

Grant Writing 101

From Readiness to Results



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Disclaimer: Some graphics are AI-generated, and we utilized ChatGPT to create worksheets to match presentation and branding style

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A vibrant illustration centered around a large, golden handshake. Radiating from this central point is a network of blue lines connecting to various circular icons. These icons depict a diverse group of people: a blonde woman with a clipboard, a man in a hard hat and safety vest, a man with a beard and glasses, a woman with long dark hair, a man in a suit, and a man with a beard. Other icons include a calendar, a document with checkmarks, a coffee cup, and a group of three people. The background features a scenic landscape with green mountains, a blue lake, and evergreen trees under a sky with soft clouds. The overall theme is global collaboration and business success.

Introductions

Building a network is a key to grant writing success- you never know when you need support!



- ✓ BA in English Literature and Creative Writing (Montana State University- GO CATS!)
- ✓ Began writing grants for non-profit agencies in 1997
- ✓ Moved from non-profit to County/City grant writing in 1998 and back to non-profit in 2010
- ✓ Have been writing grants for KLJ since 2014
- ✓ In total have written grants for awards just over \$300 million total



- ✓ BA in History
- ✓ Began writing grants as an economic developer in 2004
- ✓ Averaged while in Eureka over \$3 Million annually
- ✓ Started working for MCDC/MCOC in 2019

Who- What – Why:

Let's Hear your “Elevator Speech”



Today is practical and work-focused— Ask Questions, Be Engaged, Learn and Laugh.

Schedule at a glance (8:00–5:00)

- Grant landscape + ethics and alignment
- Finding opportunities + building a grant pipeline
- Break
- Readiness + compliance setup (UEI, SAM.gov, systems)
- Lunch
- To write or not to write? (go/no-go decision)
- Designing a fundable project (problem → outcomes → workplan)
- Budgeting, match, and “true cost” planning
- Break
- Writing to the rubric + attachments strategy
- Submission planning + post-award realities
- Grant Writing Tips and Tricks
- Homework for Tomorrow

What we hope you leave with

- A better understanding of the dos and don'ts of grant writing
- 1–3 potential grant opportunities matched to your project
- Grant Readiness Checklist
- One-page Project Blueprint
- A means to determine “Go or No-Go”
- Some confidence to begin your Grant Writing Journey

LANDSCAPE OF GRANTS



The Landscape

Competitive funding requires planning, capacity, and discipline.



- ✓ Grants are extremely competitive
- ✓ Aligning projects takes knowledge of each program and advance planning
- ✓ Building support is critical
- ✓ There is no such thing as “free” money

The Basics

- Notice of Funding Announcement (NOFA)
- Request for Proposals (RFP)
- Request for Qualification (RFQ)
- Match: Two kinds (normally), in-kind and cash
- Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA)
- Code of Federal Regulations (CFR)
- Grants vs. Contracts – Loans vs. Cooperative Agreements – Federal/State vs Foundation/Private

Quick Tip: The Language for the Industry/focus you are applying for is both good and bad – writing in acronyms and specific language like “heavy engineer” may not be understood by the reviewer

Ethics of Grant Writing: Handout from MNA

- **Grant writing is skilled professional work** → *pay for the work*, not the outcome (avoid “contingency” expectations)
- **Client-first, mission-first** → don’t chase dollars; prevent mission creep
- **Truth in storytelling** → no inflated need, invented partners, or “promises you can’t keep.”
- **Write what you can administer** → ethics includes capacity: reporting, procurement, timekeeping, match documentation
- **Respect the funder + the public** → follow instructions, meet requirements, be transparent about constraints
- **Integrity with partners & data** → accurate roles, honest letters of support, no misrepresentation
- **AI use = accountability** → AI can edit/organize, but *humans own facts and commitments*

Ethical Red Flags:

- “*We’ll figure it out after we win.*” → Build capacity + compliance into plan and budget
- “*Just make it sound competitive.*” → Improve evidence and alignment; don’t exaggerate
- “*I can guarantee funding*” → No; guarantee a strong process and a compliant application
- “Use this partner letter—they’ll probably support it.” → Get true consent + defined roles
- “*Count that match twice.*” → Never; document match clearly and avoid double-dipping

Activity: Pick one and rewrite it into an ethical, fundable statement

1. **Pick one red flag** from the slide.

2. In **one sentence**, rewrite it so it is:

1. **Truthful** (no exaggeration / no invented capacity)
2. **Specific** (who/what/when/how much)
3. **Compliant** (acknowledges requirements, partners, match, reporting)
4. **Deliverable-focused** (what you will actually produce)



FINDING OPPORTUNITIES & BUILDING A GRANT PIPELINE



Finding Opportunities and Building a Grant Pipeline

Understand your Mission to understand Mission Creep.

