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Resources for Grantseekers

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SUMMARY

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Resources for Grantseekers

Federal grants are intended to meet goals authorized by Congress and often target community needs. Federal grants are not guaranteed benefits or entitlements to individuals. Most federal grant funds go to state and local governments, which in turn may award funds as sub-awards to local entities, such as nonprofit organizations. Because of this, contacting federal departments and agencies, state-level grants administering agencies (SAAs), or both to discuss grant opportunities is likely to be an important step for many grantseekers.

However, due to limited purposes of grants and competition for available funding, grantseekers seeking government aid might need to search for funding options other than grants. For instance, individuals may be eligible for other kinds of benefits or assistance. Small businesses and students may be eligible for loans.

Sources that grantseekers need to identify federal grants are available from federal government websites for free. The Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (or "Assistance Listings" database) at SAM.gov describes more than 2,200 federal programs, more than half of them grants, and can be searched by keyword, department or agency, program title, beneficiary, and applicant eligibility. Federal department and agency websites provide additional information and guidance, and they provide state agency contacts, given that some federal grant opportunities may be administered by state-level agencies.

Once a program has been identified, eligible grantseekers may apply for grants at the website Grants.gov through a uniform process for many agencies (for state-administered federal grants, applicants may apply through the state-level agency). Through Grants.gov, grantseekers may identify when federal funding notices and deadlines for a program become available, sign up for email notification of funding opportunities, and track the progress of submitted applications.

Because government funds may be limited, sources of private and corporate foundation funding may be important to consider. Sources for nongovernmental funding are available online from organizations supporting grantseekers. For example, Candid (formerly the Foundation Center and GuideStar) is a clearinghouse for information about private, corporate, and community foundations, with publicly-accessible collections of resources in every state. These private, corporate, and community foundations often maintain their own websites with information for grantseekers.

This report provides a brief introduction to the grant process, describes key sources of information on government and private funding, and outlines eligibility for federal grants. This report also includes some sources for information on writing grant proposals.

Additional sources for grantseekers include reports such as CRS Report RL32159, *How to Develop and Write a Grant Proposal*, by Maria Kreiser and CRS Report RL34035, *Grants Work in a Congressional Office*, by Maria Kreiser.

This report is updated at the beginning of every Congress and as needed.

Contents

Introduction 1
Who Is Eligible for a Government Grant? 1
Key Federal Sources 2
Federal Contacts in States and State Administering Agencies 4
Related Federal Sources 5
Private, Corporate, and Additional Funding Sources 6
Grant Proposal Writing Websites 7

Contacts

Author Information 7

Introduction

Hundreds of grants or loans for various purposes are available from federal departments and agencies. However, federal grants are not benefits or entitlements to individuals. Federal grants are authorized by Congress and are often intended for projects serving state, community, and local needs. Most federal funding goes to state and local governments, which in turn may make sub-awards to local entities, such as eligible nonprofit organizations.

Local governments seeking funds for community services, infrastructure, and economic revitalization may be eligible to tap into state or federal funds. Government funding may also be available for nonprofit organizations, including faith-based groups, for initiatives such as establishing food kitchens or after-school tutoring programs. For faith-based grant recipients, projects must benefit the community at large and not solely the groups' members or congregants.

For individuals seeking financial help (such as starting or expanding a small business, or educational assistance), benefits or loans may be available.

- Individuals looking for government benefits (such as for child or health care, housing or energy costs, disability or veterans' needs, or "living assistance") may find useful the website Benefits.gov at http://www.benefits.gov.
- Students seeking financial aid can search Student Aid on the web at https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/.
- To start or expand a small business, the federal government provides help in the form of loans and advisory and technical assistance (such as business counseling). See the Small Business Administration (SBA) website at http://www.sba.gov to find programs and state or local SBA offices.

Groups seeking funding for projects need first to determine the most appropriate sources of funds. Because government funds may be limited, sources of private funding may also be important to consider. Regional and community foundations may be particularly interested in funding local projects; however, many projects may require a combination of government and private funding. Local business or private foundation funding might be appropriate for supporting local memorials or programs. Community fundraising may be more suitable for school enrichment activities, such as band or sports uniforms or field trips.

