Funding Your Vision:

A Grant Writing Guide for Change-Makers

Introduction

Grants are more than just applications they are opportunities to secure funding that can create real, lasting change. But obtaining grants requires more than just filling out forms and answering questions. It requires strategy, organization, persuasive storytelling, and an understanding of how to meet funders' expectations.

This self-paced grant training can be used whether you are a first-time grant writer or looking to refine your skills. It is designed for you to move through it at your own pace, in the order you prefer, and to be revisit any time you need.

Who This Training Is For

This training was created with first-time and early-stage grant writers in mind—those who are learning the process or stepping into grant writing as part of a new role. Whether you work for a nonprofit, school, local government, or grassroots group, the goal is to help you build confidence and skills for approaching grants more strategically.

That said, if you have experience with grants already, you may still find value in the templates, planning tools, and examples included throughout. This guide can serve as a refresher, a resource library, or a foundation for building team capacity.

How to Use This Training

This is a go-at-your-own-pace training, meaning you can move through each module in order or jump to sections most relevant to your needs.

Each module includes:

- Detailed lessons on each stage of the grant writing process
- Templates, checklists, and worksheets (included in your resource folder)
- Examples of strong grant proposals and key best practices

Use this guide as a reference manual, returning to sections as you prepare different grant applications.

Table of Contents

Module 1: Grant Introduction

Grant writing is a structured process that involves identifying funding opportunities, developing a compelling project proposal, and successfully securing financial support. Whether you are applying for federal, state, private foundation, or corporate funding, understanding the fundamentals of grant writing is essential.

In this module, you will learn:

- What a grant is – Understanding different types of grants and how they work.
- Types of grants – Federal, state, foundation, corporate, and congressional earmarks.
- Grant myths vs. realities – Common misconceptions that can derail the process.
- Eligibility requirements – How to determine if your organization and project qualify.
- The grant life cycle – The step-by-step process from research to post-award management.

What is a Grant?

A grant is funding provided by an organization (such as a government agency, foundation, or corporation) to support a specific project or initiative. Unlike loans, grants do not need to be repaid, but they typically come with strict guidelines, eligibility requirements, and reporting expectations.

Key Characteristics of a Grant

- Non-repayable – grants are not loans and do not require repayment unless terms are violated.
- Competitive – most grants have a formal application process and limited funding, making competition high.

- Purpose-driven – grants are given to achieve specific outcomes, such as economic growth, social impact, or innovation.
- Restricted funding – funds must be used for approved expenses as outlined in the proposal.
- Time-bound – most grants are awarded for a set time period and require reporting.

Example of a Grant in Action:

Imagine a rural town needs funding to build sidewalks for safer pedestrian routes. The town could apply for a transportation-related grant from a state agency or federal program. If awarded, the grant funds must be used only for the approved sidewalk project, following reporting and compliance rules.

Types of Grants

Grants come in many forms, each with different funding sources, eligibility requirements, and application processes. Understanding the various types of grants will help you identify the best opportunities for your project. Below are the main categories of grants:

Federal Grants

Source: U.S. government agencies (e.g., Department of Transportation, Economic Development Administration, Department of Agriculture).

Who Can Apply: Local and state governments, nonprofits, educational institutions, businesses, and Tribes, among others (will depend on the grant).

Purpose: Usually aimed at large-scale projects that align with national priorities, such as infrastructure, research, economic development, etc.

Application Process:

- Highly competitive, often requiring extensive documentation.
- Applications are submitted through Grants.gov or agency-specific portals.
- Compliance with federal regulations.

Pros: Large funding amounts, credibility, multi-year opportunities

Cons: Complex applications, strict reporting, competitive

State Grants

Source: State agencies (e.g., State Departments of Economic Development, State Arts Councils, etc.).

Who Can Apply: Local governments, nonprofits, businesses, and educational institutions.

Purpose: Projects that align with state priorities, such as workforce development, community programs, and infrastructure.

Application Process:

- Applications are usually simpler than federal grants.
- Funded through state budgets, lottery revenues, or federal pass-through funding.

Pros: Easier to apply for than federal grants, more localized focus.

Cons: Less funding than federal grants, state budget fluctuations can affect availability.

Private Foundation Grants

Source: Philanthropic organizations and charitable foundations (e.g., The Gates Family Foundation, The Colorado Health Foundation, The Ford Foundation, etc.).

Who Can Apply: Nonprofits, community organizations, and educational institutions.

Purpose: Social impact initiatives, education, health, arts, environment, and more.

Application Process:

- Foundations have unique guidelines and priorities.
- Some require an invitation to apply.
- Grantseekers may need to submit a Letter of Inquiry (LOI) before a full application.

Pros: Often aligned with nonprofit missions, can fund innovative projects.

Cons: May require relationships with the funder, variable application cycles.

Congressionally Directed Spending (Earmarks)

Source: U.S. Congress, allocated in the federal budget.

Who Can Apply: Local governments, nonprofits, higher education institutions, Tribes.

Purpose: Direct federal funding for community-driven projects that align with congressional priorities.

Application Process:

- Not a traditional competitive grant; funding is requested through a Member of Congress.

- Organizations submit project proposals to their U.S. Representative or Senator.
- Funds are allocated through federal spending bills.

Pros: Less competition than federal grants, direct funding.

Cons: Requires strong relationships with lawmakers, dependent on political approval.

Corporate Grants & Sponsorships

Source: Corporations and businesses (national, regional, or local).

Who Can Apply: Nonprofits, community organizations, schools, and sometimes small businesses.

Purpose: Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs, community development, education, sustainability, and social impact.

Application Process:

- Some companies have formal grant programs with applications (e.g., Walmart Foundation Grants).
- Others offer sponsorships for events, programs, or specific projects.
- Can approach businesses to sponsor your event, program, or to provide gap funding for something like a park structure.

Pros: More flexible than government grants, potential for long-term partnerships.

Cons: Often small funding amounts, may require branding or promotional commitments.

Grant Myths & Realities

When it comes to grants, there are many misconceptions that can lead to frustration, wasted time, and missed opportunities. Understanding what is true versus myth will help set realistic expectations and improve your grant-seeking strategy.

Myth #1: There is Free Grant Money for Everyone

Reality: Grants are primarily intended to support specific projects or programs that align with a funder's goals. Some grants do allow for limited general operating support. For-profit businesses will find fewer grant opportunities overall, and most that do exist are targeted toward specific outcomes like research or innovation, sometimes for startup costs. In nearly all cases, grants come with clear eligibility requirements, defined funding priorities, and a competitive application process designed to ensure funds are directed toward impactful, mission-aligned work.

Example: A town may get a grant for building new sidewalks, but it cannot use the funds to pay for unrelated expenses like office supplies or salaries outside of the project scope.

