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Unlock K-12 Funding Opportunities: A Quick Guide for Grant Success

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Presented by Ashley Schultz and Sam Rawdon • Grants Office, LLC

Welcome and Introductions

Ashley Schultz:
Hello everyone, and welcome to our event. My name is Ashley Schultz, one of the managers of research and consultation here at Grants Office. Today we're going to be discussing how to unlock K-12 funding opportunities, running you through this quick guide for grant success.

Housekeeping

Ashley Schultz:
Before we get started, I've just got two quick housekeeping things for you. One: you can ask questions at any time during today's event using the Q&A interface on the right-hand corner of your screen. You are more than welcome to submit as many questions as you'd like, and we'll get to those questions toward the end of our hour. Also know that the session is being recorded. The recording is going to be available for download at the Grants Office website starting tomorrow. The PowerPoint slides from today's presentation are also going to be available in that same location.

Today's Speaker and Agenda

Ashley Schultz:
So again, today we're talking about K-12 funding opportunities. We are joined today by Sam Rawdon. Sam is a Grants Development Associate here at Grants Office, and he specializes in K-12 funding. He's on our K-12 funding team. He has been very busy with schools across the country this month as they wrap up their School Violence Prevention Program (SVPP) grant applications this Thursday.

We're really excited that he was able to set aside some time and share some amazing information with us today. High level, this is what we'll talk about: Sam will go through the K-12 grants landscape as a whole, what individual funders look for, and then some general strategies for grants success and how to get your school or organization started. And again, we'll end today's session with Q&A. Please feel free to drop questions into that bottom right-hand corner of your screen. We'll get to as many questions as we can. So with that, I'm going to pass things over to Sam to get us started. Sam?

The K-12 Grants Funding Landscape

Sam Rawdon:
Great, thank you, Ashley, and thank you to everyone who was able to attend today's session. Just to start, I'd like to take a look at what the K-12 grants funding landscape actually looks like.

Evolution of K-12 Education Funding

Sam Rawdon:
The focus of K-12 education funding has evolved over time, so this is a quick snapshot as to what that's really looked like. Starting with equity and access — this established the idea that federal dollars should help make sure every student, no matter what their background is, has access to a quality education, and laid the foundation for funding priorities that ensure those themes of fairness and opportunity.

Then national interest and competitiveness is where we saw a big push for STEM so that students would be ready for the modern workforce and the global economy as well. After that, there was a shift to focus on innovation and reform to help improve student outcomes and close achievement gaps by trying new approaches in areas related to teaching, learning, and overall school operations as well.

And then most recently, we've seen a focus on emergency response and recovery, especially in response to the COVID pandemic. Federal funding during this time was ultimately aimed at helping schools pivot quickly, recover from disruptions, and support students and staff during that very challenging time. So as we think about grants and future funding opportunities in K-12, it is important to keep these evolving themes in mind. They help us understand not just where we've been, but also where we're heading as well.

Current K-12 Funding Priorities

Sam Rawdon:
So where are we heading exactly? Looking at the current K-12 funding priorities, three major areas are being emphasized at the federal level. First, there's a strong push for evidence-based literacy, which supports reading instruction that follows what's called the science of reading — an approach backed by research, emphasizing clear, systematic, and purposeful teaching of foundational reading skills, with the ultimate goal to ensure that all students build strong reading abilities from the ground up.

There's also a growing focus on education choice, giving families more options when it comes to choosing the best learning environment for their children — whether that's through school choice programs or other methods that allow them to select what'll best fit their child's needs.

And then there's also a growing shift toward more oversight to the states, meaning that state-level education departments are being given more control and responsibility over decisions related to things

like curriculum, academic standards, and even how schools are run, with the ultimate goal of helping ensure that these decisions are better aligned with local needs and values. So each of these priorities is going to influence how funding is allocated, as well as what kinds of programs and initiatives are likely going to be seen as supported.

