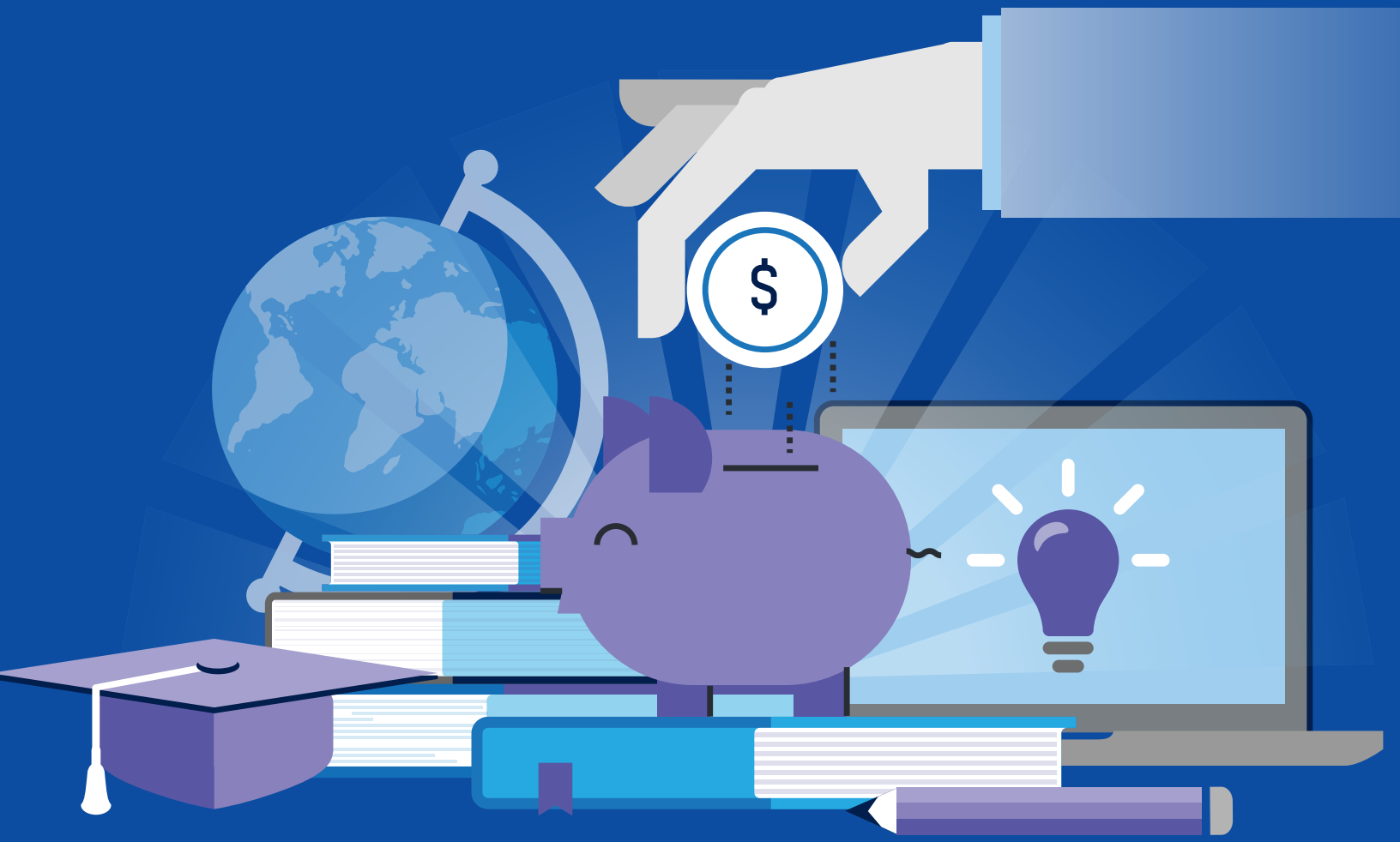
SAMSUNG

eBook:

Getting Creative: Funding Solutions for Ed Tech Purchases



Although EdNET Insight reports that planned spending is stable or increasing in many school districts,[1] much of that increase is driven by the need to purchase student computing devices and upgrade internet access for required Common Core online assessments. The article goes on to note that some districts are decreasing funds for professional development and tech support to make budget room for the new purchases. Futuresource Consulting dove into the spending statistics and confirmed that many of the increases were in mobile devices — including Chromebooks — and were driven by online testing.[2] As a result, balancing the necessity of keeping up with state and federal testing requirements with the desire to provide more enriching learning environments for students can be complex.

