Grant Writing support Information/Trainings

Resources for Identifying Grant Opportunities

Grant opportunities are numerous, yet the funding landscape can be difficult to navigate. Below are a few resources that municipalities can use to identify additional grant opportunities.

Foundation News and RFP Website
(Some grants are only offered in certain states) Note, you may have to sign up to their email list to get access to the site. Their RFP section has all the current foundation grants listed by category.

California Grants Portal (State of California)
The State of California provides an interactive webpage that lists current and upcoming opportunities from every state agency, along with links to more details and application forms. Designed for nonprofits and local government agencies seeking grants and loans from state sources, the site was built by the California State Library with input from a variety of stakeholders.

Funding Navigation for California Communities (CivicWell)
CivicWell’s Funding Navigation for California Communities is a platform that provides direct assistance and a roadmap to help local government and community leaders identify funding opportunities and develop competitive proposals. This funding platform and direct assistance platform supports local leaders in navigating the complex landscape of affordable housing,
sustainable transportation, urban greening, and water resources management to identify viable funding sources best suited for their local needs.

**Grant Opportunities and Forecast** (WRCOG)

WRCOG’s Grant Opportunities and Forecast provides a snapshot of grant opportunities that are currently open to jurisdictions. Their resource is continually updated and each opportunity has been reviewed by the WRCOG team to identify key information such as the source of funds, maximum funding available, match requirements, and historic success rate.

**Grant Opportunities Matrix** (Climate Resolve)

Climate Resolve has curated a list of current and forecasted climate grant opportunities ranging from public and private sources. These opportunities are organized by category types such as air quality, energy, forests/fire, greening, planning/engagement, transportation, and water/stormwater. Updated regularly, the matrix lists out the grant name, application deadline, description, source of funds, match requirements, and contact information for who to reach out to when applying for the grant.

**What to have handy when applying for a grant**

It is important to keep track of all of your key organizational documents at all times. This is especially important when applying for a grant and is essential if applying for government grants. Typically, grants that are private have less strings attached while as you go from local, to state, to federal funds the scrutiny on organizational record keeping and reporting gets tougher. Make sure you have the following:

- Non-profit determination letter.
- Articles of incorporation
- By-laws that have been approved by your board of directors
- Make sure you have filed recently with the franchise tax board, attorney general, and filed taxes with the IRS.
- Have your last year in board meeting minutes and agendas accessible.
● Have your organization’s financials available to you including bank statements, and accounting information (ie the same you would use for taxes).
● If applying for government grants from the federal government it is important that you obtain a DUNS number, have your EIN number handy, and have an active registration within the System for Awards Management at sam.gov
● If you have a guidestar.org account this can also help you to get verified for private grants. Guidestar is used as a third-party verification for grantors to review potential grantees.
● Have any financial policies for your organization on file and in writing such as policies for hiring, pay-scales, payroll, insurance policies, fee for service rate schedules, and any policy related to financial decision-making such as how checks are cut and approved and how those decisions are made and by whom.
● Have an organizational chart prepared that shows the chain of command in your organization.

Many of these components as well as some of the legal issues around grants and contracts are complicated. Sometimes your organization may want to organize itself in another way instead of the traditional non-profit. Maybe you want to be a B-corp or maybe you want to be an LLC or worker cooperative. Maybe you have ideas about another type of organization. The Sustainable Economies Law Center has many resources that can be of help.

The Sustainable Economies Law Center
Mission: Sustainable Economies Law Center cultivates a new legal landscape that supports community resilience and grassroots economic empowerment. We provide essential legal tools - education, research, advice, and advocacy - so communities everywhere can develop their own sustainable sources of food, housing, energy, jobs, and other vital aspects of a thriving community.

Best Practices for Grant Writing

Initiation: Identifying Internal Priorities
The first step in writing a competitive grant proposal is identifying a jurisdiction’s or an organization’s internal priorities for funding. These may consist of existing projects that the jurisdiction or organization is seeking to continue, or new projects that will advance a jurisdiction’s progress towards meeting a goal or further the organization’s mission.

Existing projects that have demonstrated success are often easier to propose, because they are fully formed and the grant writer can point to past progress as an argument for future success. In addition, existing projects show that the organization has the knowledge and capacity to implement the grant it is proposing.

New projects, however, may be exciting for funders who want to put their name on something innovative; these projects may be more difficult to describe because they are not fully fleshed out. Their impact may also be more difficult to quantify, which is often an important section in proposals.

