GRANTS OFFICE
empowering communities

Getting Started with Grants.gov: A Step-by-Step Guide

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Presented by Ashley Schultz and Sandy Trowbridge • Grants Office, LLC

Welcome and Introductions

Ashley Schultz:
Hello everyone, and welcome to our event. My name is Ashley Schultz. I'm the Manager of Community Engagement here at Grants Office. Today we are going to be discussing the U.S. federal government's platform, Grants.gov. Today's event is going to show you how to get your organization registered on this website and also how to start using its most powerful tools for your grant-seeking.

Housekeeping

Ashley Schultz:
Before we get started, I've just got two quick housekeeping items for you. First and foremost, you can ask questions at any time today during today's event. Look at the bottom right-hand corner of your screen for the question-and-answer interface. Feel free to submit as many questions as you'd like, and we'll get to them at the end of today's presentation.

Also, know that today's session is being recorded. The recording is going to be available for download at the Grants Office website starting tomorrow. The PowerPoint slides we're sharing here today will also be available on the same site, and we are also going to drop a Grants.gov guide on that site, which goes into even greater detail on how to set up a workspace, add contributors to your application, and fill out web forms for your proposals. I definitely recommend you check that out.

Today's Speaker and Agenda

Ashley Schultz:
Again, today we're talking about the U.S. federal government's platform, Grants.gov. I am joined today by Sandy Trowbridge, who is a Grants Development Associate here on our team. Sandy works with folks every day just like yourself who are out there looking through Department of Education or Department of Labor grants. They're trying to keep track of what their state and local workforce development funding looks like. They're polishing up federal and state grant proposals, et cetera.

If you are a regular reader of our free magazine, FUNDED, you will recognize Sandy from her frequent contributions on grant-seeking best practices. For today's session, I want to specifically call your attention to her article from last August about how to decide if a funding opportunity is right for you.

This article has a really cool go/no-go rubric where you can ask yourself questions about whether a grant that you found actually meets the needs of your organization. You're going to hear Sandy today give a lot of tips on how to find opportunities in Grants.gov, but I encourage you to then pass some of the results that you find through that rubric to see how they hold up.

Either way, Sandy's got a wealth of information to share with you, and I know you're going to learn a lot from her today. Here's a quick run-through of our agenda over the next 30 or 40 minutes. Once I pass things over to Sandy, she's going to run through the basics of Grants.gov. What is it? What can you do on this site? And critically, how do you get your organization registered there? It's harder than it sounds.

Next, Sandy's going to take you through a step-by-step guide on how to search for funding opportunities from the federal government that are posted there on Grants.gov. Once you've found a grant, she'll also share what it looks like to actually go through the steps of applying to that grant through the application portal that's inside Grants.gov. Then last but certainly not least, Sandy's going to draw from not only her own experience with Grants.gov, but also that of the team here at Grants Office, to share some common pitfalls that we've seen and then give you ways to avoid them. We'll end with a description of Grants Office services and a Q&A session from the audience. Feel free to drop as many questions as you'd like into the chat in that bottom right-hand corner, and we'll address them at that time. With that, I'm going to pass things over to the very capable hands of Sandy to get us started. Sandy, kick it away.

What Is Grants.gov?

Sandy Trowbridge:
Thank you for that introduction and overview, Ashley. Hi, everyone. Happy for the opportunity to chat with you about all things Grants.gov today. Just a heads-up that I will be referencing a number of websites and resources throughout, and direct links for all will be summarized in a resources slide at the end.

In the world of grants, funding comes from three major sources: federal, state, and foundation. Grants.gov will only ever highlight federal funding opportunities. If interested in state funding or foundation funding, you would turn instead to state department agency websites or Grants Office Communities to identify funding opportunities in those categories. But for today, we're going to focus solely on federal funding opportunities.

