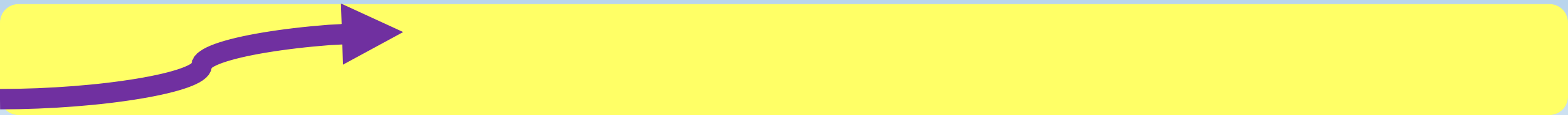




Pathways for Addressing Social Needs: Grants As A Way to Support the Work

Identifying Grant Opportunities and Developing A
Letter of Intent and Grant Proposal





Overview

- One key source of funds to support a program or project is through grant funds.
- Sources of grant funds include both private (e.g. through foundations or businesses) and public funding (e.g. through government funds at both the national, state, and local levels).
- Understanding the process to research and secure grant funds is key to developing a successful grant proposal.
- Obtaining grant funding is one step but the organization must also have the capabilities to monitor and manage the grant.
- Building a good rapport with foundations and government agencies will benefit the organization in securing funding for its programs and projects.

Researching Funders



- Successful grant writing includes doing research to identify what funding exists for your program/project.
- Do online searches to identify sources of funding.
- The *Foundation Directory Online* provides a good resource of foundations and the types of causes or initiatives they support.
- Register on government listservs (e.g. Grants.gov) to be notified of upcoming funding announcements.
- Word-of-mouth from peers is also a good source for learning about foundations.
- There are companies and grant consultants that provide information on funding opportunities, but they usually provide this service for a fee.
- Do research at your local community or college library to see what foundation directories/databases they maintain.
- *Guide Star* provides a good database of foundations' tax filings (e.g. Form 990) that shows how much they give and what types of organizations they give to.



Private Foundations

- Private sources of grant funds may include companies or families that have established foundations, nonprofit organizations that provide grants (e.g. a local community hospital), community foundations, and organizations established to support specific causes (e.g. American Cancer Society).
- Do research on the company and their specific grant program.
 - What types of programs do they support and do they have restrictions on the types of organizations that may apply for a grant?
 - Does the foundation support operating expenses, capital equipment, constructions costs, or seed money to start a new program?
 - Do they accept proposals from any organization (e.g. unsolicited requests)?
 - Do you have to be invited to submit a proposal to the foundation and do they have a list of pre-selected organizations they give to?
 - What are their guidelines and due dates?
 - Do you need to submit a letter of intent prior to submitting a full grant proposal?
 - What is their average giving amount and for what duration (e.g. one-year or multi-year) will they fund?
 - Is there information provided for a foundation officer or staff member to contact for more information?



Government/Public Funding

- Grant funding is available from federal, state, and local government agencies.
- Government funding usually requires a more detailed proposal but this funding tends to be for larger dollar amounts and may fund multiple years.
- Review the funding instructions closely and make sure all the required forms are completed and paperwork is submitted.
- Participate in any webinars that will provide more detailed instructions about the application process.
- If contact information for staff is provided, reach out to them with questions or if something in the application instructions is unclear.
- Write directly to the federal agency's goals and objectives stated in the grant solicitation — NOT what you want to fund.¹



Government/Public Funding Considerations

- Key questions to ask with regards to applying for a government grant:
 - Are there any restrictions on what types of organizations can apply?
 - What is the timeline for submitting a proposal and does the organization have sufficient time for submitting the document?
 - Is a letter of intent required before a full grant proposal can be submitted?
 - Are there requirements or restrictions for the organization that receives a grant from the public entity?
 - Does the organization have the expertise to manage the grant if they are approved for funding and does additional staff need to be hired to administer overseeing the grant process?
 - Is the organization able to provide the required documentation if the grant is approved (e.g. some public agencies may require that a financial audit be done)?



