GRANTS OFFICE
empowering communities



Beyond the Basics

Advanced Grant Strategy and Competitive Positioning

Today's Presenters



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TODAY'S AGENDA

01 | An Increasingly Competitive Landscape

02 | Create a Fundable Projects

03 | Find and Evaluate Funders

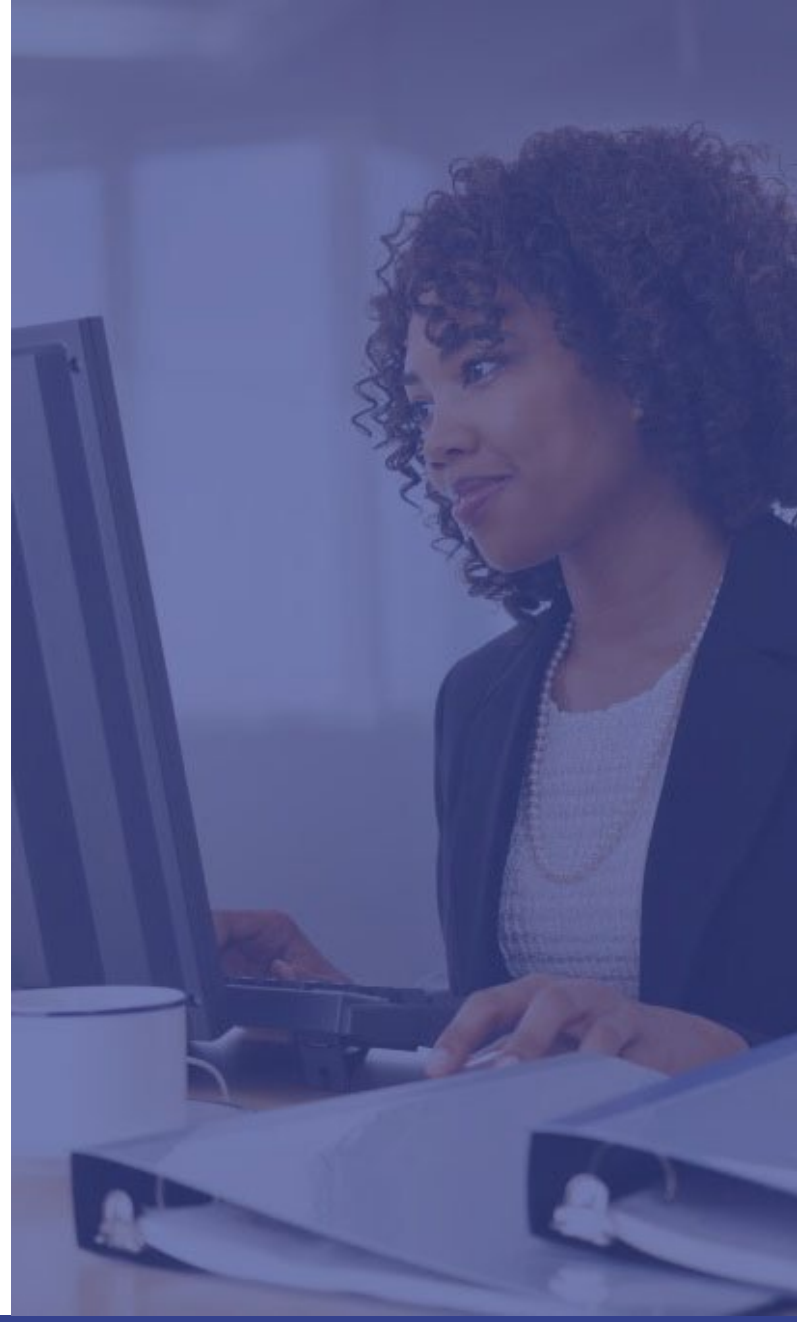
04 | Fine-tune your Proposal Alignment with Each Funder's Priorities

05 | Seek Strong Collaborations

06 | Show your Organization's Long-Term Commitment to Grantseeking

07 | Don't Forget the Basics!

08 | Grants Office is here to help!



An Increasingly Competitive Landscape

What we're hearing from public funders

CIHR	IMLS	DOJ COPS	SD DOT	MI DNR
13.57% acceptance rate for Research Projects Grants.	6.67% acceptance rate for the Inspire Grants for Small Museums Program.	20.1% acceptance rate for the School Violence Prevention Program (SVPP) Grants.	29.6% acceptance rate for the state's Bridge Improvement Grant (BIG) program.	26.3% acceptance rate for the Recreation Passport Grants.