Where do you Find Grants

Resource Handout

*If it feels too good to be true.... IT probably is.
Good Old Fashion Google Search*

- Federal:
 - Grants.gov – most common
 - Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA)
 - Agency Specific Sites (USDA – Rural Development, Dept of Commerce Economic Development Admin, Dept. of Energy or Defense)
- Montana:
 - Montana Webgrants <https://funding.mt.gov/index.do>
 - Montana Dept. of Commerce Grant and Loan page <https://commerce.mt.gov/Infrastructure-Planning/Grants-Loans/>
 - State Agency Newsletters/Alerts

Foundation/Private

- Montana Community Foundation – Grants and Funding Opportunities (<https://mtcf.org/funding/grants-and-funding-opportunities>)
- Montana Nonprofit Association – Grant Station (larger than Montana)
 - <https://grantstation.com/find-grants/montana>
- Montana State University: Private Funding Sources (<https://www.montana.edu/research/osp/findingfunding/privatefunding.html>)
- University of Montana- Foundation Center (<https://libguides.lib.umt.edu/grants>)
- Philanthropy Northwest <https://philanthropy.org/>

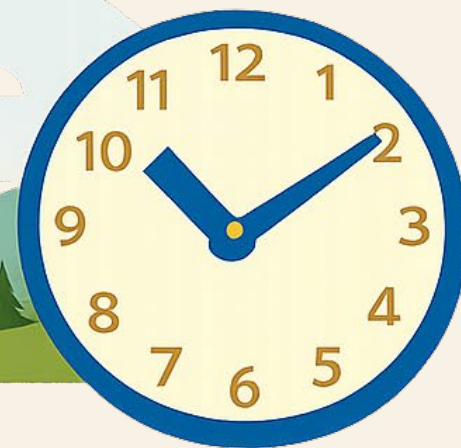
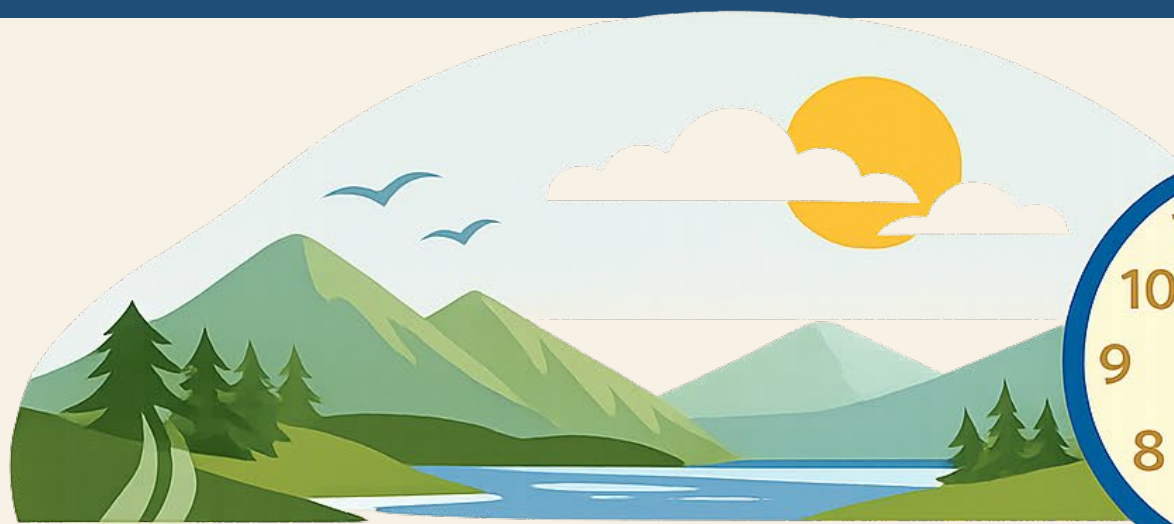
Samples of Calls for Proposals: Handouts to Review

- Montana Healthcare Foundation
- US Dept of Commerce – Economic Development Administration NOFA
 - Grants.gov listing: <https://grants.gov/search-results-detail/346815>
- Montana Main Street Community Collaboration Grant Application

Understand The Purpose - Handout to Start Building Your Pipeline

- READ – And then READ Again
 - Understand:
 - Eligibility
 - Purpose of Grant
 - Match
 - Scoring Criteria
 - Deadlines
 - Required Attachments
 - Administrative Requirements





**TAKE A
BREAK**



GRANT READINESS & COMPLIANCE SET-UP

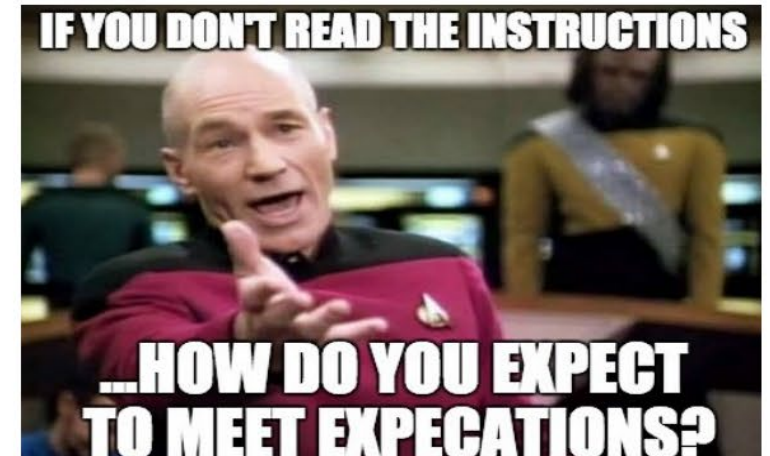


Grant Readiness and Compliance Set Up

Steps to the Magic Castle of Grant Writing Success

(Psst! There is no magic castle. If you're looking for that, you should probably leave now)

- ✓ **Read the Guidance and Instructions FULLY and multiple times**
 - ✓ Up to 50 percent of grants are NEVER READ because applicants didn't follow the instructions
 - ✓ AND, after you understand the instructions, answer the questions.