Funding technology purchases can be a challenge, particularly in education.

In order to create a technology deployment plan that fits your budget and allows you to keep up with testing requirements without stifling students' creativity, you must first decide what your goals are, both in a general educational sense and for any technology tools you choose to purchase. Use your long-term plan for student learning and standards as your starting point, and examine where technology fits in and how it can be used to improve the learning experience or outcomes. Which technologies will provide the greatest benefit to the largest number of students? Is one-to-one computing the best option to help you achieve your goals? How will your teachers adapt to the new technology? How will you tie your assessments of the technology to your goals to ensure that you're getting good feedback about the technology's effectiveness?

Once you're comfortable that your planned technology deployment is a good fit for your school or district, it's time to figure out how to pay for it. Which budget will the money come from? Are any funds allocated for innovation and test runs before you commit to purchasing the technology for the entire school? Will your budget cover your planned purchase and if not, where will the additional funding come from and how will you secure it?

The typical technology budget is a bit of a puzzle. Money allocated for technology can come from the capital budget, textbooks and materials, classified and certified salaries and benefits, or educational services. After assessing what funds are available, you must plan to fill in any funding gaps, looking for grants from state and local government as well as private foundations and businesses.

To help make sense of how to best sort out the technology purchasing process, this eBook will take you through the buying cycle — breaking into the steps necessary to plan, purchase and deploy new technology tools. It will also give you ideas for finding any missing funds you need to complete the purchase and support the new technologies in the curriculum.

Chapter 1: Timeline and Buying Cycle

Technology purchases, like any large expenditures, take a relatively long time to plan and complete. The actual amount of time spent and when the process begins will likely depend on your district's typical budgeting cycle, but you'll want to make sure you're following these steps.

STEP 1: Needs Assessment

Begin by looking at your learning goals and five-year plan. The following questions can help you align your school's technology and learning needs:

- What do students need to learn?
- Are there particular areas on which the district is focusing, such as STEAM, project-based learning or raising test scores?
- How does technology support these learning goals?
- Is the district planning to shift from labs or shared computers to a one-to-one program?
- What technology tools have you already deployed in your schools?
- How well are they aging?
- Will you need to add to the technology you already have or completely replace it?
- How robust is the bandwidth within the school buildings, both for internal networking and internet use?
- How are district and building enrollment projected to grow over the typical lifespan of educational devices?
- Is there a wide level of variability in home access to computers and internet?
- What out of school resources are there for students who don't have access?

Use the answers to these questions to decide what purchases you need to make and how you can deploy devices — whether they're to be used in class only, sent home for 24/7 access, or contained in labs and technology centers. For example, if you find that many of your students aren't able to access technology outside of school, you might consider making the case for a one-to-one deployment that includes students taking their assigned devices home, even if that isn't part of your district's overall plan.

