Global – With chapters all around the world, the global community of Awesome Foundations can be a big help in spreading the word about your new chapter. The easiest way to do this is to join our internal e-mail list (see above), and send out an announcement asking people to help promote when you’ve launched. You’ll find that your fellow chapters are more than happy to lend a hand.

Too Many Interested Trustees

One of the persistent questions with the Awesome Foundations around the world are how to deal with an influx of individuals interested in serving as trustees. At the time of writing, there is no consensus in the community about the best way to approach this question. More trustees allow for larger grants and connections to more communities, but a small trustee group makes settling on a grant by consensus and building rapport easier. We list the most prominent approaches that chapters have taken below:

The Washington Method – AF-DC has held to keeping the trustee group strictly limited at ten trustees, opting to maintain a waiting list of interested trustees that succeed to chairs as they open up.

The Berlin Method – Upon receiving enough trustees, AF-Berlin created two interlinked group of trustees. The two chapters operate under the same common name in Berlin, and alternate months on donating and choosing grants.

The Melbourne Method – At the time of writing, AF-Melbourne is considering launching additional chapters in the same city which would fund projects simultaneously from month to month.

The Boston Method – AF-Boston has found a great deal of success just bringing on more people! Since people miss meetings, and it is difficult to schedule people, increasing the number means that you'll have close to ten attendees at every meeting. If you have enough people, you can meet together, but split into smaller groups to decide what to fund.

The Seattle Method – AF-Seattle has a guest trustee system whereby two to three interested community members are invited to serve as guest trustees each month. The guests are asked to contribute \$100 and participate fully in the deliberations. If they turn out to be very interested and get along well with the rest of the group, they may be invited to come back as a full-time trustee.

The Dean of Awesome

If you've selected the right group of trustees, they'll often be extremely busy. The role of the Dean of Awesome was originally formed in Boston with the purpose of dealing with this systemic problem by creating a point person responsible for taking on the logistical load of the chapter. Their powers and responsibilities vary according to the needs of the chapter in achieving that goal.

The New York Method – To deal with the busy schedules of their trustees, AF-NYC granted their Dean of Awesome the power to pre-filter application submissions in advance of the grant selection meeting. The trustee group would then ultimately consider 4-5 finalist grants at their meeting.

Delegating – For an active chapter, one Dean may not be enough to make sure everything gets done. Several chapters have additional positions like treasurers (making sure everyone pays up) and event planners to deal with the additional workload.

Uncomfortable with this power dynamic? Lots of chapters have a rotating deanship so that everyone can experience it at least once!

The Funding Process

Running Your Deliberation Meetings

How meetings are run is just as important the actual process you chosen determine a "winner". It is important that there be (flexible) structure for discussing and voting on projects. Debate often changes hearts and minds, and also helps the group understand each other, the project that ends up winning, and their common purpose better.

Designate a facilitator for the meeting. If a trustee has seemed frustrated with the speed, tone, or method of deliberations and they have an idea that would fix that, try handing over leading the deliberation to them. Asking someone at the beginning of the meeting if they'd like to "preside" over the whole meeting is a great way to keep members engaged and give anyone who wants to take a shot at running the show.

The Dean can help to streamline what is going on in the meetings by collecting a "short list" ahead of time, keeping an eye on the clock, interjecting reminders of the time, and suggesting a timecaps for discussions. Staying on top of the timing and pace are key to keep the general frustration level to a minimum and ensure deliberations don't push the meeting into overtime.

If you're interested in different decision making models that chapters use around the world, Kara Brickman from AF-Boston has compiled this helpful set of links: <http://bitly.com/bundles/karabee/i>.

Also, e-mail the global list if you're really hitting a wall! You'll find a community of people who will share their experiences thoughts on any questions you have about this.

Delinquent Projects

The point of Awesome Foundation isn't to have a 100% success rate with funding, but too many unsuccessful projects can lead to bad morale. Chapters have generally focused on a set of characteristics in selecting grants to promote the chances of success:

- 1) The ability to complete the project within the timespan of a month.
- 2) The ability for the proposer to complete the grant, based on past experience listed in the application and interviews with applicants.
- 3) The ability for the \$1,000 grant to make a difference in being able to complete the project.

Grant Frequency

Generally, chapters give out grants once a month, except in months where they receive no proposal that interests the trustees and decide to pass. This element of the Awesome Foundation grant scheduling can and has been varied. Generally, the most important thing is maintaining a steady rhythm so that applicants know roughly when to expect a response, and everyone knows your chapter is staying active.

