

March 19, 2009

Google Grants Department
1600 Amphitheatre Parkway
Mountain View, CA 94043

Dear Google Grants Director:

I am writing this letter as the Executive Director of TechMission, a faith-based nonprofit social service organization that provides online volunteer matching for the faith-based social service sector. Our national partners represent over 30,000 local organizations, 4 million volunteers serving over 40 million low-income individuals in the USA, and have included the Salvation Army, the Association of Gospel Rescue Missions, World Vision and AmeriCorps, among others. We rank among the top 10 organizations focused on nonprofit technology, and among this group we have the highest representation from Black and Hispanic communities. I am writing to express concern over the inconsistency of Google's policy toward faith-based organizations the Google Grants process.

Our experience in applying for Google Grants for the past three years has shown inconsistencies in your policy toward Faith-Based Organizations focused on social services that could result in unintended consequences and open Google to liabilities. Below is a summary of those issues:

- 1. Google Grant's Policy toward Faith-Based Organizations is, in effect, more restrictive than any major technology organization, and is resulting in secularizing Google's search rankings within the nonprofit sector.** Of more than 50 other tech companies that we have identified, Google Grants has, in effect, the most restrictive policy toward faith-based social service organizations (see list at: <http://www.techsoup.org/stock/restrictions.asp>). **The faith-based social services sector represents about one-third of the total social services sector, but appears to only be less than 1% of Google Grant awardees.** Faith-based volunteers in the USA alone make up 34.8% of volunteers and provide volunteer time valued at \$51.8 billion each year, so excluding them results in a great loss of resources that could bring community change. VolunteerMatch (which receives Google Grants) reports that only 1.8% of its volunteer listings are from faith-based organizations, showing they are not effectively reaching that sector. Faith-based social service organizations make up 20 of the largest 100 nonprofits in the country. Google Grants' stated goal is serving "the globally diverse audience that our search engine and tools serve." Globally, 97.5% of people profess some faith. In addition, if faith-based social service organizations are not adequately represented as recipients of Google Grants, it could result in indirectly discriminating against organizations from developing countries as well as against African American and Latino communities in the USA. These communities have strong cultural ties to faith-based organizations, and the majority of social service organizations in these communities are often faith-based organizations. In addition, in the United States, the majority of African American and Latino leaders are in faith-based organizations. If Google Grants does not ensure that faith-based organizations are fairly treated, then it could result in an inadvertent bias toward white-led and Western organizations both in Grants and search results. We believe that Google Grants should be open to Faith-Based Organizations focused on social services (whether Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist or other faiths). Because Google Grants makes up about one-third of the traffic of our secular counterparts (VolunteerMatch and Idealist.org), the increased traffic (and resulting links from visitors) from that visibility increases their web search rankings. The end result is that the Google Grants process is that secular nonprofits receive significantly higher search rankings than faith-based nonprofits that do the same

work. Given Google's market share and about of grants, overall this has a very significant affect of secularizing Google's search rankings within the nonprofit sector. If Google does not bring its policies more in line with that of its peer technology companies, then it risk facing a public relations issues of being perceived as having an anti-religious bias compare to other technology companies by secularizing its search rankings among nonprofits.

2. **Google Grant's Policy and Process involving Faith-Based Organization is inconsistently applied.** We have talked to at least five current Google employees that have expressed support of TechMission's past Google Grants applications, and found that each person had a different understanding of Google Grant's policy toward faith-based organizations. Some indicated that they thought Google excluded all faith-based organizations and others did not. We were told by one employee that our application would not be disqualified for being a faith-based organization, and that it would be reviewed. Then, we received a notice that our application was declined, found out it because we are a faith-based organization. We applied on three separate occasions using our secular brand (iVolunteering.org) and our Christian brand (ChristianVolunteering.org), and were dedined for being faith-based regardless of our nondiscrimination policy and focus on social services. Our iVolunteering.org website follows your policy of having no "religious content which proselytizes or discriminates on the basis of religion." In researching hundreds of Google Grants that were awarded, we identified several that were associated with faith based organizations including to Baptcare, Children of Rural Africa, Catholic Relief Services and Helping Hands of Goose Creek among others. TechMission researched occasions where Google awarded grants to faith-based social service organizations, which shows inconsistencies that result in less than 1% of grantees coming from faith-based social service organizations although they represent about 33% of the social services sector.

Given Google's market share of the search market, this is a critical issue that must be challenged until a solution is maintained and sustained. Our websites represent that largest Web portal for the faith-based social services sector, so as an advocate for that sector, we feel it is our responsibility to bring up the concern. For TechMission, this is an issue of justice. Excluding a third of the social services market (which has the largest representation of Black, Hispanic and indigenous leaders) is a policy that is inconsistent with nearly every other technology organization. TechMission respects the right of every company to choose their grant recipients based on profitable measures, we also respect the right of social action organizations like ourselves to make it very unprofitable for companies to discriminate against religious groups that perform the same social services as non-religious groups.

There are some members of our board that have suggested that we take a more public challenge to Google on this issue, suggesting some combination of a legal challenge, employing PR firms and/or a boycott of Google Search. We have chosen not to pursue those actions at this time because we want to pursue a dialog to see whether we might be able to find a mutually agreeable solution. We have tried every possible means to talk to someone at Google about this issue, but have been unsuccessful in even getting a phone call returned.

I'm familiar with the grant policies of hundreds of companies, and Google's policy is much more restrictive than any other technology company toward faith-based organizations. I have a research background in technology and policy, and previously co-founder of the Internet and Telecoms consortium at MIT where we studied the social, business and technology implications of the Internet. TechMission's Board of Directors and advisory board includes the Executive Director of the Harvard Business School, graduates from Stanford and MIT, the formal CFO of the Salvation Army USA and other national Black and Latino leaders. Given Google's market power, this is not an issue that our board is

willing to let stand. If we did decide to move forward with any of those actions, our goal would be to recruit a broad representation of the faith-based social services sector as well as Black and Hispanic church networks.

TechMission requests the following actions be taken into consideration. We request that Google review its policy and grants process toward faith-based organizations to develop precise language that is consistently understood and followed by all Google employees. The recent revisions to Google's grant policies make a good step in this direction, but without adequate training to everyone in Google's grant review process, it is likely that the process will continue to be inconsistently applied. We suspect that much of this may be because of the strong involvement of regular Google employees in the Google Grants process, and that different employees may have different understanding of those policies. We believe that if the process is not biased, then faith-based social service organizations should be receiving grants proportional to their overall representation in the social services sector. We also request that Google consider adopting a policy toward faith-based organizations that is more in line with other technology companies (see list at: <http://www.techsoup.org/stock/restrictions.asp>).

TechMission has the highest respect for Google and believe that Google Grants is one of the most innovative and effective philanthropic efforts on the Internet. I would be very interested in either meeting in person or on the phone to discuss this further. I can be reached at andrew@techmission.org or 617-282-9798 x101. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Andrew Sears". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Andrew Sears
Executive Director