CASE STUDY

“I had no idea where to start.”

How a first-year special education nonprofit found a fundable strategy, built its first budget, and submitted a funder-ready proposal in under four weeks.

The Challenge

Scenic Land didn’t realize grants were even an option in its first year. The learning center had grown from five students to fifty in nine months, but its founder charged families only what they could afford, so tuition covered just part of what the program cost. Her first plan asked one funder to cover a full teacher’s salary. Her budget counted some income twice and showed a surplus so large it suggested the grant wasn’t needed.

The Approach

- **Started with the funder.** Met with the foundation’s director and a board member to learn what they fund: programs that directly benefit students.
- **Built a sustainable model first.** Showed how tuition that reflects the program’s real cost, together with a full tutoring program, could sustain the homeschool program without turning away the families it was built for.
- **Reshaped the request into a bridge.** A one-time grant funding spring scholarships, so six students with significant communication needs could attend full time while families adjust to the new rates.
- **Built the budget from scratch.** Created Scenic Land’s first operating budget and fixed income counted twice, formula errors, and missing costs.
- **Told a compelling story in the founder’s voice,** weaving her own words with parent testimonials, to show what Scenic Land makes possible for children who learn differently.

The Results

- Submitted on time, with a proposal, budget, and IRS letter that tell one consistent story
- Fees that cover what the program actually costs, and a clear path to seeking true scholarships for the families with the greatest need
- A founder who feels more confident in her program’s direction and equipped to pursue the next grant on her own

CLIENT
Scenic Land Learning, Soddy-Daisy, Tennessee

ORGANIZATION
First-year 501(c)(3) serving students with disabilities, many of them nonspeaking

FUNDER
A local private foundation

REQUEST
One-time bridge grant funding spring scholarships

STATUS
Submitted October 2026; decision expected December 2026

REFERENCE
Meredith Strauss is happy to speak with prospective clients about her experience. Contact details available on request.

> *“We didn’t realize there were grant options available to us in our first year. She not only helped us find organizations looking to support missions like ours, she helped us through the process.”*

> *“The grant application that resulted was a beautifully organized compilation of our program in our words, just in a way that a grantor likes to see them.”*

> *“We feel much more equipped to apply for future grants because of the time she invested in our program.”*

*“She doesn’t know it yet, but at our learning center she is known as our **Fairy Grantmother.**”*

Meredith Strauss, Founder and Executive Director, Scenic Land Learning

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