Before Notice of Funding: Advance Work

- ✓ **Collect Statistics and required technical information**
 - ✓ When possible, get and keep data in advance and from other partners and keep a repository of that data
 - ✓ Know how long it takes to get data if you don't already have it (plan for staff vacations or holidays that delay this)
 - ✓ Grants tell a story, generally to someone that knows nothing about your community/project. Data is the framework to support a compelling story for strangers.

Create the Outline/Template

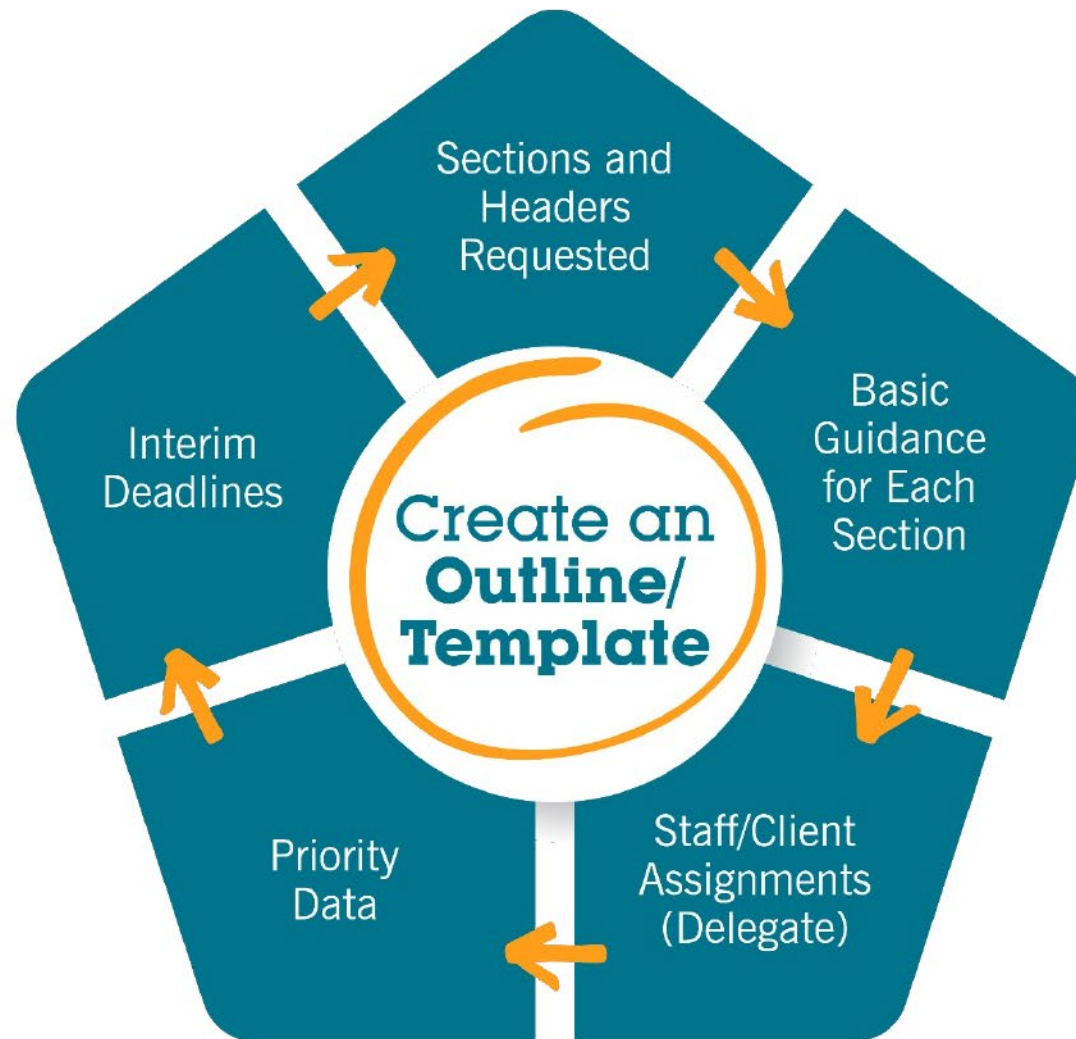


Table of Contents Example

Form SF-424, “Application for Federal Assistance”grants.gov
Form SF-424-A, “Budget Information-Non-Construction Programs”grants.gov
Survey on Ensuring Equal Opportunity for Applicants **(optional)**.....grants.gov
Title Page
Table of Contents

Executive Summary (2 page limit).....i-ii

Eligibility Discussion (2 page limit)iii-iv
Applicant Eligibility
Meet Applicant Type Requirements
Cost Sharing or Matching Funds
Use of Funds
Project Area
Grant Period
Satisfactory Performance

