

Resources for Grantseekers

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Resources for Grantseekers

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

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

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

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

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

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

Additional sources for grantseekers include the following:

- CRS In Focus IF12910, *Searching for Federal Grants: An Overview of Resources*, by Maria Kreiser and Kathleen E. Marchsteiner, and
- CRS Report RL32159, *How to Develop and Write a Grant Proposal*, by Maria Kreiser.

Congressional staff may also find the following CRS products useful:

- CRS In Focus IF12906, *Constituent Grants Services in a Congressional Member Office: A Brief Guide*, by Maria Kreiser and Natalie Paris, and
- CRS Report RL34035, *Grants Work in a Congressional Office*, by Maria Kreiser.

This report is updated as needed.

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Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

Who Is Eligible for a Government Grant?

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

- Government Organizations
 - *State Governments*

¹ Grants.gov, "Who is Eligible for a Grant?," at <https://www.grants.gov/learn-grants/grant-eligibility>

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

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

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

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

Key Federal Sources

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance ("Assistance Listings") at SAM.gov (General Services Administration)

<https://sam.gov/assistance-listings>

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

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

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

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

Federal Program Inventory

<https://fpi.omb.gov/>

In 2024, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) publicly launched the Federal Program Inventory (FPI). Using data from SAM.gov Assistance Listings, this site similarly provides “snapshot” summaries of federal financial assistance programs, including grant programs. Like SAM.gov, this site allows searching by agencies, type of program/assistance, and eligible applicants—but this site also offers a category search function that displays results by topic across multiple agencies. This added functionality may be particularly helpful for new grantseekers who are at the beginning or exploratory stage of the search process. Grantseekers can select categories (and subcategories) to search, such as agriculture, economic/community development, housing, disaster prevention and relief, transportation, and many others. The Federal Program Inventory also displays some overview data on federal program obligation amounts from USAspending.gov.³

³ USAspending.gov, maintained by the Department of the Treasury, provides data on federal prime grant awards and (continued...)

Grants.gov and FedConnect

<http://www.grants.gov>

<https://www.fedconnect.net>

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

One significant limitation to Grants.gov and FedConnect.net is the exclusion of state-level federal grant program information. For example, Grants.gov provides information only about the funding opportunities for *primary* grant recipients. However, federal grant funds may first be received by a state government (a “primary” recipient) and then passed through to the local level as sub-awards to more local sub-recipients. Thus, a local grantseeker would not be able to access information on Grants.gov about the possibility of receiving federal sub-grants from a state-level agency.

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

Federal Agency Websites

Federal agency websites often provide information about active grant programs and include deadlines, program contacts, and eligibility. This information can vary from agency to agency, and many post Frequently Asked Questions, recorded presentations, or guides on funding programs, as well as detailed program guidance. For example, the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development provides several fact sheets, which provide information on USDA federal assistance programs that support rural areas.⁴

Grantseekers can often sign up to receive upcoming notifications or announcements from an agency, or agency’s divisions or offices of interest. Some agencies might also announce funding opportunities that are expected to be available later in the year.

Some federal agencies have developed special dashboards or other sites to help grantseekers identify potential funding. For example:

first-tier subawards (or subawards awarded directly by the prime recipient) by state, county, city, CD, and zip code. The prime grant awards data in USAspending.gov are reported by federal awarding agencies, and the first-tier subaward data are reported by prime recipients (usually state, local, tribal and territorial governments; and nonprofit or for-profit entities). See <https://www.usaspending.gov/> and CRS In Focus IF10231, *Tracking Federal Awards in States and Congressional Districts Using USAspending.gov*, by Jennifer Teefy.

⁴ See USDA Rural Development, “Fact Sheets,” <https://www.rd.usda.gov/resources/publications/fact-sheets?langcode=en>.

- The U.S. Dept. of Transportation provides a discretionary transportation grants dashboard: <https://www.transportation.gov/grants/dashboard>.
- SchoolSafety.gov has a grants finder tool: <https://www.schoolsafety.gov/grants-finder-tool>.
- Rural Community Toolbox lists U.S. Departments of Justice and Health and Human Services funding opportunities for substance abuse projects: <https://www.ruralcommunitytoolbox.org/funding>.
- The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) provides a grants dashboard that also includes forecasted opportunities: <https://www.samhsa.gov/grants/grants-dashboard>.

