

PERCOLATOR TIP SHEET: FUNDING YOUR MEMORY CAFÉ



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The ideas here were compiled from Percolator surveys conducted in 2023 and 2017, and the Percolator Idea Exchange on June 14, 2023. Thanks to everyone who has shared their wisdom!

Download the Percolator Memory Café Toolkit in [English](#) or [Spanish](#) for more guidance on Funding Your Café!

Background

One of the benefits of memory cafés is that they serve people living with dementia AND their care partners at a modest expense. For most cafés, the biggest expense is the time of the person who coordinates the café.

Some cafés are run by volunteers. Even if your coordinators do not get paid, it is useful to accurately estimate the TOTAL cost of your café, including their time. Independent Sector is a nonprofit that estimates the current value of volunteer time:

<https://independentsector.org/resource/value-of-volunteer-time/>

A café that meets once a month for two hours requires an estimated 20 hours per month to run, plus additional time for planning and outreach when the café is starting up.

Other common expenses are refreshments, paper goods (napkins, plates, etc.), materials for activities, outreach expenses (photocopying, mailing, paid ads), and honoraria for guest artists or other activity facilitators.

Cafés that provide transportation and/or offer outings cost more to run. The least expensive cafés are held at restaurants or coffee shops, where participants can purchase their own food. It is recommended to use free meeting space to avoid this ongoing expense.

The Percolator conducted surveys of its network in 2017 (38 respondents) and in 2023 (71 respondents). **Most respondents report an annual budget under \$5,000 for their café. Including the café coordinator's time, most cafés probably cost between \$5,000 and \$15,000 per year.**

Download the Percolator Memory Café Toolkit in [English](#) or [Spanish](#) for templates to help you calculate your café coordinator's time, and your café's costs. The Toolkit also includes a template that you can adapt and use for business and family sponsors.

Common Sources of Funding

Now, let's explore common sources of funding for memory cafés. We will go through these sources roughly in their order of importance to memory café budgets, based on the findings of the Percolator's 2023 funding survey. The funding sources that we will delve into are:

1. **Organizational budget**
2. **Grants from foundations**
3. **Other local/regional funders**

4. Government grants
5. Business sponsorships
6. Individual/family donations
7. Participant fees

1. Organizational budget

The most common model is that one organization covers the operating expenses of a café and includes it in their annual budget. Many café coordinators are employed by the organization that runs their café, and coordinating the café is just one of their duties.

If you are applying for grants, awards, sponsorships or other philanthropy, make sure to estimate and include the cost of the coordinator's time. This is usually the biggest expense of a memory café!

2. Grants from foundations

Grants are one of the main sources of funding for cafés nationwide. Foundations often give start-up grants to memory cafés, and may also give grants for expansion/innovation of existing cafés. Some may be willing to provide ongoing support.

Foundations may be funded by individuals, or organizations (such as faith communities, hospitals or universities). They may make grants on a national, state, regional, county or town/city basis.

It's important to carefully look at their geographic range and their criteria for making grants. Do you have to be a registered nonprofit or have a fiscal agent that is? Can you make the case that your café is aligned with their funding priorities? If it's a stretch, it may not be worth your time. It's better to find the funders that fit!

Foundations (along with government funders) usually require a more "formal" process than some of the other funders listed in this tip sheet. They often want you to measure the impact of your café. Because most cafés meet only for a few hours per month, and because participants come and go, it is not possible for one café to accurately measure "outcomes." However, it's important to have an evaluation process in place so that you can get feedback and continuously improve. Include information about this process in your funding proposal. Then, draw upon published research to make a case for the benefits of memory cafés, such as this 2021 study by Masoud et al:

<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpubh.2021.660144/full>

In addition to your own evaluation data, and published research, participant quotes and stories can bring your café to life. In your funding proposal, it is often possible to include

some quotes and stories!

Keep in mind that foundations NEED to give money away. Your success is their success! So, be a great grantee by following timelines and reporting requirements. Acknowledge their support in public presentations. Build a positive relationship with your funders, and they will be delighted to support you!

Getting started

- To find potential grant makers, search Pro Publica (free!) and look at organizational 990s to find ones with relevant interests (www.propublica.org)
- Connect with your local branch of the Association for Fundraising Professionals and other non-profit marketing groups.
- Be prepared to network and establish contacts over time, and to educate potential funders about cafés and dementia friendly concepts.
- Community banks have small foundations, and may be able to connect you with family foundations that are hard to find otherwise.
- Some large businesses, such as supermarket chains, have foundations. Reach out to talk with a manager to get the conversation started.
- For those starting a café, you may be able to get a smaller planning grant.
- If you are starting your café with grant funding, it's important to keep costs sustainable from the start, so that the program can be sustained when grant runs out.
- Consider partnering with other nonprofits to seek a grant together. Most funders like to promote collaboration, and to know that their investment will have a broad impact!

If at first you don't succeed...

- If your grant proposal is rejected, ask why. Get feedback!
- Ask community foundations for grant-writing assistance. They may also be able to suggest other funders to try.

Get to know your Community Foundations

A community foundation is a public charity that pools donations from individuals, families and businesses, and then provides grants to nonprofits. Usually, community foundations focus on a specific geographic area.

Not only do community foundations offer grants that may be useful to cafés, they may also be able to connect you with local individuals and businesses that could provide support over time. They may also offer grant-writing assistance.

3. Other local/regional funders (clubs, etc.)

Many communities have smaller organizations or clubs that could be a source of funds. Note that Rotary in the UK has been a major engine powering the spread of memory cafés there. Clubs can also connect you with local business owners that might want to sponsor your café.