Table of Contents Example Continues:

Proposal Narrative (40 Page Limit, using no less than 11 point font size)

Goals of the Project..... 1

Estimated Performance Evaluation Measures 1

Suggested Additional Performance Evaluation Measures (optional)..... 1-2

Undertakings..... 2

Scoring Criteria 3 - 37

- Administrative Capabilities 3
- Technical Assistance 6
- Economic Development 14
- Past Performance 17
- Networking & Regional Focus 18
- Commitment 21
- Matching Funds 23
- Work Plan/Budget 23
- Qualifications of Personnel 31
- Local & Future Support 35

Administrator Discretionary Points 38

Certifications 39

Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability & Equity (RAISE-now called BUILD) 2024 Template

FY 24 RAISE Application Template

Project Description (5 pages Max) Need to include:

- Detailed statement of work that focuses on the technical and engineering aspects of the project
- Current design status of the project
- Transportation challenges and how those will be addressed
- Project history, including a description of any previously incurred costs or previous completed components
- Broader context of other related infrastructure investments being pursued by the project sponsor
- Detailed geographical description of the proposed project
- Maps of the project's location and connections to existing transportation infrastructure
- Is the project located in an Urban or Rural as well as is it an area of Persistent Poverty and/or Historically Disadvantaged Community, including the relevant County and/or census tract(s)

Project Budget (5 pages Max) This section will determine the Financial Completeness Assessment. Need to include tables as well as narrative:

- Provide complete information on the budget for the project scope that includes RAISE funding, other sources, and match funding. If a source of funds is available only after a condition is satisfied, the application should identify that condition and describe the applicant's control over whether it is satisfied.
- Explain how the project budget satisfies the statutory cost share or non-federal funds matching requirements shown in the project budget table, if applicable
- *Documentation of funding commitments for those non-Federal and other Federal funds (attach letters in a separate file)*
- Indicate the specific contingency amount included in the budget to demonstrate there is sufficient funding to cover unanticipated cost increases and describe a plan to address potential cost overruns. Planning projects are not required to include a contingency amount but must describe a plan to address potential cost overruns.
- Indicate the degree of design completion for which the cost was estimated (e.g. no design, 30, 60 90 percent design)
- Indicate how, when, and by whom project costs were estimated. Cost estimates should be no older than a year from February 28, 2024. If older, please apply an inflation factor.
- Clearly identify any expenses expected to be incurred between time of award and obligation **these expenses are not eligible for reimbursement
- This budget should not include any previously incurred expenses

Must include tables similar to below:

Table 1:

Funding Source:	Component 1	Component 2	Total Funding
Raise Funds	\$	\$	\$
Other Federal Funds	\$	\$	\$
Non-Federal Funds	\$	\$	\$
Total Project Cost	\$	\$	\$

2a:

2020 Census Tract(s)	Project Costs per Census Tract
9405	\$
	Total Project Cost: \$

**If the project is located in two or more census tracts, the budget needs to separate the costs between the various census tracts

2b:

2010 Census Tract(s)	Project Costs per Census Tract
9405	\$
	Total Project Cost: \$

2c:

Urban/Rural	Project Costs
Urban (2020 Census-designated urban area with a population greater than 200,000)	\$
Rural (Located outside of a 2020 Census-designated urban area with a population greater than 200,000)	\$
	Total Project Cost: \$

Merit Criteria (15 pages Max) – Refer to NOFO for scoring information

- a) Safety
- b) Environmental Sustainability
- c) Quality of Life
- d) Mobility and Community Connectivity
- e) Economic Competitiveness and Opportunity
- f) State of Good Repair
- g) Partnership and Collaboration
- h) Innovation

Project Readiness (5 pages Max)

A. Project Schedule (Capital and Planning Projects)

The Project Readiness file should include a detailed project schedule that identifies all major project activities and milestones. For capital projects, examples of such milestones include State and local planning approvals; start and completion of NEPA and other Federal environmental reviews and approvals, including permitting, design completion, right-of-way acquisition, approval of plans, specifications, and estimates; procurement; State and local approvals; project partnership and implementation agreements including agreements with railroads; and construction start and end. For planning projects, examples of milestones may include start dates, schedule for public engagement and completion dates.

B. Environmental Risk Assessment (Capital Projects Only)

- i. **Required Approvals** (Environmental reviews, NEPA, Permits, studies, public engagement, State and local required approvals and planning documents)
- ii. **State and Local Approvals - Receipt** (or the schedule for anticipated receipt) of Tribal government, State, and local approvals on which the project depends
- iii. **Assessment of Project Risks and Mitigation Strategies** – Identify risks and strategies to mitigate (procurement delays, environmental uncertainties, increases in costs, legal acquisitions, equipment availability) **Projects with a risk mitigation plan are more competitive

C. **Technical Capacity Assessment (All Projects)** - Describe the applicant's technical capacity to deliver the project

D. Benefit Cost Analysis (Capital Projects Only)

(based on a notice of funding (NOFO) that is 51 pages long)

Common Registrations:

- State:
 - eMACS – State Procurement Bureau (<https://spb.mt.gov/emacs-resources>)
 - Web Grants Montana Grants and Loans (<https://funding.mt.gov/index.do>)
- Federal
 - SAM.gov and CAGE code (Commercial and Government Entity Code)
 - UEI (unique entity identifier)
 - Grants.gov
 - Workspace can be tricky – learn in advance
 - Valued Eval (US Dept. of Transportation)

Montana APEX Accelerators – work with federal, state and local partners to provide opportunities for companies new to government contracting – can assist in SAM and UEI registrations (<https://montanaapex.org/>)

Request Support Documents Early

- ✓ Create an Executive Summary, Abstract, or Briefing Paper
- ✓ Ask for Letters of Support, MOUs, and Partnership Agreements
- ✓ Be prepared to draft those

An Internal Checklist:

Handout For You to Use (Make it Your Own)

- governance docs, financials, audit status, policies
- program data/metrics, service area, partnerships/MOUs
 - letters of support
- staffing capacity and time allocation
- available data
- prior planning and timelines
- administrative requirements – and cashflowing, position to wait- reimbursement grants

What's the most important thing?



Read the instructions again.

LUNCH BREAK



TO WRITE OR NOT TO WRITE?



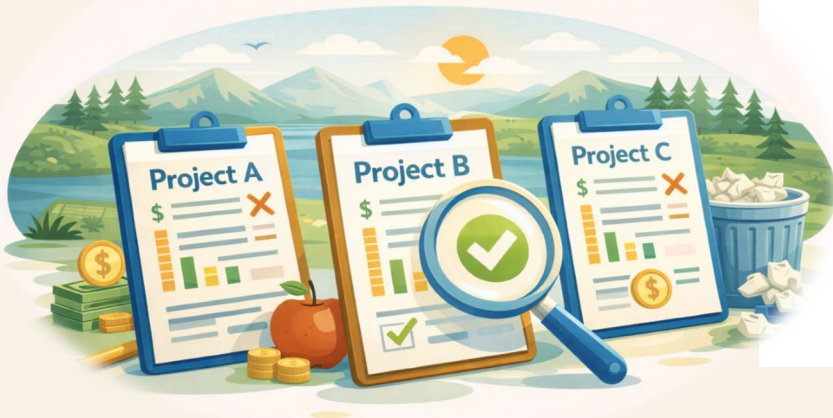
To write or not to write?

A fast go/no-go screen before investing proposal time.

Selecting Projects- To Write or Not to Write?

- ✓ Is the juice worth the squeeze?
 - ✓ Will the front-end time have a reasonable chance of producing results
 - ✓ Does the project match the grant criteria?
 - ✓ **Eligible vs competitive**
 - ✓ Has planning/data collection been done to justify the project as “ready?” (for implementation)
 - ✓ Do you have the data/statistics required?
 - ✓ Are you able to administer the grant?
 - ✓ Don't chase the money- the money should chase you

SELECTING PROJECTS



Why Wouldn't I Write?

✓ Front end staff time

✓ Cost

- ✓ Small Grants (less than \$50,000) 4-12 hours
- ✓ Medium grants (between \$50,000-\$150,000) 8-24 hours
- ✓ Large grants (above \$150,000) 40-120 hours

✓ Amount of time will increase/decrease based on:

- Private vs. Public (Foundation grants tend to require more relationship building time)
- Advance work in gathering/maintaining program data and statistics
- Grant writing experience
- Costs to hire a grant writer vary, but are typically \$150-\$300 per hour



Why Wouldn't I Write?



✓ Post-award staff time

- ✓ Are you prepared for reporting requirements & related data collection?
- ✓ Can you deliver the goals you outlined?
- ✓ Are you willing to comply with grant requirements
- ✓ Did you add administration/materials to your request? Does the grant allow for those costs?
- ✓ Are you creating programs that meet your mission? Are you writing just because it's "free" money?
- ✓ Not getting a grant is disappointing. Getting a grant and not being able to meet requirements is worse

Activity: Go / No-Go decision : Handout

- Pick one opportunity (or sample NOFO) and score it for eligibility and competitiveness
- Identify your top 3 risks (data gaps, match, timeline, admin capacity)
- Decide: Go • Go with changes • No-go