Based on publicly available or funder provided application data following 2024 or 2025 funding cycles.

What we're hearing from private funders

Foundation A

Foundation A "receives more than **1,000 grant requests annually**. Of those, about **300 grant requests will receive funding."**

Foundation B

"The grant portal will close at 5pm ET on that date (**subject to change based on the number of applications received). Grant applications will be capped at 500."**

Foundation C

"Over the last year, the number of LOIs we've received has skyrocketed (366 in our last cycle!) for all of the obvious reasons. **Accordingly, we have had to decline an increasing number of well-aligned organizations,** including some of our long-time partners."

How do you stand out when everyone else has a quality proposal too?



Create a Fundable Project

Where do project ideas come from?

PROJECT IDEAS

Oversight Board
Sets policy direction; projects tend to be incremental, based on board members' direct needs

Highest authority, but limited information flow

Vendors
Bring improved products and cross-organization insights from working with similar agencies

Broad, domain-specific perspective

Staff
Most abundant source — immersed daily in delivery with deep contextual knowledge

Closest to the work; greatest access to info

Citizens / Clients
End users who experience service gaps, pain points, and unmet needs firsthand

Direct insight into outcomes and quality

KEY INSIGHT: None of these groups operate in isolation — their interaction creates a culture of meaningful project development

Grant Project Field Scoring

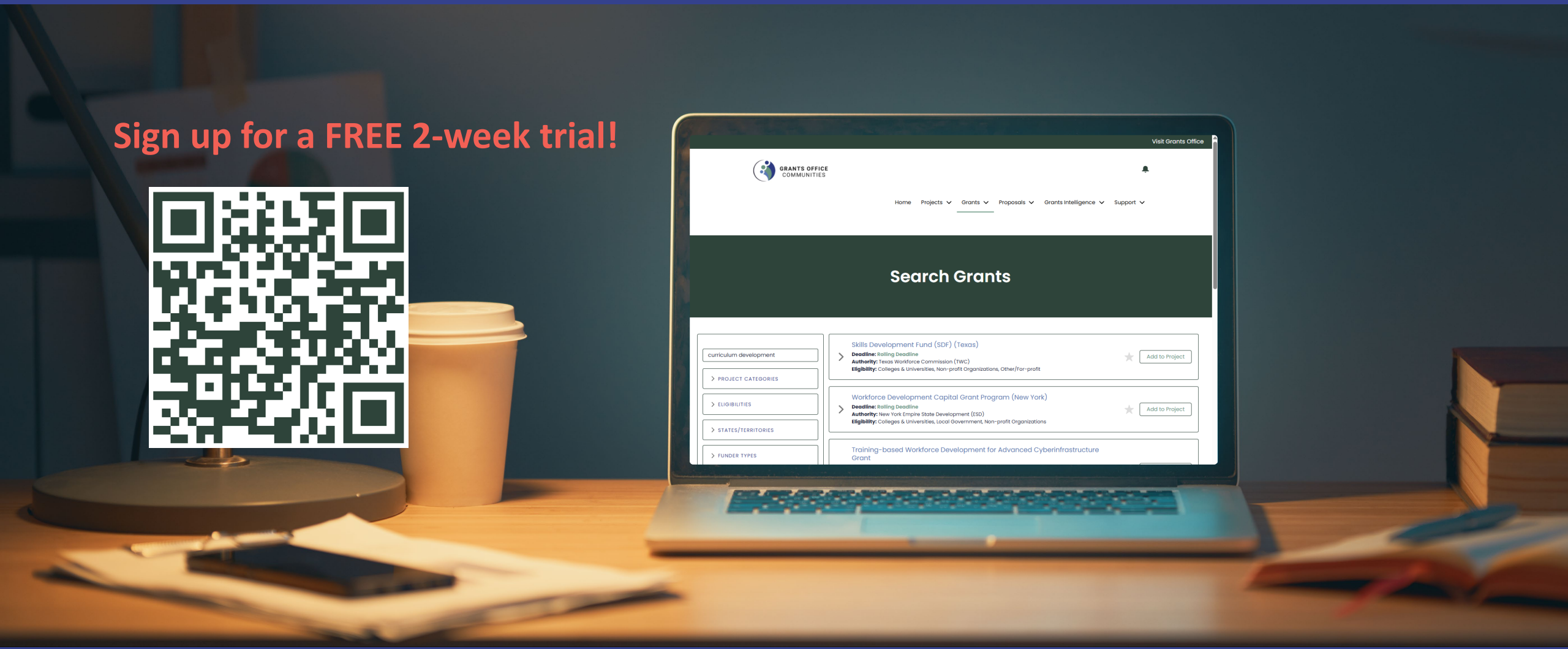
Category	Component	Score
Comprehensiveness of Proposed Project	The proposed project is based on fulfilling a need of identified beneficiaries	
	Potential partnerships have been explored to increase project support and scope	
	The proposed project has the potential to incorporate necessary basic grant-friendly components (training, drills, information sharing, lessons learned, etc.)	
	The proposed project is not entirely equipment-centric or administrative/operational	
Compatibility of Proposed Project with Grant Funding	The project has measurable outcomes to comply with grant guidelines	
	The purpose and objectives of the project are compatible with the funding priorities of one or more grant making agencies	
	The applicant is willing and able to contribute necessary matching funds and/or has commitments from other qualifying sources (i.e., foundations)	
	The lead applicant is a common recipient of grant funding for this type of project	
Executive Involvement in Proposed Project	The proposed project currently has Executive level support and/or involvement	
	If the applicant employs a grantwriter, they are involved in the development of the project	
Total Field Score		**Out of a Possible 20**

