



THRIVING COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE

Part 2: Writing a Compelling Grant Application

At this stage, you have completed your registration, assembled a dedicated team, and found a grant opportunity that aligns with your community goals. You're ready to launch into the next step of this journey. We'll share eight steps to guide you through the intense process that grant writing can be.

1. Understand your audience.

- Review information about the grant program and agency.
- Start by looking at the agency's grants.gov profile.
- Pay attention to the tone and language the agency uses in the notice of funding. This tells you what is **most important** to them.
- Note what they have already funded to ensure your problem is **relevant** to the agency.

2. Thoroughly review the notice of funding opportunity.

- Generate a **list of tasks** from the different sections.
- Pay attention to **additional documents** required: DEI plans, project timelines, maps, letters of support, etc.
- Review the criteria and scoring guidelines to guide your application.
 - This is typically at the end of the notice of funding opportunity.
 - Reviewers evaluate many grants. Make it easy to find what they are scoring you on.
- Confirm eligibility and required documents.

3. Write a strong introduction.

- Establish your **organization's credibility**: Share the history, mission, success stories, and staff qualifications.
 - Highlight why your organization is eligible to undertake this project.
- Define the problem with a focus on addressing **local needs**.
- Summarize the objectives of your project.

4. Develop the need statement or problem statement.

- Articulate and support the need with **data, community stories, and studies**.
- Avoid defining the problem as a lack of a program or facility and frame it as a **community need** that is not being met.
- Explain how the funding opportunity will meet this need NOT how it will meet your need for funding.
- Demonstrate your organization’s familiarity and ability with addressing the defined need, show **why your organization** is qualified for this role.
- View a detailed guide on [Writing an Effective Needs Statement](#).

5. Describe project description and objectives.

- Use **SMART objectives** to specify what results will be achieved:
Specific | Measurable | Attainable | Realistic | Timebound
- Avoid confusing objectives with methods or strategies.
- The objective isn’t to build a facility, it is to **improve a community outcome** by a date.
- Specify the roles and responsibilities: who is involved, what actions will be taken, the target audience, the location, the timeline, and the reason for this approach.
- Explain why the method you’ve chosen is the **best approach** and discuss alternative methods to showcase why your way is better.
- Highlight what is **innovative** about your proposal to make it distinct from others.
- View a [sample workplan example](#) and this detailed guide from the [Congressional Research Service](#).

6. Provide a detailed evaluation plan.

- Some agencies will list **specific metrics** you can refer to for writing your plan, such as jobs created, energy savings, number of planning activities, communities served, etc.
- Summarize what the program will achieve by the end.
 - What data will be collected, when, who is responsible, how it will be used and analyzed.
 - Data collection tools used: Surveys, focus groups, monitoring systems, etc.
 - How will progress be assessed? How will adjustments be made if needed?
 - How will you **measure performance** by comparing the actual with the expected?
This can be quantifiable or qualitative: Energy savings, quality of life, photos, etc.
- For help writing these sections, view the guide [Elements of a Grant Proposal](#).

7. Build a budget spreadsheet and narrative.

- Prepare the budget spreadsheet and then write the accompanying narrative.
- Make sure this is consistent with the program narrative.
- Usually contains **eight categories**: Personnel, fringe benefits, travel, equipment, supplies, construction (typically not an allowable cost), consultants/contracts, other costs, and indirect costs.
- Access a [general budget template](#) example.

8. Review, review, review!

- Grade your application against the **provided criteria and scoring rubric**.
- Request partners to offer feedback well before the deadline.
- Reach out to technical assistance groups like us at the [Great Lakes Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Center](#) for review.

At this point, you've done everything you can to write a strong grant application. Good luck!

College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences.

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