State Government Websites

State agency websites may provide information about available federal grant funding that will be passed through the state and sub-granted at the community level to local governments, nonprofits, or other grantseekers.⁵ Many state level agencies accept federal sub-grant applications or proposals.

Some states might also provide broader search tools; for example, Virginia provides an informational grants portal listing federal, state, and private funding, and Ohio also provides a searchable database of grant opportunities that are administered by the state.⁶

Federal Contacts in States and State Administering Agencies

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

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

⁵ See “What is a government grant and pass-through funding?” website, <https://grantsgovprod.wordpress.com/2016/08/30/what-is-a-government-grant-and-pass-through-funding/>. For example, the Secretary of the Interior provides financial assistance to states for outdoor recreation purposes, under a formula grant program (through the Land and Water Conservation Fund). Under National Park Service program guidance (2023), states may award this federal funding to local units of governments and tribes, among others. Eligible purposes include the acquisition of lands and waters and the development of parks and other public outdoor recreation facilities. A local government looking to fund an outdoor recreation area might explore their state’s parks/recreation or similar agency to learn about this federal program.

⁶ See Secretary of the Commonwealth of Virginia, “Grants,” at <https://www.governor.virginia.gov/constituent-services/grants/>; and Ohio Funding Partnership, “Funding Opportunities,” at <https://grants.ohio.gov/funding-opportunities>.

State Administering Agencies or Contacts

Many federal grants, such as formula and block grants, are awarded directly to state governments, which then set priorities for funding and allocate sub-funds within that state.⁷ For more information on how a state intends to distribute federal formula funds, grantseekers can contact the State Administering Agency (SAA). State government agencies are familiar with federal program requirements, can assist local governments and nonprofit organizations with proposals, and can provide other guidance.

Many federal department and agency websites include SAAs, and often the site will have an interactive U.S. map. Grantseekers can click on their state and obtain program and state contact information. A selection of some executive department websites includes the following:⁸

- Agriculture Rural Development State Contacts,
<https://www.rd.usda.gov/page/state-offices>
- National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Partners,
<https://www.arts.gov/state-and-regional-arts-organizations>
- Education (ED) State Contacts,
<https://www.ed.gov/contact-us/state-contacts>
- Energy (DOE) Efficiency & Renewable Energy,
<https://www.energy.gov/eere/funding/eere-funding-opportunities>
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Grant Regional Office,
<https://www.epa.gov/grants/regional-grants-information>
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) State Offices and Agencies (preparedness),
<https://www.fema.gov/grants/preparedness/about/state-administrative-agency-contacts>

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) State Offices and Agencies (hazard mitigation)

<https://www.fema.gov/grants/mitigation/state-local-territorial-governments/state-contacts>

- Health and Human Services (HHS), Social Services Block Grants State Officials & Program Contacts,
<https://acf.gov/ocs/contact-information/ssbg-grantee-contact-information>
- Homeland Security (DHS) State Homeland Security Contacts,
<https://www.dhs.gov/state-homeland-security-and-emergency-services>
- Housing and Urban Development (HUD) State/Local Offices,
https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/field_policy_mgt/localoffices
- National Endowment for the Humanities (NEA) State Councils,
<https://www.neh.gov/about/state-humanities-councils>
- Office of Justice Programs (OJP) State Administering Agencies,
<https://www.ojp.gov/funding/state-administering-agencies/overview>

⁷ For further explanation of formula and block grants, see <https://grantsgovprod.wordpress.com/2016/07/13/what-is-a-formula-grant/> and <https://grantsgovprod.wordpress.com/tag/block-grant/>.

⁸ Compiled by the Congressional Research Service (CRS) from executive department and agency websites.