DESIGNING A FUNDABLE PROJECT



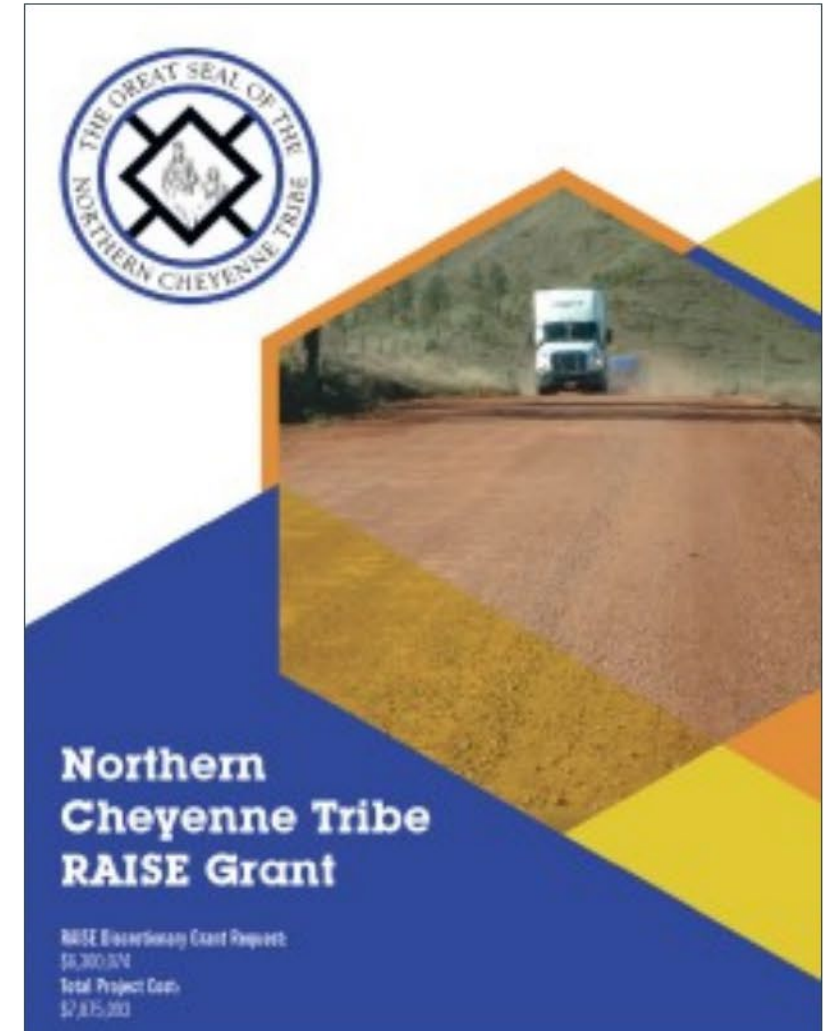
Designing a Fundable Project

Write to the rubric and support claims with evidence.

Typical Framework

All grants have specific guidance, but you can almost always count on some variation of these sections:

- ✓ Application Form/Applicant Information
- ✓ Project Description/Summary
- ✓ Project Location
- ✓ Demonstration of Need & How the request addresses that need? Who does it impact?
- ✓ Cost Estimate (and sources of funding including match)
- ✓ Local Support/Commitment/Public Engagement Plan
- ✓ Project Readiness
- ✓ Merit/Scoring Criteria
- ✓ Attachments (LOS, Maps, Planning Documents, etc..)



Abstracts, Program Summaries, Project Descriptions

- ✓ 1 paragraph to 2 pages in length
- ✓ Overview or “framework” for the remainder of the application
- ✓ Not a huge “point value” but important for laying groundwork



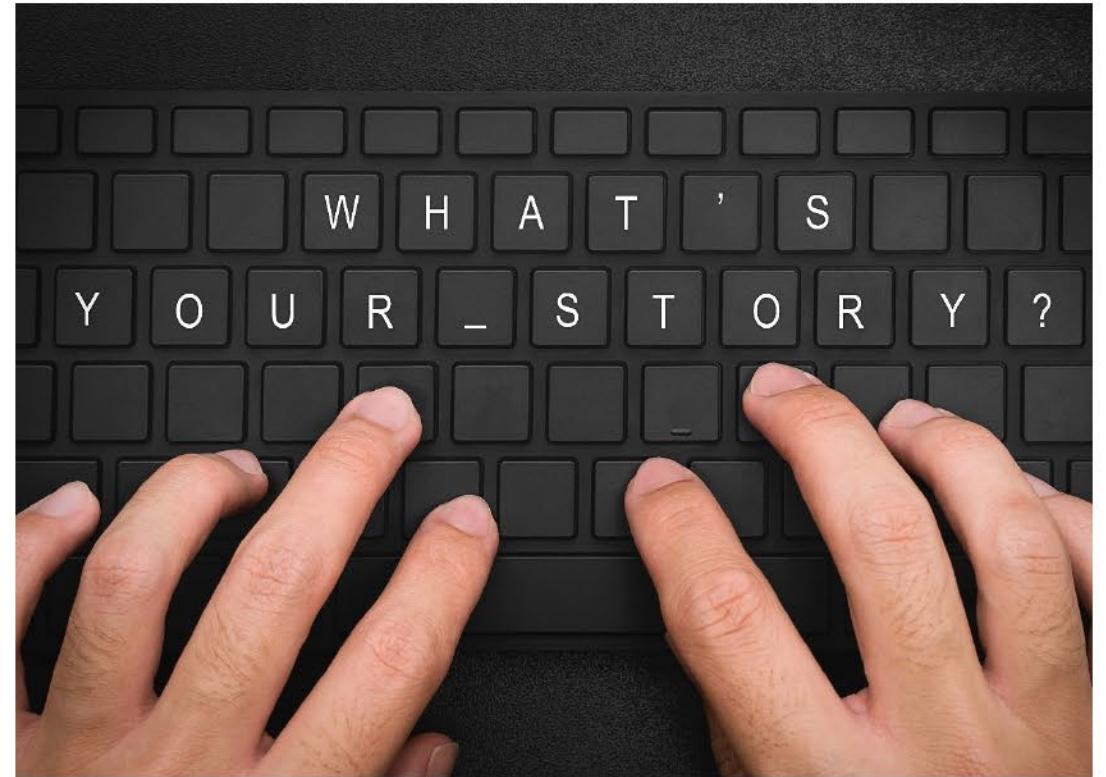
Objectives and Need for Assistance

- ✓ Why you need the money
 - ✓ Most statistic heavy (match stats to the stated need)
- ✓ Utilize language in the NOFO (Parrot)
- ✓ Match the grant objective.