Grants.gov is the centralized portal for finding and applying to federal grant opportunities. On Grants.gov, you can search for federal grant opportunities, access helpful guidance on how to apply, actually go ahead and apply to federal grant opportunities, track your application status, as well as access some general grants-101-type training materials.

Grants.gov is operated under the authority of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, but serves all 26-plus federal grant-making agencies across the U.S. government. In terms of scale, there are currently around 900 posted and 600 forecasted funding opportunities listed on the site, as well as over 8,000 closed and 72,000 archived listings that you can still reference as well.

One key thing to note is that Grants.gov is simply the portal for finding and submitting applications. It does not award grants directly. It is instead those individual federal grant-making agencies that are actually reviewing your application and making grant award decisions, such as the Department of Agriculture, Department of Commerce, and so on. So that's just a broad-strokes overview of what Grants.gov is — namely, the centralized portal for finding and applying to federal grant opportunities across all federal grant-making agencies.

Registrations: SAM.gov and Grants.gov

Sandy Trowbridge:
Before diving right into how to search for opportunities via Grants.gov, let's just pause and address some actions that are good to get out of the way sooner rather than later when looking to apply to federal grants for the first time — namely, registrations.

SAM.gov and the UEI Number

Sandy Trowbridge:
If your organization plans to apply for a federal grant, it must be registered with both SAM.gov and Grants.gov. The System for Award Management, or SAM.gov, is a government-wide registry for organizations doing business with the federal government, and it is through registering with SAM.gov that organizations are assigned a Unique Entity Identifier, or what is known as a UEI number. This is just a 12-character alphanumeric identifier assigned to all entities doing business with the federal government.

This UEI number is then required when registering in Grants.gov. It is what Grants.gov uses to establish organizational authority for its users. In terms of order, organizations must register first in SAM.gov, and then, using the UEI number assigned through that process, they then must register in Grants.gov. And information across both systems must match exactly. For example, the organizational point of contact — what they call a primary Electronic Business Point of Contact, or E-Biz POC — and their email address used to register in SAM.gov must be the same as that used to register the organization in Grants.gov.

Check Before You Register

Sandy Trowbridge:
Before going any further, I recommend just checking in with your fiscal office or organizational leadership to see if your institution has already been assigned a UEI number. You can also check this yourself on SAM.gov, which I'll go over shortly. Also, check to see if your organization's SAM.gov registration is current, as it is something that has to be renewed annually. And ask if your organization has already registered with Grants.gov.

If the answer is no — which very well may be the case if your institution is new to federal grants — your organization will need to go ahead and tackle these registrations. This process can take several weeks, if not longer, if you run into any issues, so if applying to federal grants is likely for your organization, it is best to start this process sooner rather than later.

If you are registered already, this doesn't mean you are totally off the hook. You still must confirm that your registrations are all active and your E-Biz POC is still with the company and assigned appropriately, as expired registrations or those outdated roles can prevent application submission. Which brings me to this last point, just highlighting the fact that role assignments matter. Not only must the SAM.gov and Grants.gov E-Biz POCs match, but additional roles are assigned in Grants.gov that all have different access and responsibilities, and require some thought and intention in setting things up and in maintaining those registrations over time.

You definitely don't want to come up to the deadline and find that the only person that is approved to submit the application in the system is unreachable or no longer with the organization at all. I just want to flag as well — as this question comes up often — that there is no fee associated with either registration. Some folks get tripped up by third-party entities trying to charge a fee, so be sure to use only the official government sites to avoid any confusion.

Looking Up Your Organization on SAM.gov

Sandy Trowbridge:
On the SAM.gov homepage, just click on Get Started to get started with the registration process. If this all rings a bell and you think your organization might already be registered in SAM.gov but you aren't sure — or you're just curious and you want to save your fiscal office or leadership a question — click on Search to do some investigating.