Myth #2: Grants Will Cover All My Expenses

Reality: Most grants come with funding restrictions and rarely cover 100% of a project's costs. Many require matching funds (where the applicant must contribute a percentage of the budget), in-kind contributions (non-cash support like volunteer labor or donated materials), or limit how much funding can be used for indirect costs like overhead and administration.

Example: A nonprofit receives a grant for a new community program, but the grant only covers project materials, not staff salaries or overhead expenses. The organization must secure other funding sources to sustain the program.

Myth #3: The More Grants I Apply for, the Better My Chances

Reality: Quantity does not equal success. Applying for grants that are not a strong fit wastes time and resources. Instead, focus on quality applications that align with your mission, capacity, and long-term sustainability.

Example: A small nonprofit applying for a multi-million-dollar federal grant with complex reporting requirements may not be competitive if they lack the staff and infrastructure to manage the award.

Understanding Grant Eligibility

Before investing time in writing a grant proposal, it is crucial to determine whether your organization and project meet the eligibility requirements. Grant eligibility varies by funder, grant type, and funding priorities. Below are the key factors that influence eligibility.

Organizational Eligibility

Most grants specify which types of organizations can apply. Common eligible entities include:

- **Government Entities** – Cities, counties, state agencies, tribal governments.
- **Nonprofits** – 501(c)(3) organizations, charitable organizations.
- **Educational Institutions** – Public and private schools, colleges, universities.
- **Businesses** – Some grants support small businesses, particularly for innovation, research, or economic development.
- **Individuals** – Rare, but some grants are available for artists, researchers, and students (e.g., fellowships, scholarships).

Project Eligibility

Even if your organization is eligible, the project itself must align with the grant's purpose. Funders look for projects that:

- Address a specific community need.
- Fit within the funder's priority areas (e.g., education, infrastructure, economic development).
- Have measurable outcomes.
- Demonstrate feasibility and impact.

Geographic Restrictions

Some grants are limited to:

- A specific region, state, or community.
- Rural vs. urban areas (Some funders prioritize one over the other).
- Low-income or other data considerations.

Matching Fund Requirements

Some grants require applicants to contribute matching funds, a percentage of the total project cost, through cash contributions or in-kind support (donated goods, services, or volunteer time).

Types of Matches:

- **Defined Expected Match** – The funder will define the match rate. A 50% match grant means the applicant must contribute half of the total project cost, so for every $1 of grant funding, they must provide $1 in matching funds. A 25% match grant requires the applicant to cover a quarter of the project cost, meaning for every $1 of grant funding, they must provide $0.25 in matching funds.
- **In-Kind Match** – Non-cash contributions (e.g., donated space, volunteer hours). Funders often define what types of in-kind match are allowable and they vary. Some allow volunteer time at a specific hourly rate, others may accept donated staff time (if not already covered by the grant), while some only accept tangible items or facility use. In-

kind contributions usually require detailed documentation, such as time logs, donation letters, or valuation methods.

Example: A local government applying for an infrastructure grant might need to contribute 20% of the project cost, such as $200,000 in matching funds for a $1 million grant.

Compliance & Capacity Requirements

Funders often require proof that your organization can successfully manage the grant. Requirements may include:

- **Financial Stability** – Audited financial statements, IRS tax-exempt status (for nonprofits).
- **Administrative Capacity** – Experienced staff, financial tracking systems.
- **Past Performance** – If the organization has received funding before, funders may review whether past grants were managed successfully.

Application Restrictions & Deadlines

Some grants have restrictions on:

- How often you can apply (e.g., once per year, every two years).
- Past recipients (Some grants will not fund the same organization multiple times).
- Number of applications an organization can submit across programs or cycles (some funders limit how many proposals a single organization can submit at once or within a year).

The Grant Life Cycle

Understanding the grant life cycle helps organizations navigate the full process, from identifying funding opportunities to managing a successfully awarded grant. The grant process is not just about submitting an application, it involves planning, applying, receiving, implementing, and reporting. Below is a breakdown of the key stages in the grant life cycle.

Pre-Application Stage (Planning & Research)

Key Actions:

- Identify funding opportunities that align with your mission and project goals.
- Review the Request for Proposal (RFP) or Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) carefully.
- Assess eligibility and funding requirements.

  Gather necessary documentation (e.g., financial statements, letters of support, data on project need).
- Develop a grant strategy (timeline, team, budget preparation).

Application Stage (Writing & Submitting the Grant)

Key Actions:

- Draft a compelling grant proposal following the funder's guidelines.
- Develop a strong project narrative, explaining the need, objectives, methods, and expected impact/outcomes.
- Create a detailed budget and budget justification.
- Attach all required supporting documents.
- Review and proofread the application for completeness and errors.
- Submit the application by the deadline (through Grants.gov, state portals, or funder-specific platforms).

Review & Award Stage (Evaluation & Decision-Making)

Key Actions:

- The funder reviews applications based on criteria such as feasibility, impact, and alignment with priorities.
- Applications may go through multiple levels of peer review or internal evaluations.

- Some funders may request clarifications, revisions, or interviews before final decisions.
- Award notifications are sent to selected applicants; unsuccessful applicants may receive feedback. If feedback is not provided, and you had a point of contact during the process, you can follow up and ask if any feedback is available to help strengthen future applications.

Post-Award Stage (Grant Management & Implementation)

Key Actions:

- Accept the award and sign the grant agreement.
- Ensure compliance with funding requirements, financial tracking, and reporting expectations.
- Start project implementation (e.g., hiring staff, purchasing equipment, launching programs).
- Monitor progress and document activities for reporting.

Reporting & Closeout Stage (Final Reporting & Compliance)

Key Actions:

- Submit required progress reports (financial reports, performance updates).
- Conduct data evaluation to measure project impact and success.
- Ensure all funds were used correctly and in compliance with the grant agreement.
- Complete the grant closeout process, including final reports and audits (if applicable).
- Prepare for future grant opportunities by gathering lessons learned.

Closing Insights

Understanding the fundamentals of grant writing is the foundation for building strong, competitive applications. This module provided an overview of what grants are, the types of funding available, and how to assess eligibility and alignment before applying. It also introduced

the full grant life cycle, helping you see the bigger picture of what successful grant work involves, from planning to post-award management.

Key takeaways from this module:

- Grants primarily fund specific programs or projects, not general operations or personal expenses.
- There are several types of grants federal, state, foundation, corporate, and congressional, with different purposes and requirements.
- Common myths about grants can lead to wasted time; understanding the realities will help you apply more effectively.
- Evaluating eligibility is a critical early step to avoid pursuing grants that do not fit your organization or project.
- The grant life cycle includes planning, applying, implementing, and reporting, each stage requires thoughtful attention.

By applying these core principles, you will be better prepared to pursue the right grants for your organization and approach the process with confidence and clarity. As we move into the next module, we will take a deeper dive into finding the right grants including where to search, how to evaluate opportunities, and how to align funding with your organization's goals.