Three Primary Sources of Grant Funding

Sam Rawdon:
As a whole, there are three primary sources of grant funding. Each of these sources comes with its own pros and cons, so understanding the differences is key to figuring out which type of grant best fits your project, as well as your timeline. As a quick note, the figures that you see on the screen represent overall grant-making activity, not just specifically for K-12 education.

Federal Grants

Sam Rawdon:
Federal grants are usually the largest in terms of dollar amount because they're open to applicants across the country. They're often very competitive, and the applications can be very detailed and time-intensive. But with that said, the payoff for federal grants can be significant if your project is a good match to the grant.

State Grants

Sam Rawdon:
State grants function similarly to the federal ones, but usually with a smaller pool of applicants since they are limited to schools and districts within that state. While the average award size for a state grant may be a bit smaller, it is often an easier process overall — not only to contact state agencies, but also the application process itself. And the overall competition tends to be lower. Some states are a little more active than others in their grant-making activities, but a lot of states do have strong grant programs that are worth exploring.

Foundation Grants

Sam Rawdon:
Then we have foundation grants. These are typically offered by private, corporate, or community foundations. Generally they tend to focus on local, community-driven initiatives, and are typically smaller in scale. The good news here is that while they may offer smaller award sizes, the applications themselves are often simpler, faster to complete, and have quicker turnaround times when it comes to announcing or deciding on awards. And because some of them are so locally focused, your competition might really only be other organizations in your county or in your neighborhood.

So when considering where to apply, you'll want to think about your project's scope, your available time and capacity, and the level of competition that you'll be prepared to face.

What Schools Successfully Fund Through Grants

Sam Rawdon:
Let's take a look at some broader goals and initiatives that we're seeing schools successfully fund through grants. These examples cover a lot of ground, but they are all in high demand in the K-12 space.

Technology and STEM

Sam Rawdon:
Technology and STEM grants are helping schools invest in things like devices, software, robotics, coding, and other tools to engage students and prepare them for future careers in areas like science and technology.

Mental Health and Student Support Services

Sam Rawdon:
There's been a huge growing recognition of the need to support the whole child, so mental health and student support services funding is often available for school counselors, social workers, and mental health programs and interventions that help students thrive emotionally and socially.

Facilities and Infrastructure

Sam Rawdon:
Facilities and infrastructure has been another key focus. Whether it's modernizing classrooms or updating HVAC systems, these sort of grants can help with physical improvements that directly impact the learning and the health of the students.

Career and Technical Education (CTE)

Sam Rawdon:
Career and Technical Education, or CTE, programs connect students to real-world job skills — think manufacturing, healthcare, IT, things like that — and many grants are available out there to expand these pathways, as well as update equipment and technology.

Teacher Professional Development

Sam Rawdon:
From learning new instructional strategies to integrating technology in the classroom, teacher professional development can support ongoing training so educators can continue to grow and better

serve their students. This of course is not an exhaustive list of what can be funded. There are a lot of different avenues to explore with K-12 grant funding, ultimately depending on your school's goals and needs. So keep these categories in mind, and think about how similar initiatives might benefit your own students and staff.

Where to Find K-12 Grants

Sam Rawdon:
If you've already looked through some common grant opportunities and you're ready to branch out and do your own searching, there are a few go-to resources that we often check regularly for any new and upcoming grants.

Grants.gov

Sam Rawdon:
Grants.gov is our most used resource. It serves as the main hub for federal grants. Through this site you can search across all 26 federal agencies, apply for grants directly, and even manage the reporting requirements once you've received funding — all in one place. So if you're pursuing federal funding, this is definitely where you'll want to start.

Individual Federal Agency Websites

Sam Rawdon:
You can also explore individual agency websites. We frequently use the U.S. Department of Education's site, but other federal agencies such as the Department of Justice or Health and Human Services also offer grants that could apply to K-12, especially for things like STEM, mental health, and technology.

State Agency Websites

Sam Rawdon:
Also don't overlook your state's department agencies either. State education departments and other agencies often post current grant opportunities on their websites, and these can really be a great option, especially since the competition is usually limited to schools within your state.