Here, you can enter the name of your organization into the search bar. I did so for Grants Office LLC, by way of example, and found that we have an active registration in SAM.gov. I'm also able to view our UEI number here, and then click into the organization name to access more information — namely the name of the primary E-Biz POC associated with the company. Now I know that this is who I should contact with

any questions regarding SAM.gov or Grants.gov registrations. If, however, the search came up empty, then my next step would be to check with my fiscal office or leadership and ask that the appropriate party register in both accounts accordingly.

As for Grants.gov, on the home page, just click on Register on the top right of your screen to get started.

Registration Roles and Responsibilities

Sandy Trowbridge:
Now let's drill into the different registration roles and responsibilities a bit deeper. For those organizations that are just getting started, the process typically begins with your organization's primary Electronic Business Point of Contact, or E-Biz POC. There is no required job title for the primary E-Biz POC in SAM.gov and Grants.gov, but in larger organizations this is often a grants manager, chief financial officer, or finance director, and in smaller organizations it is commonly the executive director or CEO. The key is just that the individual has authority to manage roles, oversee compliance, and legally bind the organization.

First, the primary E-Biz POC registers your organization in SAM.gov and obtains the UEI. Next, using the same organizational information and email address listed in SAM.gov, the primary E-Biz POC registers your organization in Grants.gov, and then within Grants.gov, they create an organization applicant profile and enter the UEI number to link the account properly. The primary E-Biz POC can then delegate roles to other users within Grants.gov, assigning permissions such as workspace management or application submission.

If you are not your organization's primary E-Biz POC but will be involved in the Grants.gov application process, you will still need to register in Grants.gov. During registration, you should then add an organization applicant profile and enter your organization's UEI to ensure your account is properly connected to the organization. And this is important: be certain to select Organization Applicant Profile and not Individual Applicant Profile when given the option, if you will be working on an application on behalf of an organization.

Once your profile is saved, the system will then notify your organization's access manager — designated by the E-Biz POC, if not the E-Biz POC themselves — and that individual will then assign your role in Grants.gov. Given that your permissions within the system depend on that role assignment, it is important to complete this step well before any application deadline.

If you're not yet sure whether you want to apply for federal funding, you can still search Grants.gov without registering. However, registering allows you to subscribe to email notifications for new funding opportunities, which is definitely a valuable resource if this federal grants landscape is new on your radar.

Note as well that when registering with Grants.gov, you'll also need an account with Login.gov if you don't already have one, as Login.gov is used for the site's secure sign-in. If you work for or consult with multiple organizations on grant applications, you can use your single Grants.gov username and password created during registration to manage multiple organizational profiles. Again, most users are considered organization applicants, meaning they apply on behalf of an entity such as a nonprofit, government agency, university, or company. Individual applicants, who apply as a private person rather than on behalf of an organization, are less common but still an option in the system. So just to drill in on this point: make sure you are selecting the correct option for you when drafting, as this can come back to haunt you at time of submission if not done correctly up front.

Searching for Funding Opportunities

Sandy Trowbridge:
Once your registrations are all good to go, it's time to turn your focus to searching for specific federal grant opportunities to apply to. What we want to find are opportunities that our organization is eligible to apply to and that address our identified project needs.

Maybe we represent a school district looking for funding to support school security enhancements, or maybe we represent a hospital looking for funding to support our rural health programming. But by way of example throughout this section, let's pretend that we are a workforce development nonprofit looking to implement programming that sets disadvantaged youth up for success in the workforce, with a specific focus on a construction career pathway. Specifically, we are a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. Knowing our entity type will be key in more easily narrowing our search and being confident that any opportunity we're considering is one that our organization is eligible to apply for.

Simpler Search vs. Classic Search

Sandy Trowbridge:
First, we would click on Search Grants on the Grants.gov homepage. This will take us to what Grants.gov is calling the Simpler Search feature that they rolled out in 2025. Grants.gov notes that this new search feature provides a faster and more intuitive way to find grant opportunities. This is now the default search landing page for users when not logged into their account on Grants.gov.