Because the best grant proposal starts with the right funding opportunity.

Corresponding Resources

List of Common Grant Funders in Colorado

Glossary of Common Grant Terms

Grant Readiness Self-Assessment

Module 2: Finding the Right Grant

Not all grants are a good fit for your organization. A key part of successful grant writing is identifying funding opportunities that align with your mission, needs, and capacity. Searching for grants effectively saves time and increases your chances of securing funding.

In this module, you will learn:

- Where to search for grants – Federal, state, foundation, and corporate databases.
- How to align grants with your mission – Ensuring funding opportunities match your goals.
- Reviewing eligibility and requirements – Avoiding time wasted on misaligned grants.

By understanding how to find and evaluate grants strategically, you can focus on applying for opportunities that best support your organization's work.

Where to Search for Grants

There are many places to search for grants, depending on whether you are looking for federal, state, private foundation, or corporate funding. Below are key resources for each type:

Federal Grant Sources

Best for: Large-scale projects, government entities, nonprofits, research institutions.

Where to Search: Just about all of the sites with federal grants are free for you to browse. There are also a variety of contacts that have newsletters that include federal grant opportunities.

Common websites to search are:

- Grants.gov – The main portal for all U.S. federal grants.

- Simpler.Grants.gov – A new future for Grants.gov, and hopefully as the name suggests a much simpler process.
- Local Infrastructure Hub – Grant search tool.
- Specific Agency Websites – Federal agencies like the USDA, DOE, DOT, and HUD post funding opportunities on their sites.

State Grant Sources

Best for: Local projects, community development, nonprofits, and small businesses.

Where to Search: Much like federal grant opportunities, the places to search for State funding are most often free websites. Common places to look for State grants are:

- State Government Websites – Departments have searchable grants on their websites. Some examples include:
    - Colorado Department of Local Affairs.
    - Colorado Department of Transportation.
    - Colorado Office of Economic Development & International Trade.

Private Foundation Grant Sources

Best for: Nonprofits, education, arts, and social impact projects.

Where to Search: When it comes to private funding many of the databases are paid for either one-time or short-term access or a form of subscription. These include:

- Foundation Directory Online (Candid) – The largest private grant database, membership. required. Several rural libraries have access to this database; you can inquire with your library.
- GuideStar – Research nonprofit funders and grant history.

- GrantStation – Paid subscription for private and government grant searches. You can also get a discounted subscription through The Chronicle of Philanthropy.
- Colorado Grants Guide – A subscription-based database through the Community Resource Center with Colorado-based foundations and other foundations that fund in Colorado. Also, sometimes available at local libraries.
- Local Community Foundations – These foundations will often have local funding opportunities listed on their websites, or they take applications for their own grant cycles. In Southwest Colorado the two foundations are: Community Foundation Serving Southwest Colorado, Onward! A Legacy Foundation.
- Funder Websites – if you know the funder you can check their websites for applications and deadlines. A resource provided with this training is a list of common Colorado foundations and funding interest areas.

Corporate Grant Sources

Best for: Community nonprofits, workforce training, education, sustainability projects.

Where to Search:

- Corporate Websites – Companies like Walmart, Google, and Bank of America have grant and sponsorship programs.
- Local Businesses, Corporate Foundations, and Local or Regional Banks – Some corporations have regional giving programs as do local businesses and banks. Often these groups will sponsor events, projects, or funding toward capital purchases.
- Chamber of Commerce & Business Networks – Sometimes list corporate giving programs or provide sponsorship funding, most often for events or one-off projects.

Aligning Grants with Your Mission & Needs

Finding a grant opportunity is exciting, but it is only the beginning. Not every grant is the right fit and applying for funding that does not align with your mission, capacity, or project scope can result in wasted time, unsuccessful applications, or projects that are difficult to sustain. A strong grant strategy starts with knowing when to say yes and when to pass.

Before you move forward with any application, take time to assess whether the grant truly supports the work your organization is doing or wants to do. This step is not just about eligibility, it is about alignment. Strong alignment between a funder's priorities and your organizational goals is one of the clearest indicators of a competitive proposal.

Here are four key areas to evaluate when determining whether a grant is the right fit:

Mission and Goals

- Does this grant support your organization's existing work or a well-defined future initiative?
- If a grant opportunity pulls you away from your mission or pushes you to create a project just to access the funding, it may not be a strong fit.
- Grant writing should reinforce your organization's purpose, not redirect it.

Capacity

- Every grant comes with expectations, reporting requirements, financial management, documentation, evaluation, and often public transparency.
- Does your organization have the staff, systems, and infrastructure to manage these responsibilities?
- A grant that exceeds your current capacity may stretch your team too thin or result in compliance challenges down the road.

Timeline

- Does the grant's timeline align with your project's readiness and schedule?
- Some grants require quick implementation. While others may fund implementation work for several months, or even a year, down the line.
- If your project is still in early development or depends on outside factors like permits or partnerships, make sure the grant's timing supports your ability to deliver results.

Budget and Match Requirements

- Can your organization realistically cover any required match or ineligible expenses?
- Some grants require applicants to contribute a certain percentage of the project cost through cash or in-kind support. Others may have funding caps that leave you with a funding gap to fill.
- Before applying, be sure your budget is viable and sustainable, even if the grant is awarded at a lower level than requested.

Reviewing Eligibility & Requirements

Even if a grant appears to align with your project or organization, it is essential to carefully review the eligibility criteria and application requirements before beginning. This step helps ensure that your time and resources are focused on opportunities you are fully qualified to pursue.

Key Questions to Ask:

- Who is eligible to apply?
- What type of projects does this grant fund?
- Are there geographic restrictions?
- What are the reporting and compliance requirements?
- Does this grant require matching funds?

Example: A city applies for a state transportation grant, but the funding requires a 20% local match. They must determine if they can provide it before applying. A best practice is to have match secured before you apply for funding. Whether it be in your organizational budget or with another grant you have secured to use as match.

Closing Insights

Finding funding is not just about searching for opportunities. It is about being intentional in how you search, where you look, and what you choose to pursue. This module emphasized the importance of identifying grants that are a strong match for your organization's mission, capacity, and goals. When your search is guided by clarity and strategy, you can focus your efforts on opportunities that are truly worth your time.

Key takeaways from this module:

- Use trusted databases and search tools to identify grant opportunities that align with your priorities.
- Before applying, assess whether a grant supports your organization's mission and intended impact.
- Carefully review eligibility criteria and requirements to ensure your project is a good fit.

By approaching the grant search process with focus and preparation, your organization will be in a stronger position to pursue the right opportunities and build a foundation for long-term success. In the next module, we will look at how to break down a funder's guidelines and identify exactly what is required to submit a competitive application.