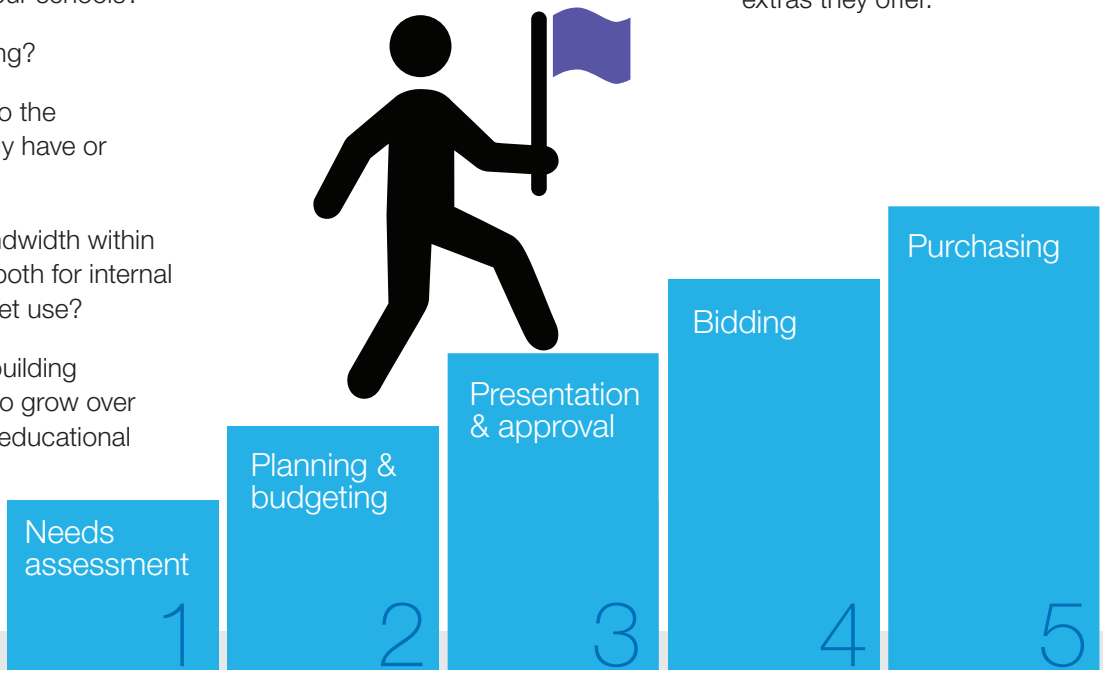
STEP 2: Planning and Budgeting

Once you know what you need, it's time to make a plan.

Look at different technology options and assess how well they'll help your students achieve their learning goals.

Try coming up with three different solution scenarios to price out for presentation and budgeting purposes. But make sure you're happy with all three, as any of them might be chosen by your leadership and school board.

One method of easing the process is to look for an integrated solution that incorporates hardware, management software, curriculum and professional development. Department heads can help you look at the various curriculum and professional learning options to ensure they'll work for your population. Once you've outlined your basic scenarios, do some preliminary pricing research. You can find guidelines about educational pricing online and use them to build out your cost projections, comparing them with what's available in your budget. If there are discretionary spending categories in your budget, prepare to make a case for why those should be allocated toward this particular technology purchase. It could be that your basic scenario is fully funded by your budget, and your second and third options are contingent on getting grant funds to pay for the extras they offer.



If you're facing a shortfall, this is a good time to research grants that will help you fill in those gaps. Gather a list of potential grant sources, noting the amounts they offer, application procedures and deadlines.[3] It may take multiple grants to cover the purchases you need to make, so don't skimp on the research.

Make sure you're including a timeline for deployment in your planning, as that will guide you in the next steps and help you evaluate vendors. Depending on your needs, you might want to test the deployment out as a pilot or roll out the technology in phases in order to ease the process and help spread the expenditures over two budget cycles.

One method of easing the process of planning and budgeting is to look for an integrated solution that incorporates hardware, management software, curriculum and professional development.

STEP 3: Presentation and Approval

Present your scenario options first to your leadership, detailing your plans to pay for each of them. At this point, your leadership may narrow it down to one scenario to present to the board, or you may decide together to present all options. If you have a basic scenario that can be funded by the budget with add-on scenarios dependent on grant funding, you'll likely want to present all of them so that you have contingent approval if your grants are approved.

Ensure that your school board presentation occurs early enough in the budget cycle that you have time for bidding, grant applications and purchasing for your deployment plan.

STEP 4: Bidding

Once you've acquired board approval, the next step is to reach out to vendors.

Use your early pricing research to narrow it down to vendors who can offer you the all-in-one solutions that will ease your budgeting, and ensure that their learning tools and professional development are a good match for the technology solution you're choosing. It will make your job much easier to work only with vendors that see the importance of meeting your needs holistically — and you and your team won't have to keep track of lots of different contacts when there are issues or questions.

You can use a formal or informal RFP process to ensure that each of your chosen vendors is being assessed on the same criteria. Allow time for presentations and assessment of the included curriculum materials and professional learning plans from your department heads or assigned teachers as well. If you're planning a pilot as part of the deployment, ensure that your vendor can help you make changes to the final purchase based on the results.