If you are logged into your account on Grants.gov, when you click on Search Grants, you'll be looking at the Classic Search option landing page, as shown on the screen here. Either option works — both pull from the same data, and both have pros and cons, largely depending on which you are most used to using. The considerations that I will share today apply to both, with the main difference being that while you can search by the Simpler Search feature for most opportunities, the Apply button is still only accessible on the Classic Grants.gov page.

Using Keywords and Filters

Sandy Trowbridge:
Regardless of which search feature you prefer to use, the filters are largely the same. You may use the basic search function — entering keywords into the search bar — and then use filters to further narrow your search results, and then sort functionality to further order the search results according to your preference.

Thinking of our example from earlier, I'm interested in workforce development and youth and construction specifically, so I'll enter those keywords into the search bar. Given that I want to see results where all of these words exist, I separated each with an uppercase AND. There are a number of other ways to search to really get specific with what you do and do not want to see in your search results, and thankfully Grants.gov provides a really helpful resource on this subject, as you see here.

Searching with keywords is very much an iterative process. You may find that you want to change up your word choices or approach if you get too many or too few returns. The AND operator that I referenced in my example is shown here along with ten others to consider incorporating as needed.

Now that our keywords are added, let's move on down to Opportunity Status. I am really only interested right now in looking at opportunities that are Posted, as I'm ready to get straight to work on an application. So I will adjust to show just Posted, as we see here. As you dive into Grants.gov, know that a forecasted opportunity is one that is expected to be posted in the future, with only preliminary details available now, while a posted opportunity is officially published and open for applications. Once the deadline passes, the opportunity becomes closed, meaning applications are no longer accepted, and it may later be moved to archived status as for record-keeping and reference purposes only.

Moving down to Funding Instruments — I am open to anything, including grants and cooperative agreements, so I won't change this. A cooperative agreement differs from a grant primarily in that it involves substantial involvement by the federal agency in carrying out the funded activity, whereas a grant is used when the federal agency provides funding but does not expect as intensive ongoing active participation in project implementation. So if your organization wants to limit results to just grants, you can certainly do so here.

As for Eligibility — as we confirmed earlier, I am searching on behalf of a nonprofit having 501(c)(3) status with the IRS, so I will mark that accordingly. Regarding Category, I will leave as-is, as I don't want to limit my options too soon. If I wanted to limit to just opportunities tagged with agriculture, education, or health, for example, this is where I could do so — with the option to select more than one as well. Same goes for Agency: I want to see what's out there, so I'll leave that marked All as well for now. But if I wanted to limit this to see just funding opportunities coming out of one or more specific federal agencies, such as the Department of Commerce or Department of Education, I could do so here.

The beautiful thing with filters is that I can always return later and further filter if I get too many returns on my initial search.

Drilling Into an Opportunity

Sandy Trowbridge:
This leaves us with a handful of interesting options. By the title alone, YouthBuild seems intriguing. I see that it's funded by the Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration, is an active posting, and has an upcoming deadline of March 2. To learn even more, I will click on the opportunity number link here.

Here I can read a synopsis of the opportunity, see if anything has changed since it was first posted via the Version History tab, access the full funding opportunity announcement in the Related Documents tab, and access the application package itself on the Package tab. If everything seems to be lining up with my eligibility requirements and project needs from this quick assessment, I would then open up the full Notice of Funding Opportunity available on that Related Documents tab to read through the program requirements in more detail. If things are not lining up, I would just go back to the search page and continue looking for better-aligned opportunities.

First, as an aside: now that I will be focusing here on just the administrative details of using Grants.gov, additional resources on more of the arts of building out strong applications are available from Grants Office. Feel free to check out our website for quarterly FUNDED articles or various blogs and trainings covering the different aspects of proposal development itself. But for now, say I've done my due diligence to confirm that this YouthBuild opportunity that we found is a good fit — reading the full Notice of Funding Opportunity, confirming things like eligibility, our ability to compile a competitive application by the deadline, our ability to actually implement the project if awarded, and so on — and I have my organization's approval to begin a grant application.