Regardless of the status of the project(s) to be submitted, the organization should have at least an idea of what it would like to do and the approximate amount of funding it is looking for.

Finding a Grant Opportunity

After identifying priorities, which may shift over time, researching grant opportunities is the next step. Although there are thousands of grant opportunities available (maybe more), the process of narrowing them down can be daunting. Signing up for mailing lists, keyword searches, and seeing where similar organizations have gotten funding can all help. In addition, resources like the grants opportunities matrix described above, and grant writing assistance services described below, can aid in the search. Keeping track of government policies is also helpful; if you know a government agency is about to receive a significant amount of money for a certain focus area, keep an eye out for upcoming Requests for Proposals (RfPs).

When researching potential funders, the grant writing team should take a look at their prior funding awards. If the funder has given money to similar organizations and projects, it is more likely that they will continue that trend. Although funders do shift their priorities, they do not often shift their basic values.

Once a certain funding opportunity seems like it aligns with the organization’s priorities, it’s often a good idea to examine the fit in detail. Some questions to ask before committing to submitting a proposal:
Impact

- Does it serve our target population?
- Does it have a clear impact?
- Do we have strong ties in the project community?
- Is the effort better with us than without?
- Would another organization be a better fit? If so, should we partner with them?

Strategic

- Does it have the ability to be a landmark program / have a wow factor?
- Does it serve our mission?
- Is it strategic for future growth (or a one-off)?
- Is it multi-year?

Winnability

- Can we meet the deliverables in a timely manner
- Do we have the knowledge and ability in-house?
- How competitive are we?
- Do we want to work with this funder?

Impact on the organization

- Do we have the available staff time / capacity?
- Is there money that is worth the effort and from a reputable funder?
- Are we allowed to claim credit and advertise this project?
- Do we acquire new skills?
- How much effort does the application require?
- Will we get paid quickly and efficiently?

The grant writer and her/his team must also ensure that they have the capacity to complete a high-quality proposal before the deadline. It’s unlikely that this one application is their only priority! This can be accomplished by looking into detail at the requirements and estimating the hours required to complete a proposal. After deciding to proceed, a work plan with deliverables and dates is often essential.

Finally, as mentioned in the questions above, the grant writing team must make sure the staff members who will be working on the project have the capacity to implement it successfully.

Partners and Project Ties

Many grant applications, especially for larger amounts, have multiple partners. If an organization identifies a gap in their ability to implement a project, bringing on a partner whose capabilities or background fill that gap is often a necessity.
If the project will be physically located in a geographic area, the application will be more successful if one or more of the applicants have ties to the community there or have done previous projects there. Partners, especially those that focus their work in a specific area, can bring and/or strengthen these ties if the prime applicant is lacking. Also, partners with previous connections to the funder are valuable as well.

After identifying potential partners, those entities should be contacted as early as possible in the proposal process. The grant writing team and the organization must confirm that the project aligns with the mission and capacity of the potential partners. In addition, the grant writing team should clearly communicate the expectations to partners, both in contributing to the proposal and implementing the project.

Common Proposal Components

1. **Work plan**
   Before starting the writing process, the grant writing team should prepare a detailed work plan for the proposal. This should identify the necessary components of the proposal, who will be responsible for completing them, and deadlines for doing so. In addition, it should include details like reaching out to partners, registering with the funder’s grant portal (if there is one), reaching out for letters of support and/or references, identifying any media needed (maps, photos, etc.), and the final submission format and process. This work plan should be shared with anyone involved in the proposal process.

2. **Organization and staff background and qualifications**
   This section should demonstrate that the organization and its staff have the qualifications and background to implement the project they are proposing. The prior projects that the grant writing team lists in the proposal should match the project being pitched, and the funder’s priorities, as closely as possible. Although these may not be the organization’s flagship projects, the grant writing team needs to show the organization has successfully completed projects in a way that makes the project being pitched seem attainable.

   Similarly, the staff background and qualifications should be tailored to the project in the proposal as well. Like applying for a job, the staff backgrounds should show the most relevant experience and expertise possible.

3. **Project description / scope of work (SOW)**
   This section should communicate the plan for the project, and there is a wide variance between different funders’ requirements for this part of the proposal. Shorter applications
may not be able to go into as much detail, and may require more of a high-level picture. Longer applications, such as those for government agencies, may require very detailed descriptions, complete with maps, schematics, data, and more. Either way, this section should show that the organization understands the project, and should present the information in a way that both meets the funder’s requirements as well as communicates the project to them. The grant writing team wants to ensure that whomever is reviewing the application has a clear understanding of the project at the end of this section.