For eligible state and local governments and nonprofit organizations, identifying appropriate programs, and contacting federal and state agencies early in the process may be encouraged. Federal offices located in states or regions often handle federal grant applications and disbursement of funds. State government departments and agencies also fund projects and administer federal block grants.

Who Is Eligible for a Government Grant?

Many groups or organizations are eligible to apply for government grants; however, each individual grant program will have its own requirements for eligibility. Typically, most grantees fall into the following categories:[1]

- Government Organizations
    - *State Governments*

[1] Grants.gov, "Who is Eligible for a Grant?," at http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/learn-grants/grant-eligibility.html.

    - *Local Governments*
    - *City or Township Governments*
    - *Special District Governments*
    - *Native American Tribal Governments (federally recognized)*
    - *Native American Tribal Governments (other than federally recognized)*
- Education Organizations
    - *Independent School Districts*
    - *Public and State Controlled Institutions of Higher Education*
    - *Private Institutions of Higher Education*
- Public Housing Organizations
    - *Public Housing Authorities*
    - *Indian Housing Authorities*
- Nonprofit Organizations
    - *Nonprofits having a 501(c)(3) status with the IRS, other than institutions of higher education*
    - *Nonprofits that do not have a 501(c)(3) status with the IRS, other than institutions of higher education*
- For-profit Organizations (other than small businesses)
- Individuals (such as Pell Grants for needy students)

Some constituents may have seen or heard media advertisements claiming federal grants are available to help them. However, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), the nation's consumer protection agency, cautions grantseekers:[2]

> Sometimes, it's an ad that claims you will qualify to receive a "free grant" to pay for education costs, home repairs, home business expenses, or unpaid bills. Other times, it's a phone call supposedly from a "government" agency or some other organization with an official sounding name. In either case, the claim is the same: your application for a grant is guaranteed to be accepted, and you'll never have to pay the money back.

The FTC warns that these "money for nothing" grant offers are usually misleading, whether you see them in your local paper, through the internet, or hear about them on television or receive a phone call. Grantseekers should beware of paying "processing fees" for information that is available free to the public. Ads claiming federal grants are available for home repairs, home business, unpaid bills, or other personal expenses are often scams.

Key Federal Sources

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance ("Assistance Listings") at SAM.gov (General Services Administration)
https://sam.gov/content/assistance-listings

[2] Federal Trade Commission, FTC Consumer Alert, "Government Grant Scams," September 2006, at http://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0113-government-grant-scams.

Official descriptions of more than 2,200 federal assistance programs (including grants, loans, and other financial and nonfinancial assistance) can be found on SAM.gov. The website, produced by the General Services Administration (GSA), houses federal assistance listings previously found on the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) website. Each federal assistance program has a corresponding CFDA program number; these CFDA numbers are still used as numerical program identifiers. Programs are searchable at the "Assistance Listings" domain at SAM.gov; descriptions are updated by departments and agencies, and they cover authorizing legislation, objectives, and eligibility and compliance requirements.

About 1,800 assistance programs are classified as grants. Assistance listing descriptions include the following:

- federal agency administering a program;
- legislation authorizing the program;
- objectives and goals of program;
- types of financial or nonfinancial assistance;
- uses and restrictions;
- eligibility requirements;
- application and award process;
- criteria for selecting proposals;
- amount of obligations for some past and current fiscal years;
- range and average of financial assistance;
- regulations, guidelines, and literature relevant to a program;
- information contacts and headquarters, regional, and local offices;
- related programs;
- examples of funded projects;
- formula and matching requirements, where applicable; and
- requirements for post-assistance reports.