Applying to a Grant Opportunity

Starting a Workspace

Sandy Trowbridge:
If I had been assigned the Workspace Manager role or AOR role in Grants.gov, I would make sure that I was logged in and then click on the red Apply button to get started. This would then make me the workspace owner for the application effort. If I did not have the Workspace Manager or AOR role in Grants.gov — in which case the Apply button would be grayed out versus red — I would just ask my organization's Workspace Manager to create a workspace and then assign me a role within accordingly.

If I'm not sure who in my organization has these designations in the system, I would just check with my E-Biz POC to confirm.

Workspace Roles

Sandy Trowbridge:
We've referenced several roles already, but let's pause for a quick overview of the standard roles within a workspace in Grants.gov before getting into an overview of how to apply. First, know that when we are referencing a workspace, we're just referring to the shared online environment where your team completes the application for a particular Notice of Funding Opportunity. This is where your team members can collaborate, upload forms, utilize web forms — all that good stuff. Second, know that all these users must have a registered Grants.gov account to be assigned a role to access a workspace and to complete web forms.

In terms of roles, the Workspace Manager creates and manages the workspace for a specific opportunity and can grant role and participant access. This role can add or remove users or assign form permissions as well. Only one Workspace Manager is active at a time; the role can easily be reassigned in the system.

The Standard Authorized Organizational Representative, or AOR — which you've heard me reference before — has authority to submit the completed application but does not automatically have full workspace management rights. This role is focused primarily on official application submission.

The Expanded AOR, however, can submit the application and manage workspace participants and access. Not all organizations use this role, but it can streamline oversight just by combining submission and administrative permissions.

Workspace Participants complete and edit assigned forms such as narratives or budgets. Participants cannot submit unless they are also assigned AOR privileges. Organizations may also create custom roles that combine specific permissions to fit internal workflows if desired.

Importantly, workspace roles are assigned separately within each individual workspace and do not carry over automatically from one application to another. And most importantly, submission authority always requires an AOR role being properly linked to the organization's UEI and being approved by the E-Biz POC. There is a lot more that goes into setting up and managing workspaces that we don't have time to dive into today, so do be sure to check out Grants Office's Grants.gov workspace guide, as well as all the resources that Grants.gov has available on their site.

Submitting the Application

Sandy Trowbridge:
Before creating a workspace in Grants.gov, confirm that core roles such as the AOR and Workspace Manager are properly assigned and linked to the correct organization profile. Next, to kick off the application process, the Workspace Manager creates a workspace for the specific opportunity by clicking on that red Apply button on the opportunity page, and assigns team roles.

As the team completes the application, be sure to follow the Notice of Funding Opportunity closely, being sure to complete all required forms and upload all required attachments, and then use the available Check Application button to catch any validation errors before submission. Once all forms and attachments are finalized, the Workspace Manager confirms everything is complete and alerts the AOR. The AOR then officially submits the application through Grants.gov. As you apply for future opportunities, know that you can reuse forms from prior workspaces, making this process more efficient over time.

Common Pitfalls and How to Avoid Them

Sandy Trowbridge:
We have covered what Grants.gov is, how to search Grants.gov, and how to apply via Grants.gov. We'll wrap things up with a quick overview of common pain points that we see first-time applicants encountering and how best to avoid them.

1. Underestimating Registration Time

Sandy Trowbridge:
It is easy to underestimate how long registration and renewal in SAM.gov can take. Delays can derail otherwise-strong applications. To be safe, begin registration at least four to six weeks early, confirm active status before applying, and set annual reminders to renew your SAM.gov registration.

2. Account and Role Misconfigurations

Sandy Trowbridge:
Account and role misconfigurations can halt submission at the last minute. We find that users sometimes accidentally create individual accounts not connected to the organization, or discover the AOR is unavailable at submission. Ensure all accounts are linked to the correct organizational profile, confirm roles early — especially those roles related to application submission — assign backups, and maintain updated role documentation, giving early clarity to the team on who needs to do what and when.