Score 1 = No / Less than average potential **Score 2** = Yes / On par or greater potential
Total 10–17: Project likely requires further development **Total 18–20:** Project is potentially ready for proposal development

Find and Evaluate Funders

Prospecting Grants is Easy with Grants Office Communities

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First Pass: Evaluating a Funder

Key items to consider when assessing a funding opportunity

01 Eligibility

Do you or a collaborator meet the funder’s basic requirements?

02 Total Amount Available

How competitive will the applicant pool be?

03 Matching Requirements

Can you meet cost-share or match obligations?

04 Application Burden

Is the effort proportional to the potential award?



First Pass: Evaluating a Funder

Key items to consider when assessing a funding opportunity

05 Scale

Can you reasonably complete the type of project the funder wants to fund?

06 Collaboration Requirements

Are partners needed, and are they available?

07 Lead Time

Is there enough time and capacity to prepare a strong application?

08 Track Record with Funder

Do you have an existing relationship or history?

Foundation Grants Require a Different Strategy

01 More Plentiful Prospects

Foundation opportunities outnumber government grants, giving you a larger pool of potential funders to pursue.

02 Reusable Content

Foundation applications share common elements, allowing you to repurpose narratives and apply to more funders efficiently.

03 Responsive to Local Needs

Foundations are more attuned to community priorities, unlike the prescription requirements of most government programs.

04 Matching Fund Potential

Foundation awards can serve as matching funds for government grants that require cost-share or match commitments.

Key Insight



Separate Foundation and Government Funders

When evaluating proposal success rates, cost per dollar raised, and other KPIs, it’s also a good idea to separate foundation and government funders.

Success rates will differ, and award amounts are likely to vary greatly between the two.

Fine-tune your Proposal Alignment with Each Funder’s Priorities

Translate the Funder's Mission Statement



Mission & Goals

The mission of the [redacted] Foundations is to identify and fund outstanding nonprofits to ensure that people of all backgrounds in the United States can build healthy, productive and satisfying lives. Through its grantmaking, the [redacted] Foundations support well-established nonprofit organizations that address significant issues within their major areas of focus—culture, education, health and social service—and that primarily serve large demographic and/or geographic constituencies. In each area of funding, the Foundations seek to identify those organizations achieving truly differentiated results relative to other organizations making similar efforts for similar populations. The Foundations also look for evidence of sustainability beyond their support.

Whether providing a scholarship to a deserving student, supporting a rural health clinic or bringing artists into schools so children can see firsthand the beauty of the arts, the Foundations' focus is consistent: to help those in need, those underserved and those underrepresented in society. Since the Foundations were formed in the 1940s, the scale and capabilities of the grant making have changed, but the mission has not.

Upon review, this foundation wants…

01 **Experienced Organizations (records of success, stable fiscal history, etc.)**

02 **Broad impact resulting from the grant investment**

03 **Anticipated results that are unique (not what everyone else is already doing)**

04 **Organizations who are ready to assume on-going costs for grant-funded efforts to continue**

Research Funder Information

Where can you find information beyond NOFO & Missing Statements?