Corresponding Resources

Grant Alignment Assessment Tool

Grant Prospecting Worksheet

Module 3: Understanding Grant Guideline Requirements

Before you even think about writing a grant proposal, there is one essential step that too many applicants rush through, or skip entirely, reading and fully understanding the grant guidelines.

A Request for Proposals (RFP) or Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) is not just a formality; it is the rulebook that dictates everything about your application. In its pages are critical details about eligibility, funding priorities, required documents, and the funder's expectations.

In this module, we will walk through how to:

- Break down an RFP or NOFO – Identifying key sections and what they mean.
- Understand common grant terminology – Deciphering technical language that impacts your proposal.
- Identify must-have components – Knowing what funders expect and how to meet those requirements.

By mastering these elements, you will avoid common pitfalls, increase your competitiveness, and ensure your application is complete and aligned with the funder's priorities.

How to Read an RFP or NOFO (Without Feeling Overwhelmed)

What Is an RFP or NOFO?

A Request for Proposals (RFP) or Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) is essentially the funder's instruction manual for applying. It tells you:

- Funding priorities – The programs, services, or initiatives the grant is intended to support.
- Who can apply – Eligibility requirements for organizations or individuals.
- How much funding is available – The total funding pool and potential award size.

- How to apply – The required format, documents, and submission process.
- What happens after submission – The review process, scoring criteria, and reporting expectations.

Every funder, whether it is the federal government, a state agency, or a private foundation, has different requirements. Some NOFOs are 50+ pages of dense government language, while others are a simple two-page PDF. Regardless of length, every word matters, missing a requirement could mean disqualification.

Breaking Down an RFP or NOFO: Key Sections

Funders do not structure their NOFOs in the same way, but most contain similar sections. Here are common things to look for:

Funding Opportunity Description

What this tells you:

- A high-level overview of the funding priorities.
- The problem the funder is trying to solve.
- What types of projects they are looking for.

Example: *"This funding opportunity supports projects that promote economic development in rural communities by investing in small business support programs, workforce training, and infrastructure projects."*

How to use this section: Check if your project aligns with the funder's goals. If your project does not match the intent of the grant, it is not a good fit. Move on and find another opportunity.

Eligibility Requirements

What this tells you:

- Who is eligible to apply (nonprofits, governments, businesses, etc.).
- Geographic restrictions (statewide, regional, rural/urban focus).
- Whether individuals or partnerships are eligible.

Example: *"Eligible applicants include 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations, local government entities, and Tribal governments operating in rural counties with populations under 50,000."*

How to use this section: Double-check that you qualify before you do any further work. Applying for a grant you are not eligible for is a waste of time.

Available Funding & Award Size

What this tells you:

- The total amount of funding available.
- The range of grant awards (e.g., “Awards between $50,000 and $250,000”).
- Whether partial funding may be awarded and then number of awards to be given.

Example: *"A total of $10 million is available. Grant requests must be between $100,000 and $500,000. Awards are subject to funding availability."*

How to use this section: If your project’s budget is too small or too large for the grant, it may not be the best fit.

Application Deadlines & Submission Details

What this tells you:

- When applications are due (time zone included!).
- Whether there is a pre-application requirement (e.g., Letter of Inquiry, concept paper).
- Submission method (email, online portal, Grants.gov, etc.).

Example: *"Applications must be submitted via Grants.gov no later than 11:59 PM ET on June 30, 2025. Late submissions will not be considered."*

How to use this section: Mark your calendar and set reminders well in advance. Many online portals have high traffic on deadline day, causing system crashes.

Project Scope & Funding Priorities

What this tells you:

- What types of projects will be funded.
- Any priority areas (e.g., climate resilience, workforce development, affordable housing).
- Preferred approaches (e.g., collaborative partnerships, sustainable models).

Example: *"Projects must focus on expanding access to STEM education for underserved youth, with priority given to programs that include mentorship components."*

How to use this section: Clearly align your proposal with these priorities. Funders want projects that match their goals, not ones that force-fit a different idea.

Application Structure and Narrative Questions

What this tells you:

- The format and organization of the full application.
- Required narrative sections and what each one should address.
- Page limits, formatting rules, and required attachments.

Example: *"Applicants must submit a project narrative of no more than 10 pages that includes a statement of need, goals and objectives, project activities, evaluation plan, and sustainability strategy. A separate budget narrative is also required."*

How to use this section: Review this part of the NOFO early to understand how the proposal must be structured and what each section must include. Plan your writing accordingly, and note which sections are weighted most heavily in the evaluation criteria. Pay close attention to formatting and file type requirements to ensure your application will be accepted and reviewed.

Budget Guidelines

What this tells you:

- What expenses are allowable (salaries, equipment, travel, etc.).
- What expenses are unallowable (e.g., lobbying, construction, debt repayment).
- Matching fund requirements (some grants require applicants to contribute a percentage of the project cost).

Example: *"Grant funds may be used for program-related staff salaries but cannot be used for construction costs."*

How to use this section: Make sure your budget aligns with the rules outlined in the RFP or NOFO. Use any budget templates they provide. Ensure you can meet the match requirements.

Evaluation Criteria

What this tells you:

- How your application will be scored.
- Weighting of different sections (e.g., "Statement of Need – 30%, Budget – 20%").
- Whether there is a review panel or automated scoring system.

Example: *"Applications will be evaluated based on project feasibility (25%), organizational capacity (20%), budget justification (20%), expected impact (25%), and alignment with funding priorities (10%)."*

How to use this section: Focus your strongest efforts on the highest-scoring sections. If the "Expected Impact" section is worth 30%, make sure it is compelling!

Reporting & Compliance Requirements

What this tells you:

- Whether you must submit progress reports (quarterly, annually).
- Financial tracking expectations.
- What is considered non-compliance.

Example: *"Grantees must submit quarterly progress reports detailing expenditures, key milestones, and measurable outcomes."*

How to use this section:
Make sure your organization has the capacity to meet these requirements. Some grants are resource-intensive to manage and require extensive paperwork.

Closing Insights

A strong proposal starts with a clear understanding of the funder's expectations. Taking time to fully read and interpret the guidelines allows you to develop a well-aligned, complete, and competitive application. Many otherwise qualified proposals are rejected simply because applicants overlooked formatting rules, misunderstood eligibility, or missed a required document.

Key takeaways from this module:

- RFPs and NOFOs outline all essential details for funding priorities, eligibility, and application structure.
- Application instructions often include narrative requirements, formatting rules, and deadlines that must be followed exactly.

- Understanding evaluation criteria allows you to emphasize the most important parts of your proposal.

Creating a checklist from the NOFO helps ensure your application is complete and submitted correctly.