While you're waiting to get responses from potential vendors, apply for the grants you need to ensure that your funding is in place by the time you need to begin purchasing. Finally, the last step is to make a decision about which vendor can offer you the best value and the best product.

STEP 5: Purchasing

Once you've made it through vendor selection and finding funding, it's time to schedule the purchase.

Depending on your timeline, you can purchase the initial pilot equipment, teacher devices or phase tools first, then follow up with the final purchase in time for the full deployment.

The budgeting cycle can seem never-ending, as you're likely working with multiple yearly budgets and long-term plans, but spending time making sure the budget is accurate early on will help ease the process as you complete the cycle.

Chapter 2: Applying for Grants

The information you gathered and the plans you made in your needs assessment and planning phases will help you apply for grants, as you've likely gathered the data you need. The next step is to insert this information into the correct format for the grants you've decided to apply for.

Because of the wide variety of grants available, you'll likely be applying for a combination of public and private grants. Although procedures and deadlines vary, there are some general tips that will help you write successful grants.

1. Follow the format

Each grant-making organization has a format, and if grants are particularly competitive, not following the format could be an automatic "no." Some, such as the RGK Foundation, require a digital submission from their website and will not consider unsolicited paper requests. Others present periodic requests for grants and only consider them during specific times of the year.

2. Answer the questions provided

Grants are typically a series of questions that help the grant-making organization assess whether issuing the grant will be a good use of their funds. Don't be afraid to provide further information in your answers, but make sure you're answering exactly what they're asking.

3. Be specific

In your grant, include information from your research about the needs of your students, the solutions you've chosen and the overall cost of the project. If your students tend to be of lower socioeconomic status or have a low rate of higher education, include this in your request and discuss how your grant will provide these students with equal opportunity and help prepare them for college. If your test scores need to improve, share those numbers and illustrate how your proposed technology solution will help meet the benchmarks you've set.

Include any relevant information you've used to get approval from your leadership and school board.

4. Get help if you need it

If you're not familiar with grant writing, try to find a staff member who has experience. If not, consider hiring a professional grant writer. The cost of a pro can be offset by a potentially higher success rate — and you and your staff can use your time to do what you're good at rather than spending it on writing grants. You might hire a grant writer only for a big grant from a foundation and write the smaller grants yourselves. Even if you write the grants yourself, make sure you have someone else read it over to make sure your copy is thorough and free of errors.

5. Follow up[4]

If you're awarded a grant, follow up with the grant funding organization with a thank you letter. Then provide updates, assessments and a final report as outlined in your grant to help the funder see the effects their grant had on your students.

Important Components of the Grant Application[4]

Statement of need: Why do you need the funds to meet the educational needs of your student body? If your student population has specific challenges — such as low tax base, high percentage of English language learners and so on — describe them here.

Goals, objectives and plan for reaching them: What educational goals and objectives are you trying to meet? How will the technology help you achieve them? Which personnel are involved in key roles in the project?

Budget and timeline: How much is the total project? How much of that is funded by this grant? How will grant funds be used? What is the implementation timeline?

Assessment and evaluation: How will you determine if the project has been effective in meeting your goals? Which assessment tools will you use?

Clincher or hook: Why is this project important? How will the funds provided by the granting organization improve education in your district? Why are you passionate about this project?

Chapter 3: Finding Grants

As you find specific grant programs, you can tie them into the various components of your technology deployment. For example, a state ed tech grant can be used for a broad range of technology purchases, while a private foundation grant may be tied to a specific curriculum area. Need and student demographics can also affect the grant decision, so if your student body has a high poverty rate, has a high percentage of English language learners or some other widely recognized disadvantage, include that in any grant application. Additionally, some federal funds are granted solely on need with no application required.

Public Grants

Federal and state government grants are available for schools.

Some state grants are federally funded block grants (such as ESSA and ed tech grants), and others are specific state programs funded by your legislature. The best way to find these is to go to your state's education department website, where you can find the guidelines, time frames, and links to the application materials you need.

You can find federal grants at Grants.gov, which has a search engine that you can use to narrow down the results to education-focused grants. You can also look at the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance, a full listing of federal grant opportunities.

Private Grants

You can find many private sources of grants, from large foundations all the way to local businesses.