Grants.gov and FedConnect
http://www.grants.gov
https://www.fedconnect.net

After grantseekers identify federal programs in SAM.gov and contact agencies (see section below), they may be directed to register and apply at websites such as Grants.gov or FedConnect when application announcements for competitive grants become available. The websites allow grantseekers to register and download applications for current competitive funding opportunities from all 26 federal grants-making agencies. Grantseekers themselves can check on notices of funding availability (NOFAs) or requests for proposals (RFPs); sign up to receive email notification of grant opportunities; and apply for federal grants online through a unified process. The sites also guide grantseekers in obtaining Dun and Bradstreet (DUNS) numbers and registering with the System for Award Management (SAM); both are required for all federal grants (follow instructions at http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/organization-registration.html).

One significant limitation to Grants.gov and FedConnect.net is the exclusion of state-level federal grant program information. For example, Grants.gov provides information only about the funding opportunities for *primary* grant recipients. However, federal grant funds may first be received by

a state government (a "primary" recipient) and then passed through to the local level as sub-awards to more local sub-recipients. Thus, a local grantseeker would not be able to access information on Grants.gov about the possibility of receiving federal sub-grants from a state-level agency.

To download and submit an application from Grants.gov or FedConnect, registration is required. The sites provide a narrated tutorial on how to complete a grant application package and a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) page. Once an application is submitted, grants applicants can then track progress of their application using their unique ID and password. Applications can be identified by CFDA number, funding opportunity number, competition ID, or tracking number.

Federal Contacts in States and State Administering Agencies

Much of the federal grant budget moves to the states through formula and block grants. State, regional, and local federal offices often handle grants applications and funds disbursement. Each federal agency has its own procedures: applicants should contact the department or agency in question before applying for funding to obtain the most up-to-date information.

After eligible local governments and nonprofit organizations have identified appropriate programs, they may be encouraged to contact federal and state agencies early in the process and before submitting formal applications. Some agencies may also offer pre-application trainings for grant programs, to provide prospective applicants with information on the federal application process. State-located federal offices may handle federal grant applications and disbursement of funds. State government departments and agencies administer federal formula and block grants, and also fund projects.

State Administering Agencies or Contacts

Many federal grants, such as formula and block grants, are awarded directly to state governments, which then set priorities for funding and allocate sub-funds within that state. For more information on how a state intends to distribute federal formula funds, grantseekers can contact the State Administering Agency (SAA). State government agencies are familiar with federal program requirements, can assist local governments and nonprofit organizations with proposals, and can provide other guidance.

Many federal department and agency websites include SAAs, and often the site will have an interactive U.S. map. Grantseekers can click on their state and obtain program and state contact information. A selection of some executive department websites includes the following:[3]

- Agriculture Rural Development State Contacts
  https://www.rd.usda.gov/page/state-offices
- National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Partners
  https://www.arts.gov/state-and-regional-arts-organizations
- Education (ED) State Contacts
  http://www2.ed.gov/about/contacts/state/index.html
- Energy (DOE) Efficiency & Renewable Energy in My State
  http://apps1.eere.energy.gov/states/

[3] Compiled by the Congressional Research Service (CRS) from executive department and agency websites.

- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Grant Regional Office
  https://www.epa.gov/grants/regional-grants-information
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) State Offices and Agencies
  https://www.fema.gov/grants/preparedness/state-administrative-agency-contacts
- Health and Human Services (HHS), Social Services Block Grants State Officials & Program Contacts
  https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ocs/resource/ssbg-contacts
- Homeland Security (DHS) State Homeland Security Contacts
  https://www.dhs.gov/state-homeland-security-and-emergency-services
- Housing and Urban Development (HUD) State/Local Offices
  https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/field_policy_mgt/localoffices
- National Endowment for the Humanities (NEA) State Councils
  https://www.neh.gov/about/state-humanities-councils
- Office of Justice Programs (OJP) State Administering Agencies
  https://www.ojp.gov/funding/state-administering-agencies/overview
- Labor (DOL) Employment and Training Administration, State and Local Contacts
  https://www.doleta.gov/regions/
- Small Business Administration
  https://www.sba.gov/local-assistance/find?type=SBA%20District%20Office&pageNumber=1
- Transportation, Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Regional Offices
  https://www.transit.dot.gov/about/regional-offices/regional-offices
- Veterans Affairs State/Territory Offices
  https://www.va.gov/about_va/state-dva-offices.asp

State Single Point of Contact (Office of Management and Budget)
https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/SPOC-4-13-20.pdf

Many states require federal grants applicants to submit a copy of their application for state government review and comment, and many (but not all) have designated a state Single Point of Contact (SPOC). The state offices listed here coordinate government grants development and may provide guidance to grantseekers.