Foundation Center (Candid)

Sam Rawdon:
Foundation Center, also known as Candid, is a resource some of you may be familiar with already. If not, it's a large-scale, searchable database of over a hundred thousand private, corporate, and community foundations. While it does require a subscription, many public libraries actually offer free access to it. One big perk about Foundation Center is that, while a lot of foundations don't have their own websites,

the Foundation Center is a really good place to look at things like their past giving, who they've funded, and even how they like to be contacted. These are all available through their IRS 990 tax forms.

Google

Sam Rawdon:
And then finally, don't underestimate Google. A few well-phrased searches can quickly lead you to local or regional grant opportunities, or to websites of organizations that support K-12 projects. So it is a great starting point if you are not sure where to begin.

Pro Tip: Set Up Alerts

Sam Rawdon:
One quick pro tip: make sure you sign up for any email alerts or listservs from any agencies or foundations that you're interested in. This way you'll be the first to know when new grants become available. Or, if that's a bit challenging for you to do, set a weekly calendar reminder to check your top grant sources. This is going to be a great habit to help you stay ahead of any deadlines and opportunities.

What K-12 Funders Actually Look For

Sam Rawdon:
So with a better understanding of what the K-12 funding environment looks like, what do K-12 funders actually look for?

Grants Fund Projects, Not Just Products

Sam Rawdon:
Just to start, I'd like to touch on what grants actually fund as you begin searching for them. Grants usually are not written to cover a single item or a one-off purchase. Instead, most grant programs are designed to support bigger, more comprehensive and holistic projects — things that aim to improve student achievement, promote equity, or support overall school improvement.

Let's say you're hoping to get funding for something specific, like an interactive display board for your classroom. If you put “interactive display grants” in Google, chances are you probably won't find much. But if you search using broader terms like “student engagement” or “collaborative learning environments,” you are going to be more likely to uncover those sort of opportunities. That's because funders want to support the impact of the project, not just the stuff or the things.

So always ask yourself: What is the goal of us purchasing this? Who is it going to benefit? What sort of educational challenge is it going to help address? Then when you're writing the application, you can

explain how the interactive display you're looking for is a tool that supports those bigger goals — like enhancing student engagement through multi-sensory learning, improving collaboration, or increasing retention. You can even go a step further and build in things like professional development for teachers or additional classroom materials that support your main goal. Ultimately, thinking bigger is going to make your applications stronger, and will help align them with what the funders are actually looking to support.

Five Things K-12 Funders Look For

Sam Rawdon:
When you're applying for grant funding in the K-12 space, it's also very important to understand what these funders are actually looking for in the application. These are five areas that tend to come up again and again.

The first thing is that they want to see alignment with funding priorities and goals — basically, clearly showing how your project supports what the funder cares about, whether it's literacy, student support, or access to technology.

They're also going to look for strong evidence of need. It's not enough to say that the project is important; it has to be backed up with data. This could include things like test scores, enrollment numbers, community feedback, and other documentation that shows there's a clear gap your project is going to address.

They're also looking for a clear, measurable impact on students themselves. Funders want to know how your project is going to make a difference. Is it going to improve learning, increase engagement, support student well-being? And just as importantly, how will that impact be measured?

Then you'll want to demonstrate your organizational capacity to manage the funding. K-12 funders want to feel confident that your team can carry out the work and handle the reporting, the budgeting, and other grant responsibilities that go along with those.

And then finally, they look for sustainability plans — in other words, what happens after the grant ends? They really want to see how you're going to keep the project going long term, how it might grow, and how you're going to train staff or build systems internally to maintain that impact. Keeping these five elements in mind is really going to help strengthen your application and increase your chances of getting funded.

Example K-12 Federal Programs

Sam Rawdon:
Let's take a look at some real-life examples of K-12 programs that are out there. These are by no means exhaustive.

Education Innovation and Research (EIR)

Sam Rawdon:
Let's take a look at a program like the Education Innovation and Research program, or EIR. This program supports schools and districts that are developing or scaling innovative, evidence-based approaches with the ultimate goal of improving student achievement, especially in ways that close opportunity gaps.