3. Relying on One Search Strategy

Sandy Trowbridge:
Relying on one search strategy can cause you to miss relevant opportunities. Search a few different ways, changing up things like those keywords and filters, and be sure to subscribe to email alerts to stay current without needing to manually search Grants.gov every day. If searching for the first time, really experiment with different ways of looking at the data to make sure you aren't inadvertently missing best-fit opportunities.

4. Feeling Overwhelmed by Volume

Sandy Trowbridge:
The volume of listings can also sometimes feel overwhelming to those new to the federal grants landscape. First, when searching on Grants.gov, start by confirming your entity type to help narrow your search parameters. You should also be certain to focus only on those opportunities that strongly match your organization's mission and capacity to implement. If the results are still overwhelming, refine your filters and sort by posted date to focus on what is new since your last search.

5. Confusing Forecasted Opportunities with Open Ones

Sandy Trowbridge:
New applicants are also sometimes confused by — or attempt to apply to — forecasted opportunities. Forecasts are planning tools, not open competitions, so track those forecasted opportunities for preparation purposes such as having early conversations with partners, but wait for the official posted notice before diving in more fully.

6. Missing Program-Specific Requirements

Sandy Trowbridge:
Each separate funding opportunity announcement includes unique eligibility rules and requirements, so be sure to thoroughly review the Notice of Funding Opportunity. Confirm your organization's eligibility and ability to meet each program requirement, and conduct a final compliance review before submission, confirming that your organization is indeed meeting each and every requirement stated in the NOFO — from programmatic requirements all the way to the file size of your attachments.

7. Technical Submission Errors

Sandy Trowbridge:
Applications may also be rejected due to missing fields, incorrect file formats, size limits, or file-naming errors. All of those little nitpicky things matter, and these issues often surface only at submission. Be sure to use the correct application package, follow formatting rules precisely, complete the SF-424 first

as it populates other forms, use the same UEI used when registering, and again use that Check Application tool early enough to fix any identified errors.

In addition, when collaborating, use those form-level permissions available strategically. Lock forms when in use or when complete, and save your work frequently. Know that workspaces will totally lock after the AOR hits Submit, so you want to complete all of those internal reviews in advance, with the expectation that there will not be an opportunity to make adjustments after submission.

8. Missing the Deadline by Cutting It Close

Sandy Trowbridge:
Grants.gov deadlines are strict and close at a specific posted time, with no grace periods. Set an internal deadline at least 48 hours early, and aim to officially submit 24 to 48 hours before the official close.

9. Expecting Award Decisions from Grants.gov

Sandy Trowbridge:
New applicants may also expect Grants.gov to provide award decisions or detailed review updates, when in reality, again, it's only the submission portal. Do monitor application status in the system, but then watch for direct communication from the awarding agency for next steps and funding decisions.

10. Not Verifying After Submission

Sandy Trowbridge:
Finally, don't assume that submission equals success. Verify and document everything after submission. After the AOR submits, first confirm that the application status moves beyond Received to Validated in Grants.gov by using that tracking number provided upon submission, and address any rejection messages immediately. Save the confirmation emails, tracking number, full application package, and the final submitted PDFs for your records.

Know that both SAM.gov and Grants.gov have a variety of helpful resources on how to navigate the registration process, as well as help desks with folks on standby to further support. If you do run into any challenges, there are resources available to assist. As referenced earlier, Grants Office has a free guide available for download that drills into even more detail on all things workspaces. I definitely recommend making use of that resource as well. But with that, I'll turn things over to Ashley to share additional tools and resources available here at Grants Office to support you.