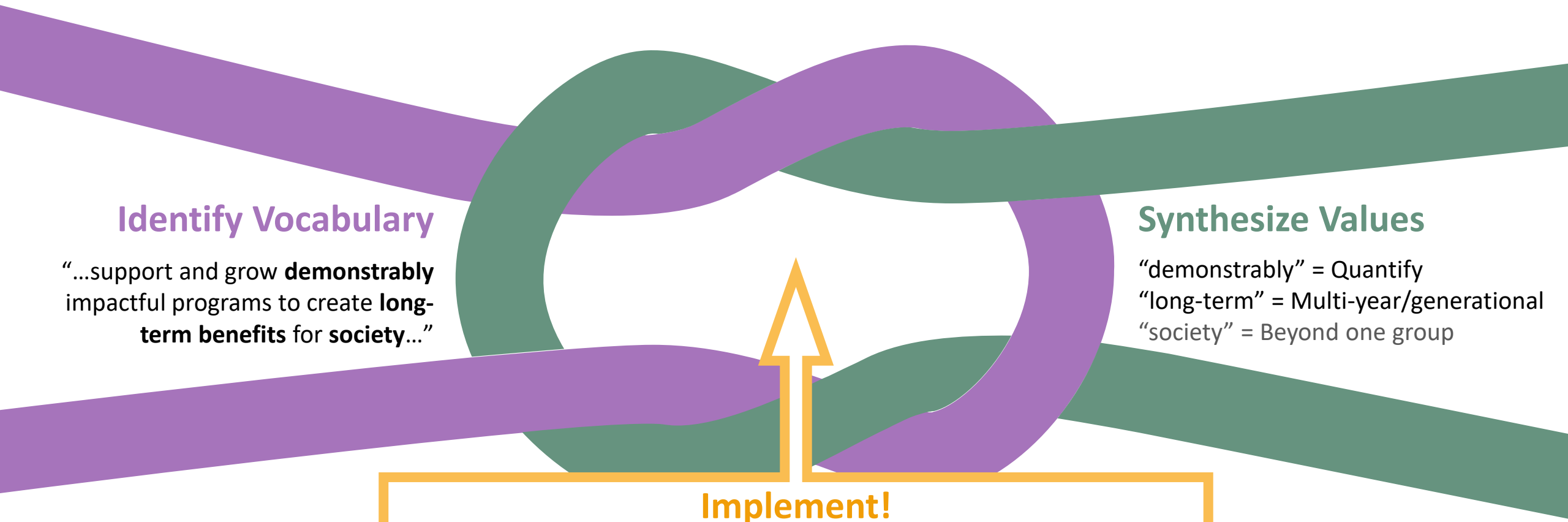
- Funder Website
- Previous Awardee Info
- Annual Reports
- Annual Budgets/Proposals
- Webinars/Conferences
- Blog Posts, Newsletters, Press Releases, and other Print/Electronic Media
- Board Meeting Minutes
- Social Media

Why do we look at these things?

To identify things like…

- Hidden interests beyond espoused interests
- Terminology/definitions
- Review Criteria
- Expectation setting for chances of funding
- Organizational/Cultural Norms

Tie the Funder's Goals to your Approach with Intentional Language



Identify Vocabulary

"…support and grow **demonstrably** impactful programs to create **long-term benefits** for **society**…"

Synthesize Values

"demonstrably" = Quantify
"long-term" = Multi-year/generational
"society" = Beyond one group

Implement!

"**Over a 10-year period**, the program is projected to reduce poverty rates **by 18%,** lifting more than 50,000 families into stable economic conditions resulting in an overall **societal benefit** through increased economic productivity, improved health outcomes, and stronger, more resilient communities."

Key Insight



Evaluate the Size of your Org

When evaluating a funder's focus areas, go one step further. Ensure they are funding like-sized organizations.

Even if a funder is interested in your focus areas, they may only fund organizations above or below a certain size.

Seek Strong Collaborations

When everyone else is the same, partnerships make an application stand out!