By approaching every opportunity with careful attention to the guidelines, your organization will be better positioned to submit strong proposals that meet funder expectations and stand out in a competitive review process. In the next module, we will focus on developing a grant strategy that helps your organization prepare, plan, and stay ahead of deadlines.

Corresponding Resources

Grant Eligibility Checklist

NOFO/RFP Breakdown Template

Module 4: Developing a Grant Strategy

Successful grant writing is not just about completing an application. It is a deliberate and strategic process that involves planning, aligning priorities, and ensuring your organization is well-positioned to apply for and manage funding effectively. A strong grant strategy helps your organization stay organized, competitive, and financially prepared, increasing your chances of securing funding.

One common misstep is chasing funding rather than aligning grants with mission-driven work. Organizations sometimes create new programs or projects simply to fit a grant opportunity, even if it is not a natural or sustainable addition to their work. This can lead to mission drift, staff burnout, and difficulty sustaining the project once the funding ends. Instead of forcing a project to fit a grant, the strongest applicants focus on identifying funding that truly supports their existing goals, capacity, and long-term impact.

A well-planned, strategic approach leads to better results. By identifying the right funding opportunities, preparing key documents in advance, and developing a strong project framework, your organization will not only improve its success rate but also streamline the application process. Focusing on quality over quantity ensures that the time and effort put into grant applications lead to meaningful and sustainable funding.

In this module, you will learn:

- How to create a grant calendar – Tracking deadlines, funding cycles, and renewal opportunities.
- How to build a fundable project – Aligning your project with funder priorities and community needs.
- The importance of developing a budget early – Ensuring financial feasibility before writing the proposal.
- How to gather necessary documents in advance – Reducing last-minute scrambling and ensuring compliance.

Proactive planning allows your organization to submit stronger applications, reduce stress, and improve your overall funding success rate.

Creating a Grant Calendar

A grant calendar is an essential tool for tracking funding opportunities, deadlines, reporting requirements, and renewal cycles. Without a structured system in place, organizations often find themselves rushing to meet deadlines, missing key opportunities, or struggling to keep up with reporting requirements.

Why a Grant Calendar Matters

- Prevents missed opportunities – Many grants have strict deadlines, and late submissions are not accepted.

- Allows for strategic planning – Some funders have annual funding cycles, allowing organizations to plan ahead.
- Helps with workload management – Knowing deadlines in advance allows teams to allocate time and resources efficiently.
- Tracks reporting deadlines – Many grants require quarterly or annual reports, and missing deadlines could impact future funding.

Key Elements of a Grant Calendar

- Upcoming Grant Opportunities – A list of grants that align with your organization's goals.
- Application Deadlines – Including pre-application requirements like Letters of Intent (LOIs).
- Funding Cycles – Understanding when applications open and close each year.
- Reporting Deadlines – Post-award compliance requirements for awarded grants.
- Renewal Opportunities – Keeping track of when to reapply for multi-year grants.

Best Practices for Managing a Grant Calendar

- Use a spreadsheet, Google Calendar, or project management tools (such as Trello or Asana) to track deadlines.
- Assign a point person responsible for updating the calendar and tracking grant progress.
- Set internal deadlines ahead of actual submission dates to allow time for review and approvals.
- Review and update the grant calendar quarterly to keep it current and accurate.

A **well-maintained grant calendar** allows your organization to be **proactive instead of reactive**, ensuring that you never miss a funding opportunity.

Building a Fundable Project

Not every idea is a good fit for grant funding. A fundable project is one that aligns with the funder's priorities, demonstrates measurable impact, and has a realistic plan for implementation. Many organizations struggle with forcing a project to fit a grant opportunity, which often leads to weak proposals that fail to get funded.

Key Components of a Fundable Project

1. Addresses a Clear Need – The project should be backed by data and community input to show it meets a genuine need.
2. Has Measurable Goals & Outcomes – Funders expect quantifiable results, not just general statements about impact.
3. Includes a Feasible Implementation Plan – A strong timeline, responsible staff, and clear action steps improve credibility.
4. Demonstrates Long-Term Sustainability – Funders want to know what happens after the grant ends.

Why Strategic Partnerships Matter

Funders prefer projects with strong partnerships because collaboration enhances impact. Before applying, organizations should:

- Engage with potential partners early to discuss shared goals.
- Consider the best lead applicant if multiple organizations are involved, particularly if matching funds are required.
- Leverage community and stakeholder support to strengthen the proposal.

A project that is well-defined, data-driven, and supported by partnerships is more likely to secure funding.

Developing a Budget Early

The budget is one of the most scrutinized sections of a grant application. Funders need to see that the requested funds are reasonable, justified, and aligned with the project goals. A poorly planned budget raises red flags and can make funders question your organization's capacity to manage the funds effectively.

Why Budget Planning Should Happen Early

- Ensures the project is financially feasible and aligns with funder expectations.
- Helps identify funding gaps and matching requirements before submitting the proposal.
- Prevents last-minute errors and rushed estimates, which can weaken credibility.

Key Budget Categories

- Personnel – Staff salaries, benefits, stipends.
- Program Expenses – Supplies, materials, equipment.
- Travel & Training – Conference fees, mileage, lodging.
- Contracted Services – Consultants, evaluators, external experts.
- Indirect Costs – Administrative expenses, overhead (if allowed).
- Matching Funds – Required contributions from the applicant or in-kind support.

Best Practices for Budget Development

- Check the funder's budget guidelines early to avoid including unallowable expenses.
- Ensure that budget line items clearly connect to project goals.
- If matching funds are required, identify sources in advance (cash, in-kind, other grants).
- If indirect costs are allowed, confirm the maximum percentage the funder allows.

A well-prepared budget demonstrates that your organization has thought through the project's financial needs and is prepared to use the funding responsibly.

Gathering Necessary Documents in Advance

Many grant applications require supporting documentation to verify eligibility, financial stability, and project feasibility. Scrambling to gather these documents at the last minute can cause unnecessary delays and stress.

Commonly Required Documents

- IRS Determination Letter – Proof of nonprofit status (for 501(c)(3) organizations).
- Financial Statements – Audited financials, IRS Form 990, organizational budget.
- Letters of Support – Endorsements from key stakeholders, government agencies, or partners.
- Resumes or Bios – Background on key project personnel.
- Organizational Policies – Conflict of interest policy, procurement procedures (for federal grants).

Best Practices for Document Preparation

- Create a Common Grant Folder with frequently required documents to save time.
- Review the NOFO or RFP early to ensure you have all required attachments.
- Reach out to partners or stakeholders well in advance for letters of support.

Having these materials ready in advance allows you to focus on writing a strong proposal rather than tracking down last-minute paperwork.

Closing Insights

A well-developed grant strategy is the foundation of successful grant writing. Instead of reacting to last-minute funding opportunities, a strategic approach allows your organization to plan ahead, align funding opportunities with mission-driven projects, and submit stronger applications.