Here are some examples to consider:

- Rotary, Lions, Elks, Knights of Columbus, etc.
- Sororities, fraternities (these may be university-based or national)
- High school clubs (think intergenerational!)
- Arts council or board

4. Government funds

These funds have strict criteria and reporting requirements. They may be administered at the federal, state, county or local government level. Examples are Administration for Community Living (ACL) which provides large multi-year grants; Area Agencies on Aging, which administer the National Family Caregiver Support Program (Title III-E), which funds caregiver support only, and Service Incentive Grants (SIG) administered by state Council on Aging organizations. Some cafés are currently using ARPA (American Rescue Plan) funds, but this is an example of a time-limited resource.

5. Business sponsorships

Many cafés have partnered with local businesses to sponsor their café. The sponsorship could be ongoing, or it could be for just one or a few café gatherings. The sponsoring business could provide funds, or in-kind donations such as food or materials.

Typical business sponsors include home care providers, assisted livings or nursing homes. Some cafés also have success with “Main Street” businesses such as cafés or restaurants, often through a personal connection. (Sometimes a presentation to a Rotary Club or similar group can open the door to connect with local businesses.)

There are usually two reasons that a business would sponsor your café: (1) someone with decision-making authority cares about this issue and wants to give back, (2) this business wants to market to your café participants.

Both reasons are fine, as long as you establish clear boundaries so that the business doesn't make your café participants feel pushed. For example, you may want to specify

that you'll publicly thank the business at the beginning of café gatherings, but that they cannot stand up and give a commercial message for the business. Download the Percolator Memory Café Toolkit in [English](#) or [Spanish](#) for a template that you can use for your own sponsor guide.

Keep in mind that when you engage businesses as sponsors, you also have an opportunity to expose them to the idea of living well with dementia, and inclusive community values. Encourage them to send staff to visit/volunteer at your café!

6. Individual/family donations

Most cafés are free of charge, which makes them more accessible. However, some of your participants can and want to give back.

For most cafés, donations from individuals/families comprise a small part of their funding. However, a few cafés get large donations or even sustaining funding from an individual or family. (Note that some café provider organizations prohibit asking participants for donations.)

Seventeen percent of respondents in our 2023 Percolator survey said that they get some funds from participant donations. How do they do this?

- Many cafés have a donation jar, though they typically report that it doesn't bring in much money.
- Some cafés make an annual or bi-annual appeal to participants, either through a mailing or at their café gathering.
- One café reports getting frequent memorial donations. (This café sends out death announcements, including obituaries, to its participant mailing list when someone dies.)
- Sponsoring a café gathering in someone's honor or memory can be meaningful for an individual or family. Consider creating a "template" for this and spreading the word that the opportunity is available.
- A small number of cafés have annual galas or other fundraising events. Events can foster a sense of community and strengthen ties; however, they can be costly to run.

7. Participant fees

In our 2023 survey, 4% of respondents reported that they charge fees to participate in their café. These cafés are likely to offer more costly activities, such as field trips, professionally-run arts activities, and/or to provide transportation. Many of these cafés

offer a sliding scale to those who cannot afford the full fee.

While many café providers feel that charging fees does not fit with their current model, these are some potential advantages to consider:

- It provides a more stable and dependable revenue base.
- It makes high quality or more costly activities possible.
- One café charges \$5-10 per person and finds that people are more likely to show up if they have paid for their “ticket.”

Laundry List of Other Tips



- If you don't ask for money, you won't get it! Know your actual costs so that you can ask effectively.
- Remember that funders and donors of all types want to invest in great projects. This is a mutual benefit!
- Tell your story. “When you tug at the heart strings, you pull the purse strings.” If a participant is willing to share their story about why your café matters, this can be especially powerful!
- Many people don't know what memory cafés are. Be prepared with a concise introduction. Depending on the audience, use photos, video clips, written material, participant quotes, research studies. (Keep in mind the Percolator PSA video!)
- Social isolation is in the news. Explain how cafés help to connect people.
- Collaborate with other organizations to help with outreach and other resources. This includes organizations and businesses outside the aging or dementia services sector, such as local businesses, libraries, nature centers, museums, concert halls, schools, YMCAs, etc. As you support your café, you are spreading awareness about living well with dementia!

- There is a growing “social prescribing” movement. As this movement takes root in the U.S. and we build the evidence base for memory cafés, the day may come when medical providers would “prescribe” attendance at a café to a patient, and the café would receive insurance reimbursement.

Trends to Watch: Social Prescribing

Social prescribing is well-established in the national health systems of countries including the UK, Canada, Australia and Japan, but it is new the US. What is it?

“Social prescribing commonly involves health professionals referring people to social activities in their communities to bolster their overall health and well-being. These might be nature walks, ballroom dance classes, visits to museums, cooking classes, or any other ways that people can meet their social needs. ...A growing body of evidence suggests social prescribing to be an effective way to combat loneliness, chronic disease management, depression, and other social factors demanding transformations in US health systems.” – Design Lab, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/design-lab/2023/03/06/design-for-social-prescribing-bridging-silos-for-health-promotion-2/>

The first pilot took place in Massachusetts, led by the Massachusetts Cultural Council: <https://massculturalcouncil.org/communities/culturex-initiative/>

The JF&CS Memory Café Percolator is a free resource that since 2014 has shared ideas and technical assistance with organizations starting and sustaining memory cafés throughout the U.S. and beyond. Visit us at www.jfcsboston.org/Percolator