Enables access to added expertise

Alleviates financial burden for the responsibility of cost-share/match

Stretches the funder's investment even further

Hallmarks of a Strong Partner Organization

01 Organizations in Your Existing Network

Existing history of coordinated efforts

Established norms/policies for collaboration

02 Organizations that Compliment Your Services

In the periphery and have shared beneficiaries

Overarching goals similar your own

03 Organizations with Grant Admin Experience

Follow budget plans without overspending

Familiar with expectations for post award management tasks Following budgets

04 Organizations with Credibility

Maintain a positive reputation

Have recognized expertise within their field

Your Proposals MUST Relay…

- **Credibility**

  Partnerships that demonstrate that other organizations believe in you and your efforts

- **Shared Assets**

  Partnerships that increase access to vital resources beyond those immediately available at your organization

- **Greater Impact**

  Partnerships that grow project scope beyond just your reach, either to a greater geography or larger number of populations served

- **Longevity**

  Partnerships that convey long-term impact through shared accountability and resources



Integrate Collaborators Beyond the “Partner Section” of Proposals

01

Executive Summary

Introduce your partners to reviewers early on in your proposal.

02

Narrative Sections

Demonstrate how your partners are integral in the implementation, evaluation, and sustainability of your proposed effort.

03

Evaluation Practice

Explain who (including your partners) will is responsible for collecting and evaluating outcome metrics

04

Budget

Highlight a well-coordinated plan for award management and fund distribution.

Show your Organization's Long-Term Commitment to Grantseeking

Grantseeking-forward organizations…

Scan for our FREE article **Why Grantseeking isn't Just About Writing**

…understand winning comes down to more than "good writing"

…know what opportunities to pursue (and when)

…are intentional in the use of advanced technologies

…adapt to changing landscapes

Scan for our FREE article **Navigating the Grant Landscape Under a New Administration**

Grantseeking-forward organizations…

…have team members who do not work in silos

…recognize rejection is an opportunity to learn

…create a culture of support through all depts

…integrate grantseeking into long-term planning and strategy

Scan for our FREE article **Building Organizational Capacity to Expand Grant Funding Opportunities**

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Track success stories NOW and always



