



Grant Research Using Federal Sources

This quick guide is designed to help individuals and organizations efficiently locate, evaluate, and track federal grant opportunities using official United States government resources.

How to Research Effectively: Step-by-Step Tips

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Background

Before diving into research, it's important to understand:

- Federal grants are funds awarded by federal agencies to support public services, infrastructure development, research, education, and other initiatives.
- They are not loans and typically do not require repayment.
- Each grant has specific eligibility criteria, application requirements, and compliance and reporting obligations, if awarded.

Key Components

Below is a list of primary federal grant sources that can help organizations research and identify grant opportunities that align with their project(s) goals:

Grants.gov

- **Website:** <https://www.grants.gov>
- **Purpose:** Centralized portal for finding and applying for federal grants. Most federal agencies list their grants on this website.
- **Managed By:** The United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and operates under the governance of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB).
- **Features:**
 - Search by keyword, agency, eligibility, Opportunity Number or Assistance Listing number (ALN).
 - Filter by posted date and date ranges

- Save searches and set up email alerts (must first create an account).
- Download application packages and submit grant applications electronically.

SAM.gov (System for Award Management)

- **Website:** <https://sam.gov>
- **Purpose:** Official source for federal contract and assistance listings.
- **Managed By:** United States General Services Administration (GSA)
- **Features:**
 - Search for federal assistance listings, formerly known as the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA)
 - View entity registration and exclusions.
 - Research past and current awards.

Agency-Specific Portals

Some federal agencies maintain their own grant portals instead of, or in addition to, Grants.gov. Below are just a few examples of federal agency grant webpages:

- **National Institutes of Health (NIH):** <https://grants.nih.gov>
- **National Science Foundation (NSF):** <https://www.nsf.gov/funding/>
- **Department of Energy (DOE):** <https://www.energy.gov/eere/funding>
- **Department of Transportation (DOT):**
<https://www.transportation.gov/grants/dashboard>

Organizations that are conducting grant research can sign up for e-mail notifications to receive agency specific grant opportunities.

Additional Resources

- **Federal Register:** <https://www.federalregister.gov> - for official grant announcements.
 - Organizations can create an account to receive Federal Register announcements.
- **USA.gov:** <https://www.usa.gov/grants> - provides general grant information.

USAspending.gov: <https://www.usaspending.gov/> - Open data on federal spending information, including information on federal awards such as contracts, grants, and loans. Maintained by the United States Department of the Treasury.

Understanding the Impact

Effective grant research helps organizations identify the best-fit funding opportunities, increasing their chances of success. It saves time, strengthens proposals, and supports long-term sustainability by aligning funding with strategic goals.

How to Search Effectively - Step-by-Step Research Tips

1. **Define your goals:** Know what type of project or program you want to fund and the specific goals and outcomes for that project.
2. **Use keywords:** Be specific in your keyword searches (e.g., "STEM education," "mental health services").
3. **Filter results:**
 - Eligibility (e.g., nonprofit, tribal, local government)
 - Funding agency
 - Opportunity status (forecasted, posted, closed)
4. **Review the full Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) details:**
 - Eligibility
 - Funding amount
 - Award floor and ceiling amounts
 - Application deadline
 - Required application materials
 - Requirements (pre- and post-award)
 - Contact information
5. **Track and Organize Opportunities**
 - Use a tracking spreadsheet or a grant management database to record important details about the grant(s):
 - Opportunity title
 - Agency and contact
 - Eligibility notes
 - Deadline(s)
 - Status (e.g., researching, under consideration, applied, awarded)
 - Amount
 - Cost Share (Matching) Requirements
 - Notes and next steps

Common Mistakes in Grant Research

1. Not Defining Clear Goals

- **Mistake:** Searching for "*any available funding*" without a specific project or need in mind. Organizations SHOULD be looking for grant opportunities for projects that are approved, clearly defined, and supported by the organization.
- **Fix:** Clearly define your project's purpose, target population, and funding needs before you begin.

2. Missing Deadlines

- **Mistake:** Overlooking application deadlines or misunderstanding the timeline to properly prepare.
- **Fix:** Track deadlines in a calendar or spreadsheet and set reminders well in advance. Understand that proper planning for a grant-funded project may take months or years of work before submitting an application.

3. Ignoring Eligibility Requirements

- **Mistake:** Applying for grants without confirming your organization meets the eligibility criteria.
- **Fix:** Carefully review the "Eligibility" section of each opportunity before investing time in an application.

4. Not Reading the Full Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)

- **Mistake:** Skimming or skipping the full NOFO and missing critical details.
- **Fix:** Read the entire NOFO to understand requirements (application and post-award requirements), evaluation criteria, and submission instructions.

5. Poor Organization

- **Mistake:** Losing track of opportunities, deadlines, or application materials; not knowing your organization's priorities and key project areas.
- **Fix:** Use a grant management tracking system or spreadsheet to stay organized and strategic. This will help with application preparation and timely submission of grant proposals.

6. Not Setting Up Alerts or Subscriptions

- **Mistake:** Manually checking for new opportunities and missing updates.
- **Fix:** Set up email alerts on Grants.gov and subscribe to relevant agency newsletters/announcements so you never miss an opportunity.

7. Overlooking Cost-Sharing (Matching) Requirements

- **Mistake:** Applying for grants that have a cost sharing (matching) requirement before you have the funding secured.
- **Fix:** Check for cost-sharing requirements and ensure you can meet them before applying.

8. Not Researching Past Awards

- **Mistake:** Failing to understand what types of projects have been funded in the past.
- **Fix:** Use SAM.gov, USAspending.gov, or agency websites to review past awards and tailor your proposal accordingly.

9. Not Building Relationships

- **Mistake:** Treating grant research as a solo activity without engaging with stakeholders, others within your organization, funders, or peers.

- **Fix:** Reach out your stakeholders and program officers with questions and network with other grantees for insights.

10. Applying Without a Strong Fit

- **Mistake:** Applying for grants that don't align well with your mission or capacity.

Fix: Focus on opportunities that are a strong match for your goals, capabilities, and track record.

Additional Resources

- www.grants.gov
- www.sam.gov
- www.federalregister.gov
- www.usa.gov/grants
- www.usaspending.gov

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