Approach and Merit Criteria – Tell the Story

- ✓ Core Information
- ✓ Elaborate on your abstract
- ✓ Make sure your goals are SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant & Time bound)
- ✓ Aim low and be an over-achiever



Evaluation Plan/Ongoing Data Collection

- ✓ Increasingly important and specialized
- ✓ Consider contracting
- ✓ Don't forget to include evaluation and related materials in your budget



Organizational Capacity



- ✓ Highlight what's special and unique about your agency/client/project.
- ✓ Financial Stability
- ✓ Management Systems
- ✓ History of Performance
- ✓ Ability to implement requirements
- ✓ GENUINE Partnerships/Collaborations

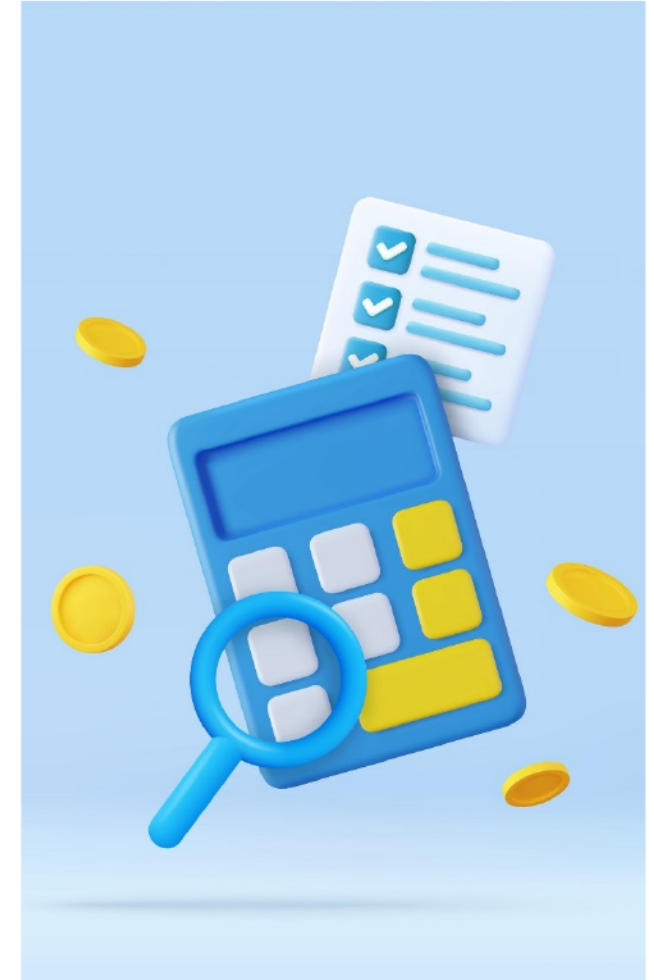
Project Readiness & Sustainability/Maintenance

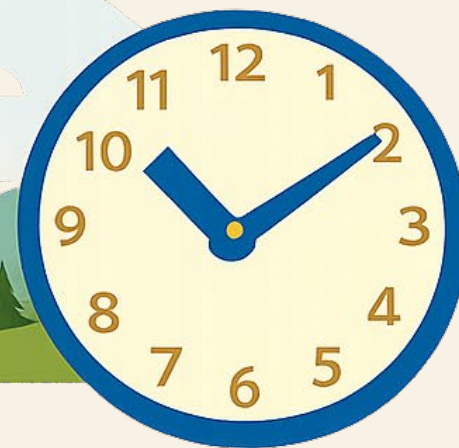
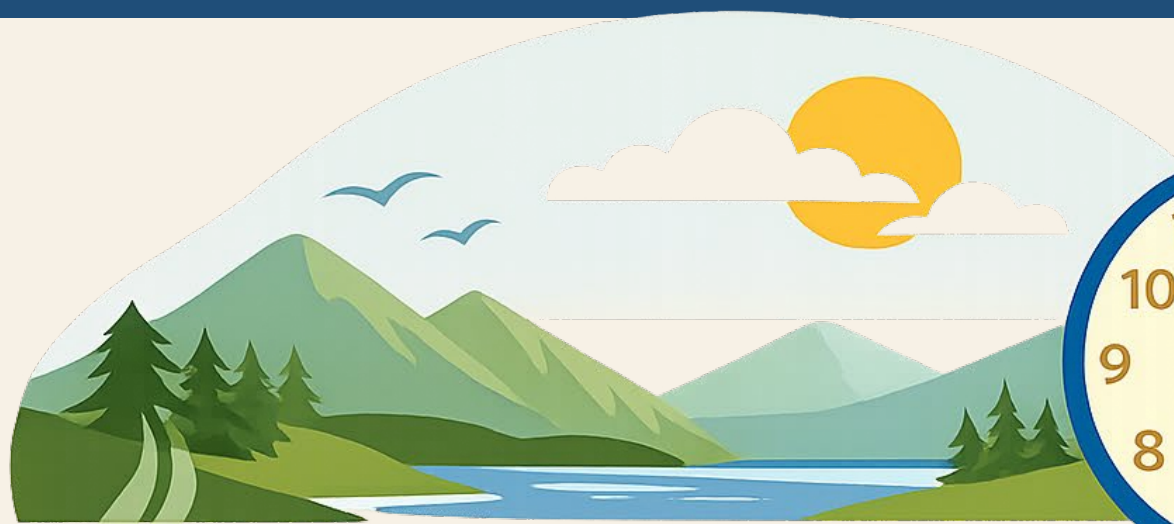
- ✓ Project schedule and what you've already done to prepare/plan
- ✓ Are there any state/federal regulatory agencies that have been or need to be consulted (permitting)?