Key takeaways from this module:

- A grant calendar helps you stay organized and prepared for funding opportunities.
- A fundable project aligns with funder priorities, has measurable outcomes, and demonstrates sustainability.
- Developing a budget early ensures financial feasibility and prevents rushed estimates.
- Keeping a Common Grant Folder with required documents saves time and improves efficiency.

By following these best practices, your organization will be positioned for long-term funding success. In the next module, we will focus on writing a compelling grant proposal, turning your planning and strategy into a persuasive, fundable application.

Corresponding Resources

Budget Planning Worksheet

Potential Funders List

Project Readiness Worksheet

Module 5: Writing the Grant Proposal

A well-written grant proposal clearly communicates your project's purpose, impact, and feasibility while aligning with the funder's priorities. Strong proposals are clear, compelling, and structured, making it easy for reviewers to understand why your project deserves funding.

In this module, you will learn:

- Key components of a grant – What every strong proposal must include.
- Writing tips for clarity and persuasiveness – How to craft a compelling case.
- Common pitfalls to avoid – Mistakes that can reduce your chances of funding.

- Mastering these elements will help you submit a well-structured, competitive grant application that stands out to funders.

Key Components of a Grant Proposal

Most grant applications follow a similar structure. Understanding each section and its purpose will help you craft a cohesive, persuasive proposal.

Executive Summary (Also called Cover Page or Abstract)

Purpose: Provides a high-level overview of the project in a concise, engaging format.
1-2 paragraphs summarizing the problem, project, funding request, and expected impact.
Think of this as your “elevator pitch” – it should grab attention!

Example: *"XYZ Nonprofit requests $100,000 to launch a youth mentorship program in underserved communities, increasing high school graduation rates by 20% over three years."*

Statement of Need (Also called Problem Statement)

Purpose: Explains the problem your project addresses and why funding is needed.
Uses data, research, and real-world examples to prove the need.

Answers: Why does this problem matter? Who is affected? What will happen if nothing is done?

Example: *"Only 60% of students in our county graduate high school, compared to the state average of 85%. Without intervention, these students face increased unemployment and poverty."*

Best Practice: Use statistics and personal stories to make the need relatable.

Project Description (Also called Goals, Objectives, and Methods)

Purpose: Details how your project will address the problem and achieve results.
Clearly defines goals (big-picture vision) and objectives (specific, measurable actions). Includes implementation steps, timelines, and responsible personnel. Addresses potential challenges and solutions.

Example Format:

- Goal: Improve youth literacy in rural schools.
- Objective 1: Provide reading support to 500 students by year-end.
- Objective 2: Train 30 teachers in evidence-based literacy methods.

Best Practice: Use the SMART framework (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound).

Budget & Budget Narrative

Purpose: Shows how grant funds will be used and justifies expenses.
Breaks down direct costs (salaries, supplies, equipment) and indirect costs (administration, overhead). The budget narrative explains why each cost is necessary.

Example:

- Personnel: $50,000 – Funds 1 full-time program coordinator.
- Training Materials: $10,000 – Covers 500 student workbooks and literacy kits.

Best Practice: Ensure the budget matches the project description—avoid unexplained costs.

Evaluation & Impact

Purpose: Describes how you will measure success and demonstrate impact.

Identifies performance indicators (e.g., "80% of students will increase reading scores").

Describes data collection methods (e.g., surveys, attendance records).

Answers: How will you track progress? What does success look like?

Example: *"We will track student progress using pre- and post-literacy assessments. A third-party evaluator will review data to ensure program effectiveness."*

Best Practice: Funders love measurable impact. Avoid vague claims.

Writing Tips for Clarity & Persuasiveness

- Use Clear, Direct Language – Avoid jargon and overly complex sentences.
- Focus on the Funder's Priorities – Show alignment with their mission.
- Tell a Story – Use real-life examples and human-centered language.
- Use Data Strategically – Balance facts with compelling storytelling.
- **Be Concise** – Respect word limits and avoid unnecessary fluff.

Example of Strong vs. Weak Writing:

- Weak: "We want to improve literacy by working with schools to help kids read better."
- Strong: "Our program will provide 1,000 hours of direct tutoring to 200 struggling readers, increasing literacy rates by 20% in one year."

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- Ignoring Grant Guidelines – Always follow formatting and word count requirements.
- Focusing on Your Needs, Not the Community's – Funders care about impact, not organizational struggles.

- Vague Goals & Objectives – Use specific, measurable outcomes.
- Budget Mismatches – Ensure the budget aligns with the project description.
- Submitting at the Last Minute – Review and revise before submission!

Closing Insights

A strong proposal is more than well-written, it is well-structured, thoughtful, and closely aligned with what the funder is looking for. Understanding how each part of the application contributes to the overall picture helps you tell a clear and compelling story. Taking the time to plan, organize, and avoid common mistakes can significantly improve your chances of being funded. Key takeaways from this module:

- A successful proposal is clear, persuasive, and directly aligned with the funder's priorities.
- Each section of the application, narrative, budget, attachments, plays a role in telling your story.
- Avoiding common mistakes, such as missing required information or misunderstanding instructions, strengthens your proposal.

With a solid understanding of how grant applications are structured, you are ready to begin developing the key components of a fundable proposal. In the next module, we will turn to planning, building timelines, preparing documents, and creating a budget that supports your project goals.

Corresponding Resources

Grant Proposal Management Tracker

Grant Proposal Template

Grant Writing Checklist

Required Documents List

Strong and Weak Examples

Module 6: Creating a Grant Budget

A well-prepared budget is more than just numbers on a spreadsheet, it is a roadmap for how your project will be implemented and sustained. Funders want to see that your organization has thought through the costs, planned for financial sustainability, and can responsibly manage grant funds. A well-developed budget provides a clear, transparent, and realistic financial plan that aligns with your project goals, ensuring that every dollar requested serves a strategic purpose.

Many strong proposals are weakened by budgets that are incomplete, unrealistic, or disconnected from the narrative of the project. Some applicants underestimate costs, failing to account for necessary staff time, materials, or indirect expenses. Others overinflate their budgets, making funders question whether the project is cost-effective. A strong grant budget strikes the right balance. It accurately reflects what is needed to carry out the project, is based on real costs, and follows the funder's guidelines for allowable expenses.

Beyond securing funding, a well-planned budget sets the stage for effective project management and compliance. Funders expect grant recipients to track expenditures, submit financial reports, and demonstrate responsible stewardship of grant dollars. A budget that is carefully planned from the outset makes reporting and financial oversight much easier, reducing the risk of grant mismanagement.

In this module, you will learn:

- How to structure a grant budget – Breaking down key expense categories.
- Direct vs. indirect costs – Understanding how different expenses are classified.
- Matching funds and in-kind contributions – Meeting funder requirements for cost-sharing.
- Budget justification and narrative – Explaining the need behind the numbers.