Grants Office Services

Ashley Schultz:
Well, thank you so very much, Sandy, for all that excellent information. I'm just going to give Sandy a second to take a glass of water before we hop into the Q&A. I do have, so far, I think four — oh, five questions for you, Sandy. Folks who are here with us in the audience, if you have additional questions, just look to that bottom right-hand corner to add more.

On the Federal Funding Landscape

Ashley Schultz:
First off, we just spent the last several minutes talking about how to find and apply for federal funding. I just want to call attention to the number of folks who have reached out to us in the last two, three, twelve months trying to understand just what's happening with money at the federal level — what's happening to the U.S. federal budget in the first place.

While state and foundation budgets have remained relatively stable and reliable forms of funding, we are seeing quite a bit of discourse around how and when the U.S. federal government provides grants. Of course, lots of conflicting information coming from the White House, from Congress, from cabinet members, from federal agency heads. It can be challenging to keep track of — and none of this is reflected in Grants.gov. None of this discourse.

If you haven't already done so, I encourage you to check out our website under the Guidance for Grant Seekers tab. We've got a series of 5-minute videos there on the U.S. federal budget — what has happened, what has not happened, how much funding is available, what changes we are seeing in the grant funding landscape. All those videos are available for you on demand and are completely free on our website right now.

Grant Writing and Editing Services

Ashley Schultz:
I also want to call attention to our grant writing and editing services. Sandy mentioned earlier, this is just a review of how to submit a proposal, how to find one and submit one, but not necessarily how to do a good job on the proposal itself. There are certainly lots of accomplished grant writers and grant-seekers in our community, so I hope you found this event to be useful for you — but if you're concerned about what's actually going into those questions, our team here, folks just like Sandy, has a 25-year reputation across both the U.S. and Canada in proposal development work. We help organizations plan out and then articulate their projects in a way that's going to speak to funders' goals and objectives.

If you are interested in exploring any aspects of this support, the first step would be to contact us at grantwriting@grantsoffice.com with the name of the program that you're interested in and the type of help you need to apply. We are here to help — actually put pen to paper on your behalf, connecting you with a writer and giving you at least two opportunities to review those drafts and provide feedback to make sure we've really captured your organization's goals and mission correctly.

We also have editing services, so if you have the ability to write the proposal yourself and you just want an extra set of eyes, that's also something that we can do.

Other Grants Office Services

Ashley Schultz:
I will also just call out our research and consultation services. If you don't know where to start, you're having trouble finding grants in Grants.gov, or you would like some help finding state and foundation funding, we do have research and consultation services to help you identify which grants would be best fits for your upcoming projects.

We also have Grants Office Communities. This is our subscription service that gives you access to our database of more than 26,000 state, federal, and foundation grants so that you can do the research and project building all on your own. Grants that show up in Grants.gov are in our database, as well as state funders and foundation funders. Grants Office Communities always offers a free two-week trial, so if you have not gone over to check that out yet, I'd highly encourage you to do so.

And then, last — Sandy mentioned this several times, but I just want to call again that Guidance for Grant Seekers section is totally free, with many videos and articles on there about just what it takes to submit a high-quality application to any type of funder — state, federal, or foundation.

Q&A Session

Ashley Schultz:
With that, Sandy, I'm going to put you back on the spot here and ask you a few questions we have from the crowd.

Q1: Can a faith-based charity apply for federal grants?

Ashley Schultz:
This person is asking about eligibility for federal funders in general. They're asking specifically if they are a Christian charity who helps people who are homeless find self-sufficiency. They're curious if you could say if they can apply to federal grants. And then maybe, Sandy, in addition to that yes-or-no, if you want to expound a bit on what types of entities can get federal funding.

Sandy Trowbridge:
That's a great question. In terms of faith-based entities being eligible for federal funding, the answer is yes. Oftentimes I'll actually see posted in Notices of Funding Opportunity that applications from faith-based entities are welcomed as well — but it will depend entirely upon the specific Notice of Funding Opportunity that you were viewing.

