



# Basic Components of a Grant Application

This quick guide provides an overview of the typical components of a grant application. This is not a comprehensive list but contains the most common sections a grant applicant will see. Key components of a grant application help funders evaluate the merit, feasibility, and impact of a proposed project.

## Grant Application Basics: A Comprehensive Overview

Publish Date	DATE
Background	<p>The development of a grant application usually begins with general information about the project and progresses to more detailed information. Additional details may be included in the appendices or attachments but verify them with application guidelines. Attachments may include resumes, organization charts, financial statements, and letters of support and/or commitment.</p> <p>Grant application requirements vary among funders. Federal grants typically require a common set of forms (e.g. SF-424), but all requirements in the Notice of Federal Funding Opportunity (NOFO) must be followed, including any supplemental information. It is important to diligently review the NOFO to ensure that the grant application contains all required sections/responses.</p>
Key Components	<p>Typical components of a grant application include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. <b>Executive Summary/Abstract</b> - Concise overview of the project or program. Summarizes the key points, your organization, and overall funding request.</li></ol>

2. **Project Description** – Detailed narrative. Provides data on why the project is needed and the targeted beneficiaries of the project.
3. **Goals/Objectives** – Goals are broad, long-term statements that describe the overall outcome. Objectives are short term, specific, measurable actions that are taken to achieve the goals, sometimes referred to as inputs and outputs.
4. **Work Plan** – A work plan is the document that details how goals/objectives will be accomplished and what tasks, timelines, and resources are needed.
5. **Budget** – The budget is best shown in a table displaying:
  - **Item**
    - i. Unit
    - ii. Cost per unit
    - iii. Total cost
  - **Staff**
    - i. Salary
    - ii. Number of Hours
    - iii. Fringe (broken out)
  - **Direct and Indirect:** Must include all costs, both direct and indirect. Verify, repeatedly, that all numbers are correct and add up correctly. It can be beneficial to double-check financial data using formula functions in a spreadsheet software.
  - **Budget Narrative:** Many grants will also require a Budget Narrative. This is the detailed justification for the items listed in your budget. In the narrative, demonstrate that these resources requested are allowable, allocable, and reasonable for the program/project.
6. **Team Qualifications** – Is your team experienced? Do they possess the qualifications to successfully implement this grant? In this section, share your team's expertise, experience, and skill sets. Include not only grant funded personnel, but also those responsible for financial and programmatic administration of the grant.
7. **Appendices/Attachments** – If allowed, attachments may include:
  - Resumes of Personnel
  - IRS Non-Profit Certification Letter
  - IRS 990 Forms
  - Board of Directors Roster
  - Letters of Support/MOUs/MOAs

## Understanding the Impact

### Application Examples:

#### Example: City of Aurora, CO

For FY2023, the city applied for a Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-saving Transportation Program (PROTECT) Grant for Box Elder Creek Roadway Erosion & Flood Protection. Here is an example of their full grant application: [Project Narrative for FASTLANE Discretionary Grant Application](#)

#### Example: Town of Waxhaw, NC

FY2023 - U.S. Department of Transportation Safe Streets for All (SS4A) Planning and Demonstration Grant to develop a comprehensive safety action plan. The town was awarded \$128,000. Here is an example of the towns full SS4A application: [Waxhaw SS4A 2023 Grant Application.pdf](#)

Understanding the components of a grant application is crucial for crafting a compelling proposal. Each section plays a specific role in convincing funders that your project is worthwhile, feasible, and aligned with their goals and priorities.

Grant applicants commonly make the mistake of repeating information from one section to the next, often due to a lack of understanding regarding the funder's own key components. Here is a breakdown of the most common key components and their implications:

- **Executive Summary - Implication:** This is your first impression. A clear, concise summary can determine whether the reviewer continues reading. It should highlight the problem, the solution, and the expected impact.
- **Statement of Need (Problem Statement) - Implication:** Demonstrates understanding of the issue and its urgency. A strong need statement backed up by data, especially the funding agency's relevant data, shows that the project is addressing a real, significant problem.
- **Project Description (Goals & Objectives) - Implication:** Clarifies what the project should achieve, if successfully implemented. Funders want to see SMART objectives (**S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**elevant, **T**ime-bound) that align with their mission.
- **Methodology (Activities & Timeline) - Implication:** Shows the implementation plan for the project. A detailed plan with a realistic timeline builds confidence in the applicant's ability to execute and manage the project effectively.

