

GERMAN IMMERSION FOUNDATION



Q: What is the German Immersion Foundation?

A: The German Immersion Foundation (GIF) is a parent-led, not-for-profit organization that was started in 2001 as a vehicle for raising funds to support both the Milwaukee German Immersion School (MGIS) and the program that MGIS students graduate into at the Milwaukee School of Languages (MSL) for junior high and high school continuation of their German immersion opportunity. It is one of the only groups of its kind in the United States established to support a public school language immersion program.

The Foundation's 501(c)3 status allows the schools to access funds from outlets that are only able to donate to not-for-profit organizations. For instance, many companies will match employee donations to a charitable organization, which would preclude them from donating directly to a public school. The Foundation allows them to donate through it to support MGIS and MSL.

Q: What areas does GIF fund?

A: Throughout the year, staff members from both schools identify areas where they have a financial need and submit those requests to the GIF for consideration. Under foundation By-laws and consistent with its tax-exempt status, the GIF is not able to fund staffing or other operational areas, however it can provide support in areas such as crucial professional development for teachers and curriculum development, important internationally recognized student testing, much needed equipment in the classrooms, and intern programs that bring native German speakers to the classrooms to encourage a cultural exchange.

This funding then provides the principals with more financial flexibility to budget for areas GIF is not able to directly support, which enables the schools to maintain the high quality of education they provide. GIF also funds college scholarship opportunities for graduates of either school to continue their pursuit of German studies.

Q: What is GIF's position on the funding crisis?

A: As a partner to each school, the GIF is focused on helping find a sustainable solution to their funding shortfalls. The funding crisis that all MPS schools face is a systemic issue that cannot be permanently solved by fundraising. Each year the gap continues to widen and this problem needs to be fixed through the political process. To that end, we assist by encouraging parents to contact their school board members and politicians who directly influence these budgets. Furthermore, we work diligently year-round to use our resources to find ways that make a lasting impact on school funding. To identify these needs, we work closely with both principals determining how best the GIF can help.

Additionally, as a small and private foundation, we neither have the means nor the authority to influence how each school's operations are funded. Directly funding any operational expense also exacerbates the funding issue as it sends a message that we can and will fund any further gaps MPS creates. To put things in perspective, the money we raise in any typical year is about 1% of the entire school operating budget at MGIS and even less at MSL. With this in mind, we can all make a difference by working together to raise additional money to fund the most impactful projects and by contacting our political representatives to improve school funding.



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Q: How does GIF raise funds?

A: The organization hosts two events each year – the fall “Friend Raiser” social event and the spring Silent Auction night. GIF also holds an annual fund drive with a direct appeal to stakeholders. The foundation has spent the past three years developing ways to pursue local corporate funding opportunities. Corporations and granting foundations almost exclusively fund specific projects, capital projects and campaigns. Rarely if ever will they fund an operational expense. To learn more about what funding options the foundation currently is pursuing or has investigated in the past, as well as to offer new suggestions, please contact board treasurer and development committee member Steve Bjork at sbjork@sbcglobal.net.

Q: Who leads the GIF?

A: In accordance with its tax-exempt status requirements, the GIF is run by a volunteer board of directors, currently comprised of 12 parents of current or former students, current and former school staff members, and community leaders. Additionally, liaisons consisting of principals and staff from both schools advise and make recommendations to the board. There are various committees that leverage volunteer support to execute the many tasks needed to raise funds for the schools.

Q: How can I get involved?

A: The GIF is in need of a variety of skill sets necessary to staff events, conduct fund raising, and communicate its mission to parents and the local community. The foundation strives to make volunteer activities manageable for busy parents and community leaders. If you or someone you know is interested in supporting MGIS and MSL in their goal to maintain high-quality German immersion opportunities, please contact board vice-president Kelly Kuglitsch at kkuglitsch@dkattorneys.com.

Q: What is the difference between the PTA and the GIF?

A: Both the PTA and the GIF are vital to the success of our schools; however, the focus of each is very different, allowing them to support the school in multiple key areas. The PTA funding focus is on important and necessary activities that impact students now. With this in mind, the PTA must raise funds as quickly as possible, with minimal investment for immediate needs. The GIF provides a long-term funding opportunity to ensure the continuation of a K-4 through Grade 12 opportunity through both MGIS & MSL. To achieve GIF’s mission, we must identify, invest in and pursue activities that will result in large donations over time to help fund large-scale projects at either or both schools. A great example of this is the GIF’s funding of conference participation for Dr. Brugger that resulted in a direct annual donation of 15,000 euros for MGIS during the last several years. For more information or to review GIF’s most recent Annual Report, visit www.germanimmersionfoundation.org.



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