Large foundations are a reliable source for larger grants that can fund a good portion of a big technology purchase. They also tend to have longer grant applications, longer timelines and specific grant-funding periods, but make sure you're clear on the guidelines and deadlines for these projects.

Technology companies often offer grants and programs that help offset some costs of purchasing their equipment, which you can ask about during the bidding process. The availability of grants can help sway you toward a specific vendor at that point.

Smaller foundations can be a good source of funding, as there may be less competition. They may also have more specific funding guidelines that fit your project and needs, or they may be focused solely on a particular region.

There are some good online resources that gather information about grants from foundations and corporations, such as Edutopia's Big List of Educational Grants and Resources, DreamBox's Educational Technology Grants for Teachers, and GrantsAlert.

Finally, look at local businesses. Many credit unions and community banks offer mini-grants for local teachers. Local businesses may also be able to provide larger one-time gifts that can contribute to your technology project. In this case, be prepared to provide recognition for the gift — many of these donations are a marketing function, and they'll expect to be thanked and mentioned publicly to obtain marketing value in the community. And if the business feels they've gotten good value for their donation, they may be willing to make similar donations in the future as part of an ongoing relationship.

Grants can fill in budget shortfalls for large technology purchases. Find a mix of potential public and private grants as part of the budgeting process so you're ready to apply when you've gotten the go-ahead from the school leadership and the board.

Crowdfunding Is a Popular Source of Technology Funds

The costs of large-scale technology refreshes can outpace even the healthiest of budgets. When this happens, some schools and teachers are turning to crowd-funding.

Through such sites as DonorsChoose, SA500Kids and GoFundMe, schools tap into their students, their parents and their families and friends to help make technology purchases. This form of funding has grown in popularity, with education contributions on DonorsChoose and GoFundMe increasing nearly 450 percent from 2010 to 2015.[5]

These types of projects work best if they are broken into smaller chunks, such as by classroom. This can also be a good option for a specific adaptive technology solution for a student with special needs, to augment the budget for helping that student work within the classroom. This works best through personal connections, as each teacher shares the link with their students' parents, and those parents share it within their personal networks. The PTA/PTO can also help publicize the fundraising links through their social media feeds.

Because many of these sites offer matching funds with special codes or funding boosts for first-time users, it's a good idea to break the requests into smaller chunks and have each teacher post their own classroom request.

Many of the same guidelines for writing grants apply to crowdfunding. Include a compelling narrative that encourages people to fund your projects. Many of your funders will be the families of students, so they'll have a personal connection, but there are many more who seek out schools and projects to fund, so make sure any site visitor will easily see the benefits of your project.

A budget is also required, so be specific here. Most sites list specific equipment and the cost breakdown.

Because you'll be dealing with multiple donors, make sure you visit the site often and thank each donor specifically. Provide updates on the project as you go through the funding cycle, and provide a final report once the project is fully funded and implemented.

Local businesses may offer one-time gifts as part of their marketing budget. Be prepared to offer recognition in print and at events so the business feels they've gotten good value for their donation.