Related Federal Sources

A-Z Index of U.S. Government Departments and Agencies (General Services Administration)
https://www.usa.gov/federal-agencies/a

To better develop a grant proposal, search a department or agency's home page to learn more about its programs and objectives. The site also includes the following:

- Government Benefits, Grants and Loans
  https://www.usa.gov/benefits-grants-loans
- Businesses and Nonprofits
  https://www.usa.gov/business
  Links to federal department and agency information and services, including information on starting a nonprofit organization.

OMB Circulars (Office of Management and Budget)
https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/information-for-agencies/circulars/

OMB establishes government-wide grants management policies and guidelines through circulars and common rules. OMB circulars are cited in SAM.gov Assistance Listing program descriptions. Circulars target grants recipients and audit requirements for educational institutions, state and local governments, and nonprofit organizations.

Private, Corporate, and Additional Funding Sources

Candid (formerly the Foundation Center and GuideStar)
https://candid.org/

Information gateway to the grant seeking process, private funding sources (including national, state, community, and corporate foundations), guidelines on writing a grants proposal, addresses of libraries in every state with grants reference collections, and links to other useful internet websites. Candid maintains a comprehensive database on foundation grantsmanship, publishes directories and guides, conducts research and publishes studies in the field, and offers a variety of training and educational seminars. Free information on the website includes the following:

- Introduction to Finding Grants
  https://learning.candid.org/training/courses/introduction-to-finding-grants/
- Foundation Finder
  https://fconline.foundationcenter.org/welcome/quick-start
- Introduction to Proposal Writing Short Course
  https://learning.candid.org/training/introduction-to-proposal-writing/
- Over 200+ articles on frequently asked questions, searchable by topic
  https://learning.candid.org/resources/knowledge-base/
- Foundation Center Funding Information Network (a national network of cooperating library collections in each state, with print and electronic resources available free to the public)
  https://candid.org/find-us Nonprofit Startup Resources
  https://learning.candid.org/resources/nonprofit-startup-resources/

Community Foundations Locator (Council on Foundations)
http://www.cof.org/community-foundation-locator

Community foundations may be particularly interested in funding local projects and maintain diverse grants programs.

Funding Sources: Funding State by State (Grantsmanship Center)
http://tgci.com/funding-sources

The website provides listings by state of top grantmaking, community, and corporate foundations that grantseekers might consider in identifying likely sources of private foundation funding.

Grants and Related Resources (Michigan State University Libraries)
https://libguides.lib.msu.edu/grants

The site provides government and private grants resources, primarily internet, by subject or group categories. Web pages include the following:

- Researching Potential Funders
  https://libguides.lib.msu.edu/c.php?g=96743&p=769466

Grants for Nonprofits
https://libguides.lib.msu.edu/c.php?g=96743&p=622545

Grant Proposal Writing Websites

A number of websites provide guidance, tips, and sample proposals. Constituents may also request from congressional office CRS Report RL32159, *How to Develop and Write a Grant Proposal*, by Maria Kreiser, which discusses standard content and formats. Websites that may be useful include the following:

- Grants and Grant Writing: Examples of RFPs and Grant Proposals (University of California, Santa Barbara Library)
  http://guides.library.ucsb.edu/content.php?pid=61909&sid=455330
- Introduction to Proposal Writing Short Course
  https://learning.candid.org/training/introduction-to-proposal-writing/
- Tips on Writing a Grant Proposal (Environmental Protection Agency)
  https://www.epa.gov/ports-initiative/tips-successful-grant-application
- Grants 101: Write the Proposal (Department of Justice)
  https://www.ojp.gov/funding/grants101/write-proposal
- Writing a Successful Grant Proposal (Minnesota Council on Foundations)
  https://www.mcf.org/writing-successful-grant-proposal

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