21st Century Community Learning Centers

Sam Rawdon:
21st Century Community Learning Centers is another example. This funding is designed to support after-school and out-of-school-time programs, especially in high-poverty and underperforming schools, with the goal of giving students more opportunities for academic enrichment and support.

Perkins V – Strengthening CTE for the 21st Century

Sam Rawdon:
Then there's Perkins V, or Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act, which helps schools expand or improve high-quality career and technical education programs that get students ready for those high-skill, high-wage, and in-demand careers. These are just three quick snapshots of programs, just to give you a sense of the types of programs that are out there, that align with funder priorities — whether through innovation, equity, extended learning, or career readiness.

Making Your Project Grant-Ready

Sam Rawdon:
Now, with a really good understanding of what funding looks like as well as what funders actually look for in an education-driven project, I'd like to give some helpful tips on making your project what we call grant-ready.

Establish a Strong Grants Team

Sam Rawdon:
When it comes to applying for and managing grants successfully, one of the first and most important steps is establishing a strong grants team. It's going to be important to include a variety of roles and

expertise. This might mean having someone from finance, curriculum, IT, school administration, and even teaching staff at the table, because different team members are going to bring different perspectives and strengths to the project.

Then you'll want to clearly define everyone's roles and responsibilities on this grants team. Who's writing the proposal? Who's handling the budget? Who's gathering the necessary data? When everybody knows their part, things are going to run a lot more smoothly.

Also, engage key stakeholders early. This can include principals, teachers, district leaders, or even community partners. Bringing them in early is going to help build a strong, supported project. Regular communication is also going to be key, so set up consistent check-ins or planning meetings to keep everyone on the same page. This is going to be especially vital during the application itself, as well as the project implementation portions of the grant.

And then finally, provide training and resources. Grants can be very complex, so making sure your team feels prepared and supported is going to help you manage the funding more effectively, and really help increase your chances of long-term success for the project.

Build Strong Partnerships

Sam Rawdon:
Another important part of a successful grant project is building those strong partnerships. Working with external partners like local nonprofits, businesses, colleges, or community organizations not only shows broad support for your project, but it also helps you increase the overall impact and strengthen its sustainability over time.

Also, these partners can bring real value to your project. They might offer matching funds, contribute specialized expertise, or even help you reach specific groups of students or families you're trying to support. To really show funders that these partnerships are serious, you can include letters of support or even formal Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) in your application, to show that there's a shared commitment to the project's goals and to make the application more credible and competitive. In short, partnerships can help you take that grant from good to great by bringing in new resources, support, and energy to achieve those shared outcomes.

Writing a Strong Grant Proposal

Sam Rawdon:
When it comes to writing a strong grant proposal, here are a few key tips to help make a difference. As I mentioned before, grants fund comprehensive projects, not just products. Funders want to see a full plan, not just a request for new equipment or technology. You'll want to make clear how items are used, who's involved, what the goals are, and how that success is going to be measured.

Then, let your project's needs and goals guide the plan. Start with the problem you're trying to solve, so that your team and your budget will be built around what's actually going to make an impact.

You'll also want to learn about any post-award requirements before you apply, because some grants do come with specific reporting requirements. Knowing what's required ahead of time is really going to help you avoid any surprises later.

Also, use what we call SMART goals — goals that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Results-focused, and Time-bound. These goals will help your projects stay focused and will also show funders you know exactly what you're planning to accomplish.

And then finally, always have someone from outside your team review the application before you submit it. A fresh set of eyes can catch mistakes, confusing language, or any missing details that you might overlook. Following these tips can really boost the quality of the application and help you stand out in that competitive grant process.

What You Can Do Now to Get Started

Sam Rawdon:
With these strategies in mind, I just want to quickly touch on what can be done now, on how to get started actually putting together a grant application. A few key steps here.

The first: take time to review the school's or the district's strategic plan. These documents already outline what those priorities are, and aligning the grant proposal with these plans will show funders your project is fitting into a bigger picture.