Understanding Grant Budgets

A grant budget is a detailed estimate of the total cost of a project and how grant funds will be used. Funders want to see clear, reasonable, and justified costs that align with the project objectives.

Key Characteristics of a Strong Grant Budget:

- Detailed & Itemized – Breaks down expenses into specific categories.
- Aligned with Project Goals – Clearly supports the proposed activities.
- Compliant with Funder Guidelines – Follows restrictions on allowable costs.
- Includes Justification – Explains why each expense is necessary.

Example Budget Overview:

- Total Project Cost: $250,000
- Grant Request: $150,000
- Matching Funds: $50,000
- In-Kind Contributions: $50,000

Best Practice: Use a budget template to organize funding sources and expenses.

Direct vs. Indirect Costs

Direct Costs

Definition: Expenses directly related to implementing the project.

- Staff salaries and benefits (e.g., program coordinators, project managers, etc.).
- Materials and supplies (e.g., books, lab equipment, software).
- Travel (e.g., mileage, lodging, conference fees).

- Contracted services (e.g., consultants, evaluators).

Example: A literacy program budget includes $50,000 for books and workbooks, which are direct costs because they are necessary for the program.

Indirect Costs

Definition: Expenses not directly tied to a specific program activity but necessary for overall operations.

- Administrative costs (e.g., office space, utilities, internet).
- HR and accounting services.
- Organizational insurance.

Example: A nonprofit applies for a grant that allows 10% indirect costs. If the total budget is $100,000, they can request $10,000 for administrative expenses.

Best Practice: Always check if the funder limits indirect costs or requires a federally approved Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (ICRA).

Matching Funds & In-Kind Contributions

Some grants require the applicant to contribute a portion of the project's budget through matching funds or in-kind contributions.

Matching Funds (Also called Cost Share)

Definition: A portion of the budget funded by the applicant or other sources. This can be cash or in-kind contributions.

- Funders may require a 1:1 match (matching every dollar granted).
- Can come from organizational funds, donations, or state/local funding.

Example: A local government applies for a transportation grant requiring a 20% match. If the project costs $500,000, they must provide $100,000 in matching funds.

In-Kind Contributions

Definition: Non-cash contributions of goods, services, or time that support the project.

- Volunteer hours.
- Donated office space or equipment.
- Pro bono professional services.

Example: A university partners with a nonprofit for an education grant. The university provides faculty time and classroom space as in-kind contributions valued at $30,000.

Best Practice: Carefully document in-kind contributions with fair market value estimates.

Budget Justification & Narrative

A Budget Justification (or Budget Narrative) explains why each expense is necessary and how it contributes to the project's success. Funders want to see that every dollar is accounted for and used effectively.

Key Elements of a Budget Justification:

- Explain Direct Costs – Describe the role of personnel, materials, and services.
- Justify Indirect Costs – Show how these expenses support project administration.
- Clarify Matching Funds & In-Kind Contributions – Provide source details.
- Use Simple, Clear Language – Avoid excessive technical terms.

Example:

- Personnel ($75,000): The Project Coordinator will oversee day-to-day implementation, supervise partners, and manage reporting. This position is budgeted at $50,000, based

on an annual salary of $70,000 at approximately 0.71 FTE (28.5 hours per week). The part-time Program Assistant will manage scheduling, logistics, and participant communication, budgeted at $25,000 based on $25/hour for an estimated 20 hours per week. Fringe benefits for both positions are included in the Personnel line and calculated at 25%.

- Supplies ($15,000): Includes computers, software licenses, and educational materials for participants. It is best to have quotes or specific costs if you are able.
- Travel ($10,000): Covers transportation and lodging for staff attending required training.

Best Practice: Funders appreciate concise, well-justified budgets, avoid unnecessary line items.

Closing Insights

A thoughtful, well-prepared budget is one of the clearest indicators that an organization is ready to responsibly manage grant funding. Funders look for financial plans that align with the proposed work, reflect realistic costs, and demonstrate both transparency and credibility. A complete budget does more than list numbers, it helps tell the story of how the project will be carried out and sustained.

Key takeaways from this module:

- A strong budget is clearly aligned with the project's goals and scope.
- It is important to distinguish between direct and indirect costs to meet funder expectations.
- Matching funds and in-kind contributions must be accurately documented and verified.
- A well-written budget narrative provides context and strengthens the overall proposal.

By developing a clear, funder-aligned budget and narrative, your organization will build trust and increase your chances of securing funding. In the final module, we will focus on submitting your proposal and navigating the follow-up process with funders.

Corresponding Resources

Budget Justification Example

Budget Template Outline

Module 7: Submitting the Grant & Follow-Up

Submitting a grant application is the final step in the proposal process, but it is far from the end of your grant-seeking journey. A strong submission is about more than just hitting "submit" on an online portal. It requires careful review, attention to detail, and an understanding of what happens next. Many grant proposals fail not because the project was unworthy of funding, but because of technical errors, missing documents, or failure to follow submission instructions.

A successful submission ensures that your proposal is complete, formatted correctly, and meets all the funder's requirements. This includes double-checking for required attachments, confirming that budgets align with funder guidelines, and making sure all application components are in their proper place. Many funders will not even review an application that is incomplete, late, or does not meet technical formatting rules.

But what happens after you submit? Funders may reach out with clarification questions, additional requests, or opportunities to strengthen your proposal. Being responsive and prepared during this stage can make a difference in whether your application is funded.

In this module, you will learn:

- How to successfully submit a grant application – Avoiding common mistakes that lead to rejection.
- Understanding online submission portals – Navigating Grants.gov, state systems, and foundation platforms.

- Common submission errors – What to double-check before sending your proposal.
- What happens after submission – Understanding review timelines and funder expectations.
- How to respond to follow-up requests – Handling funder inquiries and submitting additional information if needed.

Understanding Online Submission Portals

Most grant applications must be submitted electronically through a designated portal. Each system has its own registration process, formatting requirements, and submission procedures, and failing to follow these guidelines can result in disqualification.

Common Grant Submission Platforms

- Grants.gov – The main portal for federal grants. Many departments have gone to their own grant portals. It should be clearly stated in the NOFO where you will apply.
- State Grant Portals – Each state has its own online system for local and pass-through funding. In Colorado many of the departments have their own portals.
- Foundation & Corporate Grant Systems – Many private funders may use platforms like Fluxx, Foundant, or CyberGrants

Before beginning an application, register early and review the technical requirements. Some systems require additional steps, such as obtaining a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) number, registering with SAM.gov (for federal grants), or creating an organizational profile.

Best Practices for Navigating Submission Portals:

- Create an account early to avoid last-minute technical issues.
- Use the funder's templates if required, some portals reject applications that are not formatted correctly.
- Save a copy of your submission before finalizing, many systems do not allow edits after submission.