## Next Steps & Recommendations

- **Evaluation Plan - Implication:** Demonstrates accountability. The funding organization wants to know how success will be measured and what will be learned from the project. A solid evaluation plan shows a purposeful approach.
- **Budget and Budget Justification - Implication:** Reveals the financial planning expertise and transparency. A realistic, well-justified budget reassures funders that their money will be used wisely.
- **Appendices (Optional) - Implication:** Provides additional evidence or documentation (e.g., charts, resumes, case studies) that supports the proposal without cluttering the main narrative. Some that may be included:
- **Organizational Background - Implication:** Establishes credibility. This section shows that the applicant organization has the experience, capacity, and leadership to conduct the project.
- **Sustainability Plan - Implication:** Addresses long-term impact. Funders want to know what happens after the grant ends—how will the project continue or scale?
- **Letters of Support/Partnerships - Implication:** Indicates community buy-in and collaboration. Strong partnerships can enhance the proposal's credibility and potential for success.

Before applying, carefully review the full Notice of Funding Opportunity, application questions, and terms and conditions. Accepting an award may commit your organization to specific obligations during and after the grant period.

Grants, especially federal grants, can support forward-thinking and large-scale projects, as well as programs which are vital to a community. It may be tempting to focus entirely on the project itself and overlook the funding agency's requirements. An applicant organization must carefully evaluate all the grant program's post-award requirements before applying, including requirements around reporting, compliance, cash management, and audits. The requirements are always non-negotiable and must be followed as soon as a grant agreement is signed by the recipient organization.

For example, a [Community Oriented Policing \(COPS\) Hiring Program](#) grant is a tremendous way to expand law enforcement capacity; however, it comes with a critical condition: agencies must retain the funded positions for at least 12 months after the grant period ends, without additional federal assistance. This means that agencies cannot rely on future COPS funding or other federal grants to cover those costs during the mandatory retention period. Failure to comply may result in the revocation or suspension of existing grant funds, rejection of pending

applications, and ineligibility for future COPS or Office of Justice Programs funding. This underscores the importance of long-term financial planning before applying. Agencies need to ensure they can absorb the full cost of those positions once federal support ends. The COPS Office highlights this requirement in its official program documentation, emphasizing sustainability and strategic budgeting.

Meeting specific prerequisites is a typical part of the grant application process. These prerequisites may take 2 - 4 weeks to complete and it is important to start this work early. One of the most important is to obtain a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI)—which is required for federal grants and replaces the old DUNS number. Organizations need to register with System for Award Management ([SAM.gov](https://sam.gov)) to obtain a UEI. UEI is a 12-character alphanumeric identifier assigned to all entities (public and private companies, individuals, institutions, or organizations) to do business with the Federal Government. Organizations will also need to designate an E-Business Point of Contact (EBiz POC). *There is no fee for registering with Sam.gov and third-party assistance is not needed.*

A [Grants.gov](https://grants.gov) registration will also need to be completed. There is no fee for registering with Grants.gov, but the organization's UEI number must be assigned prior to registering. During the Grants.gov registration, the organization's EBiz Point of Contact (POC) must:

1. Create a Grants.gov account with the same email address as used in SAM.gov for EBiz POC, and
2. Add a profile with Grants.gov using the UEI obtained from SAM.gov.
3. The EBiz POC can then delegate administrative roles to other users.

Many grants utilize online application systems. It is recommended that when using these systems applicants should utilize word processing software, such as Microsoft Word, to draft and finalize the required answers to ensure compliance with character and word limits, safeguard from losing work, and encourage collaboration with other team members. This will also allow you to run grammar and spell checks before inserting answers into the grant application system.

## Additional Resources

- [Congressional Research Service: How to Develop and Write a Grant Proposal](#)
- [Simpler.Grants.gov](https://simpler.grants.gov)
- [Grants 101 | Grants.gov](#)

- [Pre-Award Phase | Grants.gov](#)
- [How to Apply for Grants | Grants.gov](#)
- [About This Site | SAM.gov](#)
- [Key Steps of the Application Process | Grants | CDC](#)

## Ready to Transform Your Grant Management?



Bookmark [Center for Grant Excellence!](#)



Follow us on [LinkedIn](#)



[Contact Us!](#)