Then identify a real need using data. The stronger your evidence of need, the more compelling the application is going to be.

Engage those key stakeholders early. Involving the right people from the beginning is going to help you build a stronger, more complete application, and ensure that everyone is on board with the project goals.

You'll want to also clarify what exactly you're asking to be funded. If you're asking for things like staff time, equipment, training, curriculum, or anything else, this is just going to help ensure that your application is focused as well as realistic.

It wouldn't be a bad idea to draft a simple summary or outline of the project. It does not have to be perfect, but creating a short overview or abstract of your project is going to help organize your thinking and communicate those core ideas to others. It also gives you a good starting point for writing the full proposal.

And then it would also be ideal to create a calendar and a task list. A good strategy here is to break that application process into manageable steps — set deadlines, assign responsibilities. These ultimately contribute toward a clear plan, and having a clear plan is going to help you stay on track, as well as avoid any last-minute stress and jitters as the deadline approaches. Ultimately, taking these steps is going to help you build momentum, and really give your team a clear path forward as you begin the grant application process. With that, I'm going to turn things back over to Ashley.

Grants Office Services

Ashley Schultz:
Thanks very much, Sam. Wonderful amount of information. Folks, if you have questions on the content that Sam just presented, I would again draw your attention to the bottom right-hand corner of that Q&A interface. I have three questions here from the crowd so far, but if you have some more, please feel free to drop them.

While I talk for a second and Sam takes a big drink of water, I will just say that we have an additional resource on our website we've called Guidance for Grant Seekers. Particularly those last two slides that Sam talked about — in terms of planning out your project, pulling in key stakeholders, building a budget, making that justification, setting those SMART goals — we actually have a series of videos that walks through each of those steps in more detail. Totally free for you. You can follow the QR code here or head over to GrantsOffice.com and click on Guidance for Grant Seekers, and you'll see all of that information in there.

I will also just quickly call out our company as a whole. We are Grants Office. We have been working in grants for 25 years now here in the United States. We have folks on hand, just like Sam, who can help you walk through the funding landscape for your school, help you weigh the pros and cons of individual sources of funding — whether that be federal, state, or foundation grant funders. We also have folks on hand who can help you with the application process all the way up to clicking submit. I mentioned earlier that Sam's been pretty busy with SVPP applications this month — our team here is available to actually put pen to paper on your behalf, or just review proposals that you or someone else in your district has written. So I'll just call those two resources out to you, should you want some more information. Chat with Sam, chat with other folks on our K-12 Ed team.

Q&A Session

Ashley Schultz:
I'm only seeing three questions so far. Oh, actually, I see a fourth question. So I'll start with those three.

Q1: How does DEI impact federal funding in the K-12 landscape now and in the future?

Ashley Schultz:
The first one, Sam, came up pretty early in your presentation. It was about federal funding priorities. This question is about DEI and how that's affecting the K-12 federal funding landscape now and then also in the future.

Sam Rawdon:
Yeah, that's a good question. Aside from the countless legal battles that are going on surrounding these issues, it's really tough to say. From what we've noticed, I can say federal funding that's in statute — think of things like Title I or IDEA funding — should remain relatively untouched. But significant cuts to any DEI-related programs may be in the foreseeable future. Again, going back to those current priorities about school choice or less federal oversight, that's also going to play in effect as to how federal dollars are being allocated in the K-12 space, especially with those concerning DEI policies. The ongoing legal uncertainty surrounding it remains. But I just want to shout out that yes, we do have resources that cover this. We have a live blog that's been going on, as well as previously recorded webinars that we've hosted about this topic as well. So yeah, that's a good question.

Q2: How do you get school leadership on board with applying for a grant if they're hesitant or have been spurned in the past?

Ashley Schultz:
Great, thank you. The second question here is about school leadership. This question came in when you were talking about getting the right individuals on board. Any advice on how to get school leadership on board for applying for a grant if they're maybe hesitant or have been spurned in the past?