- Submit early to account for unexpected technical difficulties.

Common Submission Errors to Avoid

Even the strongest grant proposals can be disqualified due to avoidable mistakes during submission. Below are some of the most common errors and how to prevent them.

Missed Deadlines

- Many funders do not accept late submissions, no matter the reason.
- Some portals close automatically at the deadline, even being one minute late can mean rejection.

How to Avoid It:

- Submit at least 24-48 hours before the deadline to allow time for troubleshooting.
- Double-check the time zone, some funders operate on Eastern Time, even if you are located elsewhere.

Incomplete Applications

- Missing attachments or unanswered questions can result in immediate disqualification.
- Some systems will not allow submission until all fields are filled, but others rely on the applicant to ensure completeness.

How to Avoid It:

- Use a checklist to ensure all required sections are completed before submission.
- Have someone else review the application for missing information before submitting.

Incorrect Formatting or File Types

- Some funders require specific font sizes, margins, or document types.
- Portals may only accept PDFs, while others may require Word documents or Excel files.

How to Avoid It:

- Carefully read the formatting instructions in the RFP or NOFO.

- Use the funder's templates if provided, modifying formatting can result in disqualification.

Uploading the Wrong Files

- Many applicants mistakenly submit draft versions or incorrect attachments.
- Some portals allow only one upload per section, meaning an error cannot be corrected after submission.

How to Avoid It:

- Label files clearly with the grant name, submission date, and document type.
- Double-check all attachments before finalizing submission.

What Happens After Submission?

Once your application is submitted, it goes through several review stages before funding decisions are made.

Initial Compliance Review

- Funders check for basic eligibility and completeness.
- Applications that do not meet requirements may be rejected immediately.

Technical Review

- A review panel or program officers assess project feasibility, budget accuracy, and alignment with funding priorities.
- Some grants go through a multi-stage review process with different levels of scoring.

Scoring & Ranking

- Proposals are assigned scores based on evaluation criteria outlined in the RFP or NOFO.
- Higher-scoring applications are prioritized for funding.

Final Approval

- Some funders conduct interviews or request additional documentation before making a final decision.
- If selected, grantees will receive an award notification and begin the contracting process.
- **Important:** Do not begin project activities or incur costs until the grant agreement is fully executed. Even after an award is announced, it can take weeks, or even months, for the official contract to be finalized. Work completed before the contract is signed is typically not reimbursable.

Typical Review Timelines

- Federal grants: 3-6 months from submission to award notification.
- State and foundation grants: Varies, often 2-4 months.

It is important to track your submission status and be prepared for follow-up communication from the funder.

Responding to Follow-Up Requests

After submission, funders may reach out for clarifications, additional documentation, or modifications to your proposal. This is an opportunity to strengthen your application and demonstrate your organization's responsiveness.

Types of Follow-Up Requests:

- Clarifications on Budget or Narrative: Funders may ask for more details or adjustments.
- Requests for Additional Documents: Some funders require updated financials or letters of commitment.
- Interviews or Site Visits: For competitive grants, funders may conduct an in-person or virtual interview before finalizing awards.

Best Practices for Responding to Funders:

- Reply promptly—delays can affect funding decisions.
- Provide clear and concise responses—only answer what is asked.
- Follow submission instructions exactly—if additional documents are requested, ensure they meet the funder's formatting requirements.

Even if you do not receive the award, engaging professionally with funders can strengthen future applications and open the door for other funding opportunities.

Closing Insights

Submitting a grant application is not just a final task. It is a critical phase that can determine whether a well-planned project receives funding. Even strong proposals can be disqualified due to missed deadlines, formatting issues, or incomplete submissions. A careful and organized approach during the submission stage reinforces your organization's credibility and positions you for a stronger review.

Equally important is how your organization responds after submission. Funders may request clarifications, additional documentation, or updates before making award decisions. Being prepared and responsive during this time shows that your organization is capable, reliable, and ready to manage funding responsibly.

Key takeaways from this module:

- Submitting through the correct portal and following technical instructions helps avoid preventable delays.
- Reviewing your application carefully before submission increases the likelihood of a successful review.
- Tracking funder timelines allows your team to stay informed and plan next steps appropriately.

- Responding professionally to post-submission requests supports strong relationships with funders.

With a complete and well-prepared proposal submitted, your organization is now in position to navigate the review and award process confidently. Whether or not funding is awarded on the first try, each application provides valuable experience to build on for future success.

Corresponding Resources

Pre-Submission Checklist

Common Submission Mistakes to Avoid

Grant Submission Tracking Sheet

Closing Thoughts: Bringing It All Together

Successful grant writing is not just about securing funding. It is about building sustainable programs, strengthening communities, and driving meaningful impact. Throughout this training, we have covered the full grant process, from understanding grant opportunities to strategic planning, proposal writing, budgeting, and submission. Each step plays a vital role in ensuring that your organization is not only competitive but also prepared to manage and implement grant funding effectively.

Key Takeaways from This Training

- A strategic approach is key. Grant writing is not about chasing every funding opportunity. The most successful applicants align grants with their mission, capacity, and long-term goals.
- Preparation sets strong applicants apart. Organizations that invest time in developing a grant calendar, gathering documents in advance, and creating a well-structured budget are more likely to succeed.

- A compelling narrative makes an application stand out. Funders receive countless applications, but those that tell a clear, persuasive, and impactful story are the ones that get noticed.
- A well-prepared budget strengthens a proposal. A grant budget is not just numbers—it is a financial plan that reflects the project's feasibility and sustainability.
- Submission is not the end of the process. Grant applicants must be prepared to track deadlines, respond to funders, and follow reporting requirements if awarded.

Looking Ahead: Your Next Steps

Now that you have the tools and knowledge to approach grant writing strategically, it is time to put these concepts into action. Consider the following next steps to continue building your grant writing skills and increasing your success:

- Start a grant calendar. Identify upcoming opportunities that align with your organization's mission and create a plan for tracking deadlines.
- Utilize the resources that accompany this training, they are meant to be a tool, but not rigid so feel free to modify them to meet the uniqueness of your organization.
- Develop a list of fundable projects. Work with your team to outline priority projects that fit within your funding strategy.
- Assemble key grant documents. Create a Common Grant Folder with frequently required materials to streamline future applications.
- Continue refining your grant writing skills. Read successful grant proposals, seek feedback from colleagues, and stay updated on best practices.

Most importantly, stay persistent. Grant writing is a process that requires time, effort, and resilience. Not every application will be funded, but each submission provides an opportunity to improve, build relationships with funders, and refine your approach.

With a strong strategy, careful preparation, and a clear understanding of how to craft compelling proposals, your organization will be well-positioned to secure funding and create lasting impact.