- Labor (DOL) Employment and Training Administration, State and Local Contacts,
<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/contact>
- Small Business Administration,
<https://www.sba.gov/local-assistance/find?type=SBA%20District%20Office&pageNumber=1>
- Transportation, Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Regional Offices,
<https://www.transit.dot.gov/about/regional-offices/regional-offices>
- Veterans Affairs State/Territory Offices,
https://discover.va.gov/external-resources/?_resource_type=state-veterans-affairs-office

State Single Point of Contact (Office of Management and Budget)

<https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/SPOC-list-as-of-August-2024.pdf> (as of 2024)

Many states require federal grants applicants to submit a copy of their application for state government review and comment, and many (but not all) have designated a state Single Point of Contact (SPOC).⁹ The state offices listed here coordinate government grants development and may provide guidance to grantseekers.¹⁰

Regional Development Organizations (RDOs)

RDOs are multijurisdictional planning and development organizations that offer a range of services to their member governments. RDO refers to a broad category of organizations that includes local or area development districts, councils of governments, regional planning commissions, and others.¹¹ RDOs are sometimes involved in facilitating federal grantseeking or grantmaking at the regional or local level for certain kinds of multijurisdictional projects (e.g., transportation, tourism, and hazard mitigation—but this varies widely, depending on the region, as well as the capacity and goals of the RDO). Contacting RDOs may also yield information and possible partnerships for a desired project.

There is no centralized directory of all RDOs, but grantseekers could utilize the following:

- Economic Development Administration’s (EDA’s) Economic Development Directory,
<https://www.eda.gov/economic-development-directory>

⁹ Under Executive Order 12372, “Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs” (issued by President Ronald Reagan in 1982), some states require federal grant applicants to submit a copy of their application for state government level review and comment. The order was issued “to foster an intergovernmental partnership and strengthen federalism by relying on state and local processes for the coordination and review of proposed federal financial assistance and direct federal development.” It should be noted that the order permits, but does not require, states to establish a procedure for reviewing federal grant programs within their jurisdiction. E.O. 12372 gives states discretion in establishing review procedures, so the process can vary from state to state, and the state can decide which federal programs are subject to review. See <https://www.archives.gov/federal-register/codification/executive-order/12372.html>.

¹⁰ As of March 24, 2025, a current list of state single points of contact is not available on [whitehouse.gov](https://www.whitehouse.gov). Additional searches by state may be required to identify a current contact.

¹¹ For example, see the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission (TCRPC), which serves the Tri-County Region of Peoria, Tazewell, and Woodford Counties, located in Central Illinois, <https://tricityrprc.org/funding-programs/call-for-projects/>.

- An interactive map from the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO),
<https://www.nado.org/edmap/>
- Online search engines.

Also see CRS In Focus IF11511, *The Role of Regional Development Organizations (RDOs) in Economic Development*, by Julie M. Lawhorn.

Related Federal Sources

A-Z Index of U.S. Government Departments and Agencies (General Services Administration)

<https://www.usa.gov/agency-index>

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

- Government Benefits
<https://www.usa.gov/benefits>
- Small Businesses
<https://www.usa.gov/small-business?source=busa>

Federal Grant Policy-Making Overviews

<https://www.grants.gov/learn-grants/grant-policies>

Grants.gov provides overviews and information on various federal grantmaking policies and guidance.

Private, Corporate, and Additional Funding Sources

Candid (formerly the Foundation Center and GuideStar)

<https://candid.org/>

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

- Introduction to Finding Grants,
<https://learning.candid.org/training/courses/introduction-to-finding-grants/>
- Foundation Finder,
<https://fconline.foundationcenter.org/welcome/quick-start>
- Introduction to Proposal Writing Short Course,
<https://learning.candid.org/training/introduction-to-proposal-writing/>

- Over 200 articles on frequently asked questions and searchable by topic, <https://learning.candid.org/resources/knowledge-base/>
- Foundation Center local partners (a national network of cooperating library collections in each state, with print and electronic resources available free to the public), <https://candid.org/find-us>
- Nonprofit Startup Resources (assess readiness to start a nonprofit), <https://learning.candid.org/resources/nonprofit-startup-resources/>

Community Foundations Locator (Council on Foundations)

<http://www.cof.org/community-foundation-locator>

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

Funding Sources: Funding State by State (Grantsmanship Center)

<http://tgci.com/funding-sources>

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

Grants and Related Resources (Michigan State University Libraries)

<https://libguides.lib.msu.edu/grants>

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

- Researching Potential Funders, <https://libguides.lib.msu.edu/c.php?g=96743&p=769466>
- Grants for Nonprofits, <https://libguides.lib.msu.edu/c.php?g=96743&p=622545>

Grant Proposal Writing Websites

Grantseekers may access CRS Report RL32159, *How to Develop and Write a Grant Proposal*, by Maria Kreiser, which discusses standard content and formats.

These additional selected resources may also be useful:

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

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