Matching Funding Sources to Projects

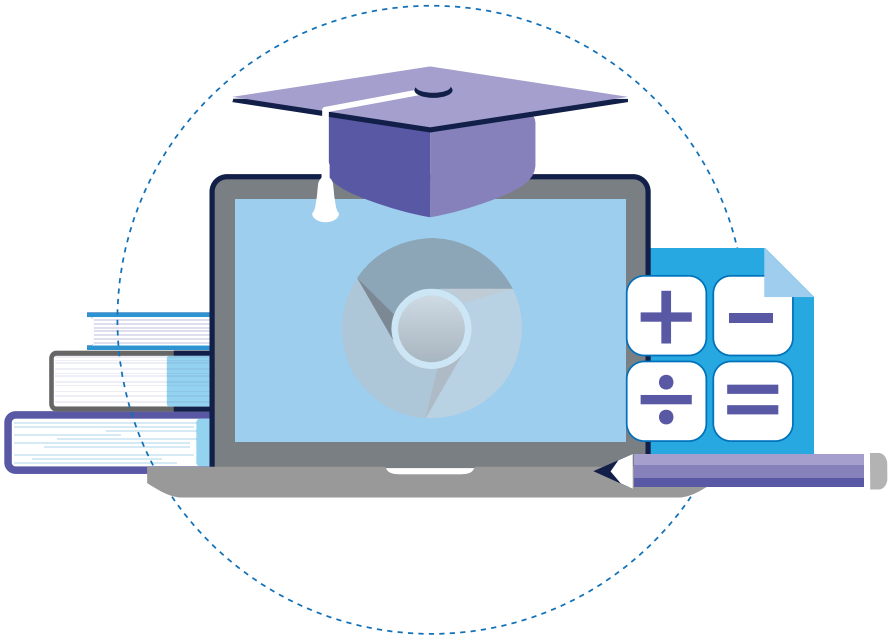
Funding Source	Budget	Public grants	Private grants	Local grants	Crowdfunding
Best for:	Large-scale purchases, ongoing support, release time for training	Specific projects, such as bandwidth upgrades (E-rate), computer purchases (Ed-Tech) and complete programs (ESSA block grants)	Large-scale purchases, specific projects tied to the grant-funding organizations or funding priorities	Smaller projects, one-time expenses, specific purchases	Smaller projects, one-time expenses, specific purchases
Where to find:	Leadership	Federal and state websites	Grant directories, web searches	Web searches, local business websites	Web searches, recommendations from fellow educators

Conclusion: Making Tech Purchases Easier

When you're preparing to fund a technology project, make sure you follow a clear set of steps, and always start with the needs of your students. Ensure that any planned purchases tie directly into educational goals so that students will benefit and teachers will participate.

Also, make the process easier by looking for a vendor that provides an all-in-one solution so that funding is clearer. For example, a solution such as Samsung's Classroom in a Box includes curriculum and professional development resources with the purchase of Chromebooks, meaning that either funding tied specifically to curriculum or professional development can be shifted to the technology purchase, or it can come completely from the technology budget, requiring no curriculum or training expenditures during that budget year. Then, curriculum upgrades and further professional learning can be part of the expenditures in subsequent years. Purchasing an integrated package means you can be sure your devices work together, shifting the focus from tech support and setup to student learning.

All-in-one solutions allow you to focus your energy on student learning rather than budget minutiae.



This sort of solution can also ease the pain of budgeting so you can focus on the planning and implementation — improving your students' ability to access their education and better preparing them for higher education and employment.

To see Samsung's full portfolio of education products and solutions, visit **samsung.com/education**.

Resources

Grants and Grant Databases

https://www.cfda.gov/

http://www.dreambox.com/blog/technologygrantsforteachersfor2016

http://www.edutopia.org/grantsandresources

http://grants.gov

http://www.grantsalert.com/

http://www.grantwrangler.com/stemresources.html

http://www.nea.org/grants/grantsawardsandmore.html

http://www.grantselect.com/

http://www.teacherscount.org/grants/

http://www.digitalwish.com/dw/digitalwish/grants

http://www.grantsforteachers.net/cat/Technology/cat_12.aspx

Crowdsourcing

http://www.Adoptaclassroom.org

http://donorschoose.org

http://www.eschoolnews.com/funding/

http://fundmyclassroom.com/

http://classwish.org/

http://www.getedfunding.com/

http://www.oo.com/sa500kids

Other Sources

http://www.digitalwish.com/dw/digitalwish/teachers

Endnotes

1. "Report: Education Tech Spending on the Rise," THE Journal, https://thejournal.com/articles/2016/01/19/reporteducationtechspendingontherise.aspx
2. "Education Hardware Technology Spend in K-12 Increases by 7% in 2015," http://futuresourceconsulting.com/201604EducationHardwareTechnologySpend8162.html
3. "Grant Lifecycle Timeline," http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/learngrants/grants101/grantlifecycle.html
4. "Show Me the Money: Tips and Resources for Successful Grant Writing," Education World, http://www.educationworld.com/a_curr/profdev/profdev039.shtml
5. "Crowdfunded Classrooms: Teachers Increasingly Solicit Online," Associated Press, http://bigstory.ap.org/article/d625e0f2c4f14255982341d755bf17a1/crowdfundedclassroomsteachers increasinglysolicitonline