Sam Rawdon:
Yeah, that's another really good question. When it comes to buy-in for grants, there are several factors that contribute to that lack of buy-in — like you said, maybe they're skeptical about grants or they just don't have the capacity. I think one really good approach to get that sort of buy-in is to think back to what I mentioned earlier about aligning the grant and the project to what the school's or the district's current priorities are — what's listed in their strategic plan. In other words, framing the grant as not just something extra to do, but rather as a tool to facilitate any current priorities.

Q3: Are private schools eligible for the funding mentioned, and do you have to live in the United States to receive these grants?

Ashley Schultz:
Great, perfect. There's a question here — actually, I have two questions about eligibility, so I'm going to give them to you back to back, and then maybe you can answer them one at a time. The first is about private schools. Could you comment on private schools and how they interact with the funding that you

mentioned today, or is it really just limited to public? And then the second question is about location: Do you have to live in the United States to get one of these grants? Could you answer both of those back to back?

Sam Rawdon:
Yeah, I can. While yes, private schools, when it comes to their eligibility for government funding — especially federal dollars — that doesn't mean that there aren't any opportunities for them. As I said earlier, private, corporate, or community foundations offer grants that are specifically geared toward a lot of different educational priorities, whether it's STEM, curriculum innovation, or even providing equal access. Using Foundation Center or Google are going to be your best friends.

Also going back to state funding, state grants can offer grant funding specifically for non-public schools. So it is a great idea again to check your state education agency's websites for any grants that a non-public school would be eligible for.

When it comes to outside of the United States, that really is going to be dependent on the program. From a foundation or a state level, they wouldn't really offer grants to anybody abroad. There may be some federal funding opportunities out there, but ultimately that's going to depend on the type of project that you're looking into, as well as the grant itself.

Ashley Schultz:
Perfect, thank you. I will just chime in on that second question about where you live in the world. The Guidance for Grant Seekers page that I referenced actually has a whole video — this is a weird shameless plug, it's me talking on the video, but you can come listen — it's about 15 minutes long about, no matter where you are in the world, what does the grant-seeking landscape look like if you're trying to find funding in countries that are not your home country. So definitely feel free to go check out that video if you'll listen to me for a few more minutes.

Q4: How do you address sustainability in grants when ongoing district funding is not guaranteed?

Ashley Schultz:
I'm just going to cut things off here because I recognize we're four minutes over our intended timeline today. Again, if you have questions that we did not get a chance to answer, please reach out to us. Education@grantsoffice.com is a great way to get in touch. You'll probably hear from Sam or someone else on the K-12 team.

Sam, just to wrap up our questions here today, it's about program sustainability — not necessarily sustainability in the green sense, but sustainability in terms of what you were mentioning about ongoing program support. The person who wrote this question doesn't see this question in grants, but limited

district funding really makes that argument a challenge. How do you address the idea of sustainability in grants when ongoing district funding is not guaranteed or is a challenge to find in the first place?

Sam Rawdon:
Yeah, that's a bit of a tricky question, because some districts or schools may not be at that capacity to address those sustainability concerns. But I think it's going to depend on the type of program that you're looking into. Really, scaling your project to the grant itself is going to be important. Generally what we find is with large federal programs, the sustainability is going to be a lot more tricky. But I think something with state grants or foundation grants is going to be less so. Ultimately, it's going to depend on the grant itself. Not sure if that answers the question, but hopefully that gives you an option.

Closing

Ashley Schultz:
Yeah, and to our audience member who asked that question — if you want to chat with Grants Office a little bit further, again, it's just education@grantsoffice.com.

Thank you again for sticking around here with us for an extra six minutes. We hope you found this event to be a great use of your time. Happy summer vacation to folks in the south. Happy almost-summer vacation to folks in the north. We hope you have a few very well-deserved weeks off before the students come back to you later in August and September.

Do keep in touch with Grants Office. This QR code here brings you to our website, should you have an interest in learning more about our services or watching some of those Guidance for Grant Seekers videos. We look forward to engaging with you in the future. Thanks again.

— End of Transcript —

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