I recommend taking a look at the different filters available on Grants.gov. If you are a 501(c)(3), you would just click on 501(c)(3) on that Eligibility filter. It also allows you to filter if you're a nonprofit without 501(c)(3) status — you can indicate that as well. Then look to the Notice of Funding Opportunity for more details on who is and who is not permitted to apply. But broadly speaking, it just depends on the different application that you're looking at.

Q2: What is the SF-424?

Ashley Schultz:
This question comes in: you referenced the SF-424. What is that? I think you mentioned that you had to fill it out first.

Sandy Trowbridge:
SF stands for Standard Forms, so it's the Standard Form 424. It's just the standard cover sheet that's required for most U.S. federal grant applications, and it just collects basic information about your organization. That's then used as the core data that feeds into the rest of your application, so you'll be indicating your organization, your project, your funding request — all that good stuff. It serves as the foundation for your application.

Q3: Why doesn't NSGP appear when I search Grants.gov?

Ashley Schultz:
I feel this next question at the bottom of my soul. I have tried to enter NSGP into the search bar and it just always comes up with nothing. Why is that? Just for the folks in the crowd today, NSGP stands for the Nonprofit Security Grant Program, so that would be an individual program offered by the Department of Homeland Security.

Sandy Trowbridge:
That's a fantastic question. The NSGP in particular is a pass-through program. It's managed by FEMA, and you would be looking instead at your state's agency to look for specific information related to that one and apply. You'd be applying through the state and not to the federal government, which is why you are likely not finding it in Grants.gov.

Ashley Schultz:
Totally agree. I would also say: if you are expecting to see a program — and it is a federal program — but you're not finding it, what you may do is just look to check the box of that funder. So going to find FEMA, for example, in that list of funders that Sandy showed, and just scroll through to see all of them, because maybe they're calling it something different or they've changed the acronym. Maybe just try from the funder's perspective as well, without any of those keywords. You might have some luck too.

Q4: How long until we hear back from the funding agency?

Ashley Schultz:
Two more questions for you, Sandy. After we submit an application via Grants.gov, how long until we hear back from the funding agency?

Sandy Trowbridge:
After submitting, you'll typically receive confirmation within 24 to 48 hours. I wish that were how fast it took to get an award decision, but for that I would say it's typically four to six months, all the way up to twelve months. Exact timing will definitely vary widely by agency and program. Sometimes the Notices of Funding Opportunity will indicate the timing of anticipated awards. Other times you can get a sense of this by looking at the timing of prior competitions, but we find that typically it's at least a few months — up to a full year, depending on the program.

Q5: What does “Validated” mean in Grants.gov?

Ashley Schultz:
Last question of today's session: you mentioned the importance of confirming an application moves from Received to Validated. What does Validated mean in this situation?

Sandy Trowbridge:
Great question. After application submission — after the AOR clicks Submit — Grants.gov will do an automated check of the different forms, making sure you uploaded everything, that it's all in the right formats, and that you have that active registration. If they find that everything is good, it will move your application to Validated. Unfortunately, again, Validated does not mean that the application is approved — it just means that it passes those technical checks, and Grants.gov will then forward it on to the funding agency for review.

Closing

Ashley Schultz:
Excellent. Thank you, Sandy, and thanks for those really great questions. That's the end of today's session here. Thank you again, Sandy, for all this excellent information on Grants.gov. For those folks

who want to dive into this a little bit more or are ready to get started with an application inside Grants.gov, I encourage you to check out Grants Office's website tomorrow, exactly where you registered for this event. We will have a recording of today's session, the PowerPoint slides, and also that Grants.gov guide that Sandy mentioned a few times, which goes into greater detail on the individual applicant roles and starting up a shared workspace inside Grants.gov so that you can work on the application forms together in that online platform.

Thank you again for attending today's session. We hope you found it to be a valuable use of your time, and we look forward to seeing you in another Grants Office webinar. Have a great day.

— End of Transcript —

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