The SOW may be separate from the description, or included. Some funders require a narrative description in addition to a more structured SOW; others require the two to be intertwined. As mentioned above, there is wide variation for this section of the proposal.

It is also important to make sure that this section aligns with the impact, and budget sections, described below.

4. **Impact**
   This is often one of the most difficult, yet important pieces of the proposal. Funders want to know that their dollars are making a difference, and they want to see that the organization is tracking its project. Some projects lend themselves more easily to measurement than others, with hard data, like the number of people engaged through an outreach program, which can be readily available. The impact of other projects, such as a public art campaign, may be more difficult to measure. Some funders also ask for indirect impacts, which are results of the project beyond the people or sites the project touches directly - for example, larger effects on communities as a result of the project. These can be even more difficult to measure.

Regardless, the impact measurements need to be reflective of the overall goals of the project, and need to align with the narrative. Projected impacts also help set funder expectations at the beginning of the project. However, there is a balance between providing impact metrics that will impress the funder and win the grant, but are still achievable by the teams implementing the project.

5. **Budget**
   A program budget is another way to communicate the overall picture of the project to the funder, as well as a way for the organization to ensure they can successfully implement the project. As with other sections of the proposal, budgets have a wide range of variation. Some funders require simple totals for various types of costs (labor, materials, travel, etc.) while others require every single projected cost to be broken out. Either way,
the budget needs to be congruent with the other parts of the proposal, and show where the organization is putting its effort.

Grant Writing Assistance Programs Within the IE Region

Western Riverside Council of Governments (WRCOG) Grant Writing Assistance Program
The Grant Writing Assistance Program was established by the WRCOG Executive Committee in 2017. The program is carried out in two ways. First, WRCOG prepares a bi-weekly summary of potential grants that are then distributed to WRCOG member agencies. This summary includes all grants to which WRCOG member agencies could be an applicant. WRCOG is also available to assist in developing grant applications for specific grants related to planning and transportation (the main focus of WRCOG’s activities and programs) by pairing specialized consultants to its member agencies. The specific grants eligible for the Program are described in the adopted Grant Writing Assistance Program Guidelines. More information on the Assistance Program can be found here.

San Bernardino Council of Governments (SBCOG) Grant Writing Assistance
SBCOG posts a grant summary table of open grant opportunities that is updated every two weeks by Blais Associates Grant Services and Software firm. This table can be found on the SBCOG website under “Grant Opportunities.” SBCOG, with the help of B&A, also provides grant writing assistance on certain grant programs for projects that will benefit multiple jurisdictions. Applicants who are interested in this program should contact SBCOG’s Council of Governments and Equity Programs Manager, Monique Reza-Arellano, to discuss further details. Projects are accepted on a case-by-case basis. SBCOG discusses internally to decide if the project should receive assistance, after which B&A is contacted to assist the applicant with their grant writing.

Climate Resolve’s Ready for Tomorrow Grant Writing Assistance Program
Launched in 2019, Climate Resolve’s Ready for Tomorrow program connects disadvantaged communities in Southern California to funding that supports climate-related planning and projects. Ready for Tomorrow has provided free grant writing assistance that has successfully won more than $7.5 million in grants for climate-related projects including bike lanes to promote active transportation, planting shade trees to mitigate urban heat island effects, and purchasing Zero-Emission Electric Vehicles to transition municipal fleets off of fossil fuels.

Cal State San Bernardino College of Extended and Global Education
CSUSB offers an online course that provides students with hands-on experience and knowledge they need to successfully begin the planning process for projects in need of grant funding. Those interested can either enroll in a teacher-led 6-week course or a self-paced 3-month course.
University of California, Riverside Extension Center
The Extension Center of UC Riverside offers courses on Grant Proposal Writing. Those who participate can gain understanding on the mechanics of creating a grant proposal by completing a proposal document that will be ready for submission upon completion of the course. Topics include grant research, planning, budget development, partnerships, document preparation, writing for the grant, and proposal presentation.

Annenberg Foundation Alchemy program
Annenberg Alchemy, the Annenberg Foundation’s free training program for nonprofit leaders, is accepting applications now through October 31, 2013, for its 2014 Leadership Seminar training sessions. Previously available only to nonprofit organizations located in Los Angeles County, Leadership Seminar is now open to nonprofits from Ventura, Orange, San Bernardino and Riverside counties, as well. The sole cost of admission is the attendance of both the executive director and board chair during the three days of training.