Fiscal Sponsor

- Using a fiscal sponsor provides the program/project with the formal organizational structure without having to incorporate.
- This option may work best for organizations that started out as voluntary and are evolving towards becoming organized under a more formal operating structure.
- Fiscal sponsors offer the program/project the opportunity to hire staff, fundraise, apply for grants, and operate more like a business.
- Fiscal sponsors may charge for their services based on a percentage of the budget for the program/project or some charge a flat administrative fee.
- The relationship between the program/project and the fiscal sponsor needs to be clearly identified and a process to resolved any conflicts that may occur.
- Fiscal sponsors may have established relationships with funders/foundations that could benefit the program/project.

Letter of Intent



- Some funders require that a letter of intent (LOI) be submitted before being invited to submit a full grant proposal.
- Carefully follow the instructions regarding what needs to be included in the LOI and the deadline when it must be submitted.
- A good LOI will include:
 - A clear summary of the program/project and whom you intend to serve.
 - The organization's expertise and background in operating this type of program.
 - Documentation of need for the program/project.
 - An overview of the staff and financial resources needed for the program.
 - Key metrics and outcomes the program/project intends to achieve.

The Grant Proposal



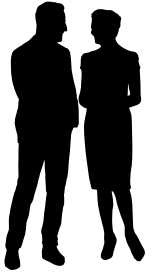
- Review the instructions to make sure all the required information is included in the grant proposal.
 - READ the Notice of Funding completely and thoroughly; highlight it and make notes on it. This is your tool for writing the best grant proposal that meets funder expectations.²
- Include any required forms and follow provided formats for budgets, budget justifications, project timelines, etc.
- Stay within the stated page limits and formatting instructions.
- Make sure to submit the grant proposal within the stated deadline.
- Have someone else review the grant package before submitting it to make sure nothing is missing and that the information is clear.
- Don't provide more information than what is requested in the instructions.



Guide to Writing a Good Grant Proposal

- Follow the instructions provided by the funder closely.
- Be clear in your proposal describing the program/project, how you identified the need, what you are hoping to accomplish (e.g. measurable targets), and what resources are needed.
- Make a good argument for the program/project and how it is unique from similar programs.
- Discuss how your organization has the skillset and talent to run the program.
- Be realistic in the funding you are requesting compared to the outcomes you hope to achieve.
- Provide timely follow-up to any questions that the foundation staff may have about your proposal and submit items within the given deadlines.
- Encourage a site visit to allow the foundation officer to see your organization in action.

Site Visit



- A good sign is if the program officer or staff member from the funding organization asks to come for a site visit.
- Arrange to have key representatives from the organization present at the site visit (e.g. executive director, grant writer, key finance person, etc.).
- Be prepared to answer specific questions about the program/project.
- If a question is asked that you can't respond to in the meeting, follow-up with the foundation representative quickly with the information.
- Encourage the foundation representative to follow-up with any additional questions that they may have and who their point of contact is at the organization.
- Ask the funding representative what the next step is in the grant review process.

Cost Sharing



- Some foundations and government agencies require that the organization provide a certain level of cost-sharing for the program/project.
- Review this requirement at the beginning of the application process to make sure the organization is able to meet this requirement.
- Be clear on what type of cost-sharing is acceptable.
 - Some funders require that the organization provide a monetary match to their investment in the program/project.
 - Funders may allow for in-kind support to serve as the cost-sharing requirement which could include providing space to house the program, offering administrative and management support, or covering overhead expenses (e.g. I.T., marketing, H.R. support).



Grant Contract/Agreement

- Once a grant is approved, the funder will establish a formal contract or agreement with the organization being funded.
- The agreement establishes the terms of the grant agreement, how funds will be distributed, and reporting requirements.
- Once the agreement is received have a legal representative review it to make sure the organization is able to meet the stipulations required by the grant funder.
- Work with the program officer on any terms that need to be edited or modified and be clear on how disputes or differences will be handled.
- If the organization is unable to meet the terms of the grant agreement and the funder is not willing to negotiate the terms, the funded entity may need to decide to decline the funds.