The London Method – To accommodate the schedules of the trustees, AF-London has elected to fund grants every other month.

December – Lots of chapters skip the month of December, as the holidays are usually a drought for proposals and a difficult time to get people together.

Dealing With Money

The general approach of the Awesome Foundation is to create organizational processes that are extremely lightweight and easy to implement. As a result, most chapters do not generally keep a common bank account for the grant money. Instead, money is given to the winners at the time of the award by all the trustees individually in cash or check form.

The San Francisco Method – To streamline the process, AF-SF has chosen to use the online service WePay to coordinate payments. We've found it to be pretty useful.

The New York Method – New York uses Venmo, which is very quick and mobile-friendly.

The Seattle Method – Seattle deals primarily in cash, and keeps everything in an envelope held by the treasurer. While it's less efficient than digital payments, it has turned out to be a convenient forcing function for meeting attendance and trustee interaction.

Award Events

Upon choosing the month's winner, the general practice is that chapters hold events where they award the money to the grantee to being working on the project. These events are a good way of recognizing award winners and bringing community attention to the project.

We've also found that the events are an extremely effective way of promoting the chapter and application submissions. However, there are some variations that chapters have experimented with in holding these events, including holding the event after the winner completes the project.

The London Method – AF-London and a number of other chapters have opted for a more competitive model of grant awards. Events are competitions where Foundation finalists pitch their projects in person and then the trustees decide the winner at the event itself.

The Boston Method – AF-Boston holds quarterly rather than monthly events. Having one bigger party rather than several smaller parties is less work and cheaper, and the parties tend to be better-attended.

The Awesome You Fund Is The Awesome You Get

We've found time and time again that the grant that an Awesome Foundation chapter gives in a previous month will shape the type and number of grants it receives in the present month. Awarding a grant to an art project gives rise to more proposals to art projects to a given chapter. A chapter that funds a project that is widely shared and discussed in the previous month will result in more proposals for the following month.

So, in choosing grants, most chapters look to the awesomeness of the project they are funding, as well as the types of project flow that grant will encourage as well. Strategically, chapters can use this

to shape the type of grants they are receiving, and maintain the health of grant flow to the chapter as well.

Building A Strong Chapter

Keep Those Trustees Involved!

The life of chapters rise and fall on trustee engagement. Deans should play an active role in bringing trustees together, and being quick to avoid frequent absenteeism among trustees at meetings. Trustees should also read the grant proposals in advance and be able to discuss them at meetings.

The Washington Method – In an effort to deal with a long waiting list of interested trustees and ensuring that the group of trustees remain committed to participating in the chapter, AF-DC considers trustees to have officially resigned if they fail to attend a scheduled meeting.

The New York Method – New York developed a set of norms for the trustees, which include attendance at 2 out of every 3 meetings, advanced notification for missed meetings, and prompt payment. While these aren't hard and fast rules, they're useful touchpoints for starting a conversation with an absentee trustee about potentially relinquishing the position.

Creating An Awesome Community

\$1,000 is enough money to produce a focused project, but we've found over time that the main value of an Awesome Foundation chapter lies in the other types of assistance we can offer – validation, connections, and advice.

Through your chapter's trustees, winning (and sometimes even non-winning!) projects are able to access multiple communities and be promoted to an audience they would not otherwise have. In many cases, an Awesome Foundation grant allows the winner to build the initial prototype of a project and receive the needed attention to meet collaborators and acquire larger rounds of funding from others.

The trustees also play a big role in encouraging winners to actually complete their project. Many chapters have trustees volunteer to be mentors to winning projects, helping to keep the trustees in touch with the progress of the project and find ways of connecting them with other projects that the chapter has previously funded.

Lackluster Applications

Many chapters will eventually encounter a period in which grant applications are not interesting and engagement flags among the trustees. Overcoming this is the biggest challenge facing young chapters. The best way to do this is to revisit the outreach strategies listed in the launch section.

Awesome Hours

A brainchild of AF-Boston, Awesome Hours are informal office hours attended by potential applicants, friends of the Awesome community, and past winners. These are very informal and easy to organize – just find a place (bars work great!), make sure a few trustees attend, and send out the invites. Though very low-key, these are great opportunities for potential applicants to learn more about Awesome Foundation and get feedback on their projects.

Final Words

Creating and being on an Awesome Foundation board is a lot of work! And it is also awesomely rewarding. This is why so many AF chapters have arisen around the world in only four short years. We hope you will find that working and playing in your local AF foundation is incredibly fulfilling.

Thank you for spreading awesomeness throughout your world.