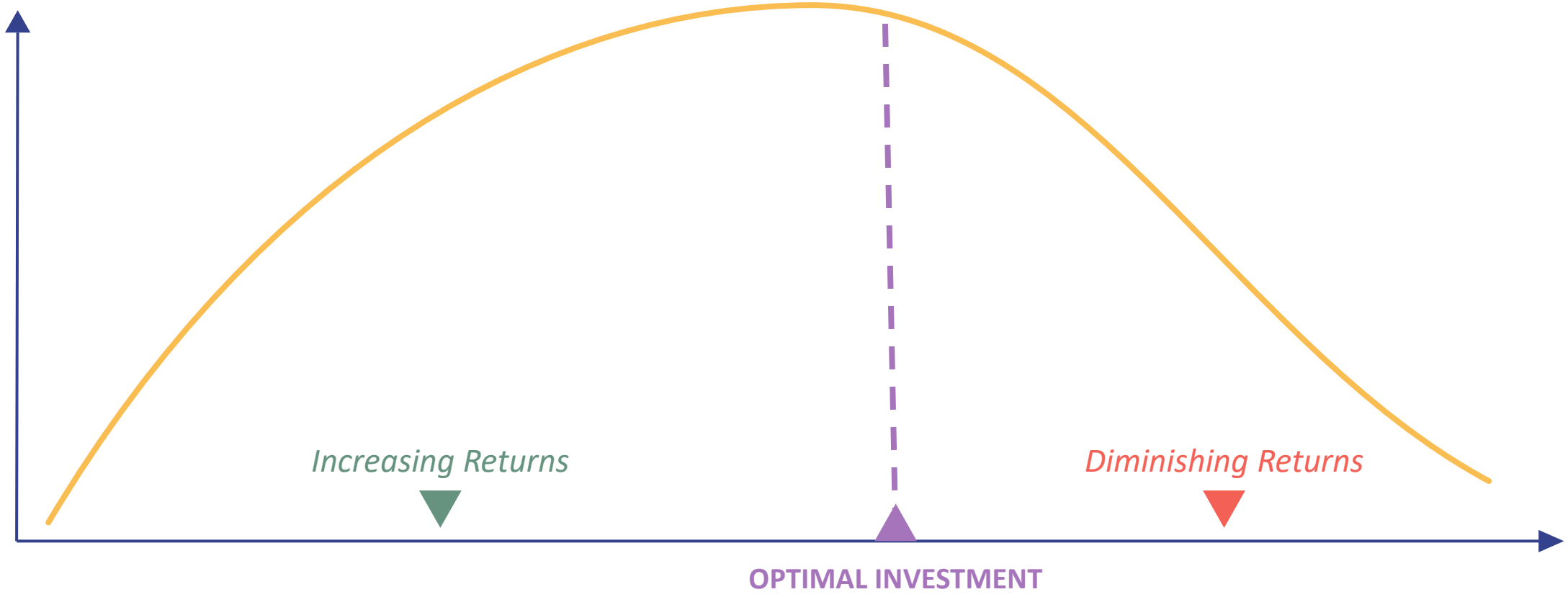
Build credibility & evidence base

Persuasive & compelling

Time saver

Reflecting on Capacity

There is a point of diminishing returns for grant proposal volume



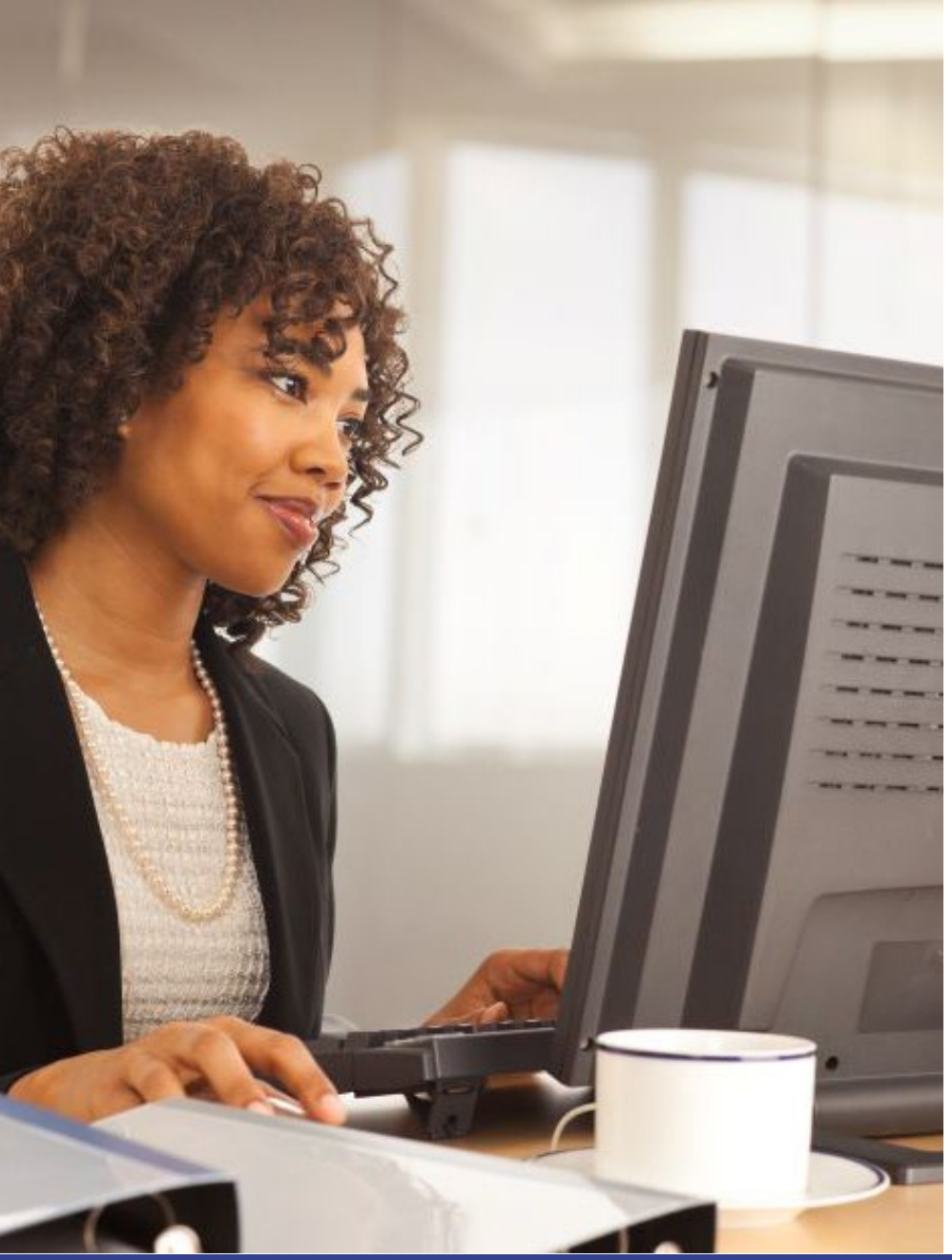
Don’t Forget the Basics!