Grant Timeline

- It is important to review and be clear on the timeline once the grant proposal is approved.
- The timeline will stipulate the following:
 - When the grant period begins and ends.
 - When progress reports are due to the funder.
 - The payment calendar when funds will be received.
 - Some funders will pay the entire amount of the approved grant over multiple payments.
 - Instructions regarding if the grant funds will be paid in advance or after the service is provided.
 - The date when the final report is due.
 - Some timelines may address when a no-cost extension request needs to be filed if the funds are unable to be expended during the grant period.



Grant Management

- Once a grant proposal has been approved by the funder and the paperwork is finalized, the next step is managing the grant.
- Nonprofit grant management consists of all the steps and processes organizations must follow to satisfy the requirements of grant funding that they've been awarded, and it typically involves tasks related to documentation, financial tracking, project management, and more.³
- Establish at the onset of the program/project the data tracking and collection tools that will help to meet the grant deliverables.
- Monitor the budget closely to make sure funds are being spent within the timeframe of the grant and as stipulated in the proposal.
- Be clear on reporting requirements established by the funder and submit information within the stated deadlines.



Grant Management

- Provide the funder with advanced notice if it is apparent the funding will not be utilized completely within the grant timeframe.
- Develop a good filing system to maintain any records or documentation that the funder might request.
 - Documents the funder may request include time sheets, receipts of project expenses, copies of subcontractor agreements, proof of liability insurance, job descriptions of key personnel on the project, listing of key equipment or assets purchased, or other documentation.
- When the grant has ended the organization needs to maintain the files for a defined period of time.
 - Best practice is to keep these records for seven years after the end of the funding period, unless the grantor requires a different retention policy.⁴



Conclusion

- Grant funding represents a good source of financial support to help launch, operate, or grow a program/project.
- Grant funding can come from both private and public sources.
- Developing a good grant proposal requires following the instructions established by the funder, being realistic with your request, and making a good case for your program/project and why it should be funded.
- Once a grant is received, the organization needs to make sure it has the capacity to administer the funding and meet all of the stipulations established by the funder.
- Maintaining a good relationship with the funder during the life of the grant will be important to retain the funding and to be invited to apply for future financial support for the program/project.



Online Resources

- **Greenlight Grants Initiative**

- Provides information on available grants and resources to help with grant writing.

<https://www.greenlightsgrantinitiative.org/>

- **Grant Professionals Association**

- Provides grant tips, tools, best practices, and training.

<https://grantprofessionals.org/>

- **LearnGrantWriting.org**

- Provides a list of resources and websites to get more information on grants and grant writing.

<https://www.learngrantwriting.org/>

Reference Notes

¹Greenlights Grant Initiative, “Top 5 Tips for Putting Together A Competitive Grant Proposal,” 2025, <https://www.greenlightsgrantinitiative.org/top-5-tips-for-putting-together-a-competitive-grant-proposal/> (accessed December 8, 2025).

²Jeanne Donado, Bernadette Hicks, Diane H. Leonard, GPC, Jodi Samuels, Olivia Smith-Daugherty, and Tammy Tilzey, “Grant Tips and Best Practices,” Grant Professionals Association, 2025, <https://grantprofessionals.org/page/granttips> (accessed December 10, 2025).

³Grants Plus, “Nonprofit Grant Management: Learning the Essentials,” 2025, <https://grantsplus.com/insights/blog/grant-writing-support/grant-management-guide/> (accessed December 10, 2025).

⁴Cameron Hawkins, “Key Categories of Records Nonprofits Must Keep,” July 2, 2025, <https://www.chawkinslaw.com/blog/record-keeping-requirements-for-nonprofit-compliance> , (accessed December 11, 2025).