Budget and Budget Detail

- ✓ Strangely, this is not as important as it sounds in grant review
It is, however, incredibly important for purposes of implementation.
- ✓ “Guesstimate”
- ✓ Don’t forget to include the “little” things
 - ✓ Evaluation costs (personnel, software)
 - ✓ Supplies/Materials
 - ✓ Copy & Printing Costs
 - ✓ Employee Benefits/Expenses
- ✓ There is rarely enough money to do everything. Focus on core needs and costs that are most difficult to get through other funding
- ✓ Pay attention to maximum percentages. Many grants have a maximum percent you can spend on certain budget items (i.e. 8% for administration)





**TAKE A
BREAK**



Activity: Project Blueprint Worksheet



Other Things to Know:

- 1) AI and compliance**
- 2) When to Plan and How to Fund Planning**
- 3) Making the Submission**
- 4) Post Award Considerations**

AI or no AI?



- ✓ Be cautious-AI is NOT intelligent
- ✓ Double check AI statistics
- ✓ Tell your own story (unique vs. algorithm)
- ✓ Use as 3rd party review (ensures you're using "preferred" language)
- ✓ Federal funding agencies are beginning to use AI to score applications & asking to what degree YOU are using it.

One Last Word About AI



What AI cannot replace:

Curiosity: Only humans can ask “What if we tried something completely different?”

Courage: AI can calculate risk. Only humans can decide if the risk is worth taking

Creativity: AI can remix what exists. Only humans can decide what’s worth reimagining

Compassion: AI can simulate concern. Only humans feel and express it

Communication: AI can translate language. Only humans can turn language into meaning

When to Plan and How to Fund

- Planning is a requirement for most grants –
 - Infrastructure grants often require a PER (Preliminary Engineering Report)
 - Building/Bricks and Mortar requires a PAR (Preliminary Architecture Report)
 - Mainstreet Grants often require a Mainstreet Plan
 - Internal Strategic Plan
 - Capital Improvement Plan
 - Growth Policy
 - Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy
 - Long Range Transportation Plan
 - Other?
- Planning grants are available:
 - Economic Development Administration
 - Dept. of Commerce – Community Development Block Grant
 - Side NOTE: Bigger Communities have their own CDBG funds
 - USDA- Rural Business Development Grant

Making the Submission:

- **#1 Rule - NEVER WAIT TO THE LAST DAY!**
- Follow the Directions
- Review, Revise, and Review again
 - Read it out loud
- READ the NOFA/RFP one more time –
 - Double-check any links or references to other compliance items (CFR's are tricky!)
 - And don't rely on the grant templates to have all the criteria required
- Make sure all attachments are attached

Post-Award Considerations

- ✓ Pay attention to contract language to which you will need to agree if the grant is awarded. Are you willing/able to comply?
- ✓ Examples:
 - ✓ Labor & Workforce preferences
 - ✓ Compliance with federal immigration enforcement
 - ✓ Preference to communities with marriage and birth rates higher than the national average
 - ✓ Prohibition of imposing vaccine & mask mandates
 - ✓ Buy American-Build American (BABA)

WRAPPING UP THE DAY



Wrap-up

Practical habits that improve win rates over time.

Hints & Tips

- ✓ **READ THE INSTRUCTIONS – YES! AGAIN!**
- ✓ Make informed and educated guesses.
- ✓ Answer the actual questions/targeted answers
- ✓ Ask for help. Be a team player.
- ✓ Leave time for 3rd party review
- ✓ Write Grants! Lots of them!
- ✓ Ask for feedback/ debrief
- ✓ Keep everything – Pilfer, borrow, and copy
- ✓ Don't get discouraged. Even great applications aren't funded.
- ✓ Don't care more than "they" do.



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



Tomorrow

9am to 2pm – Stay as Long as you like in that Time Period

- For those coming tomorrow:
 - Select your Opportunity and Project
 - Complete the blueprint worksheet and Readiness Checklist
- If Able:
 - Bring Computer, writing utensil and notebook