Avoid Common Mistakes

Right population, wrong project

Compelling proposal, ignored guidelines

Great project, no proof



Set Yourself Above the Rest



01 Create a Fundable Project

02 Find and Evaluate Funders

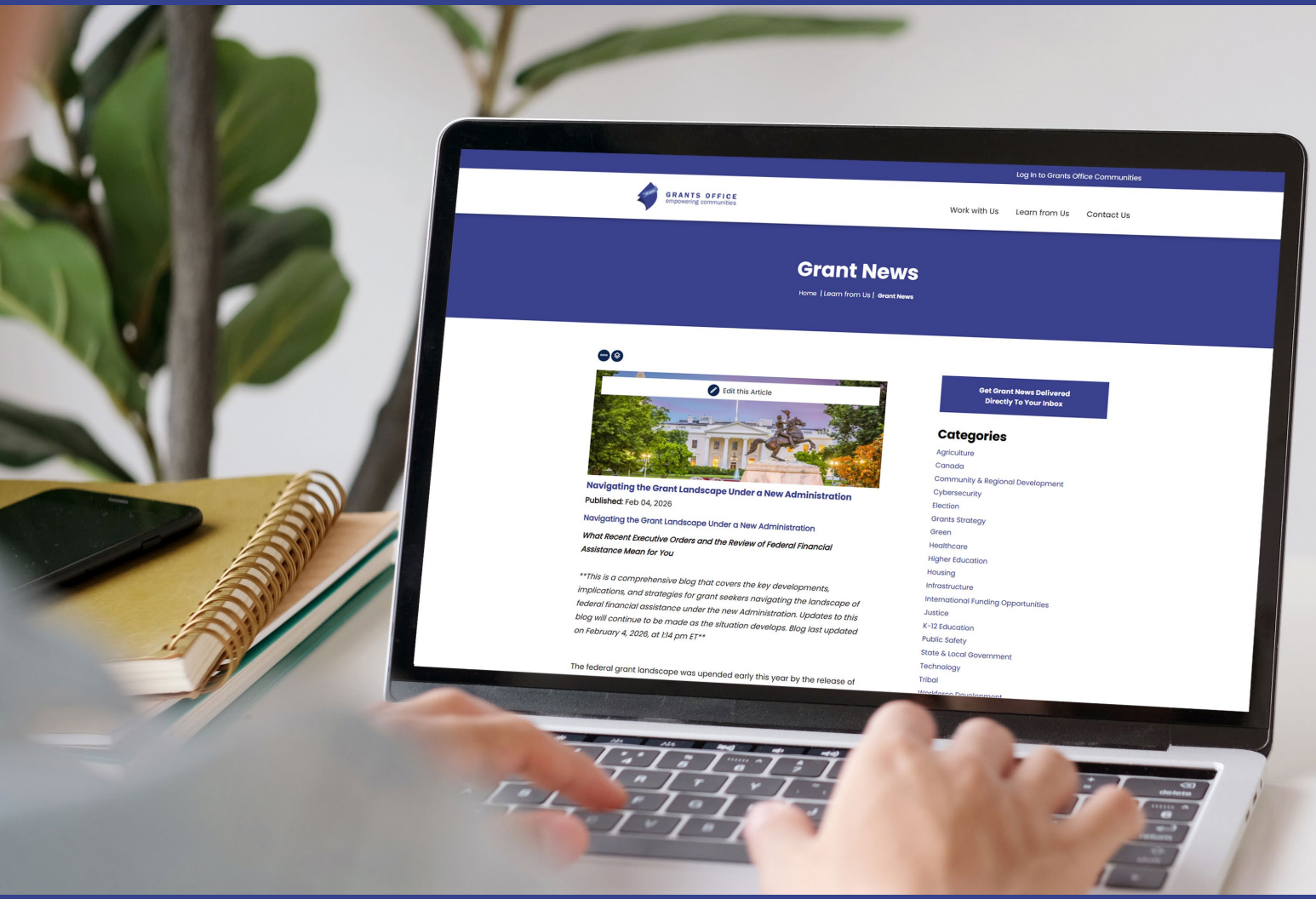
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