



# The Full Federal Grant Life Cycle

This quick guide provides a comprehensive and detailed explanation of the federal grant life cycle, outlining the responsibilities, timelines, and compliance requirements for each phase. It is designed to support grant applicants, recipients, and administrators in navigating the full process from planning to closeout.

## Understanding the Three Major Phases of Federal Grant Management

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**Background**

The federal grant life cycle is the structured process through which federal agencies plan, award, and oversee grants.

It is divided into three major phases:

- 1. **Pre-Award Phase**
- 2. **Award Phase**
- 3. **Post-Award Phase**

Each phase includes specific steps and compliance requirements for both the grant-making agency and the recipient. Understanding this life cycle is essential for ensuring eligibility, securing funding, and maintaining compliance throughout the grant period.

**Key Components**

**A. Pre-Award Phase**

This phase begins with the planning of a funding opportunity and ends when the award decision is made.

### **Federal Agency Responsibilities:**

- Develop clear program goals and funding priorities that align with the agency's strategic goals and initiative ([OMB Circular A-11, Part 6, "Strategic Plans, Annual Performance Plans, Performance Reviews, and Annual Program Performance Reports"](#)).
- Select the appropriate assistance mechanism (grant vs. cooperative agreement).
- Create or update an Assistance Listing Number (ALN) in the System for Award Management (SAM) managed by the General Services Administration (GSA).
- Draft and publish the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) in the Federal Register and Grants.gov. The NOFO must include a summary, availability period, and full text of funding opportunity ([2 CFR 200.204](#)).
- Establish eligibility criteria, evaluation metrics, and submission deadlines.

### **Applicant Responsibilities:**

- Register with required systems (e.g., SAM.gov, Grants.gov).
- Review NOFOs and determine eligibility and alignment with organizational goals.
- Develop and submit, on time, a complete application.
- Respond to clarifications or requests for additional information (if applicable).

### **Review Process:**

- Applications are screened for eligibility and completeness.
- Peer or technical review panels evaluate proposals based on published criteria.
- Agencies conduct risk assessments (pre-award risk assessments and organizational risk factors) and may request clarifications.
- Review Responsibility/Qualification records on SAM.gov. This helps agencies make informed awarding decisions on prospective recipients and protect the government from awarding grants to recipients that are not responsible.
- Agencies will conduct a merit review of discretionary applications and the proposed activities in accordance with the awarding agency's written standards ([2 CFR 200.205](#)).

### **B. Award Phase**

This phase begins once the agency selects recipients and issues formal award notifications.

#### **Agency Responsibilities:**

- Awarding agency prepares the award through the creation of a grant agreement.
- Notify successful and unsuccessful applicants.

- Issue Notice of Award (NOA) with terms and conditions, which must include ([2 CFR 200.211](#)):
  - Recipient Legal Name
  - Unique Entity Identifier (UEI)
  - Federal Award Identification Number (FAIN)
  - Federal Funds Obligated
  - Total Cost-Sharing / Match
  - Total amount of the federal award, including approved cost-sharing /match
  - Period of performance start and end dates
  - Budget period start and end date
  - Budget approved by federal awarding agency
  - Federal Award project description
  - Name of Federal Awarding Agency and Contact Information of Awarding Official
  - Assistance Listing Number (ALN) and Title
  - Indication if the award is for research and development
  - Indirect Cost Rate for the Federal award, including whether the de minimis rate (15%) is charged ([2 CFR 200.414](#))
  - Performance Measures
  - General conditions
  - Specific conditions ([2 CFR 200.208](#))

#### **Recipient Responsibilities:**

- Review and accept the award. This requires the recipient or subrecipient to return a signed document acknowledging that they accept the award and all of its conditions.
  - For other agencies, accepting a NOA or grant agreement occurs upon drawdown of funds or request for payment. Either action legally obligates the recipient/subrecipient to abide by the terms and conditions of the award.
- Set up internal systems for financial management, procurement, and property management.
- Begin project implementation in accordance with the approved scope of work.

#### **Key Considerations:**

- Understand and comply with Uniform Guidance ([2 CFR Part 200](#)).
- Prepare for ongoing monitoring and reporting to ensure compliance with the Uniform Guidance.

#### **C. Post-Award Phase**

This phase covers the implementation, monitoring, closeout of the grant, and audit.

**Recipient Responsibilities:**

- Execute the project as proposed.
- Maintain accurate financial and programmatic records.
- Submit required reports:
  - Federal Financial Report (SF-425)
  - Performance Progress Reports
  - Final Reports at closeout
- Monitor subrecipients (if applicable).
- Prepare for audits and evaluations.

**Agency Responsibilities:**

- Monitor performance and compliance through:
  - Desk reviews
  - Site visits
  - Audit reviews
- Provide technical assistance.
- Close out the award upon completion.
- The Federal awarding agency ensures non-Federal entities have a single audit conducted and submit a single audit reporting package to the Federal Audit Clearinghouse (FAC).
- The Federal awarding agency performs follow-up on audit findings to ensure the non-Federal entity takes appropriate and timely corrective action.

**Closeout Requirements ([2 CFR 200.344](#)):**

- Submit final financial and performance reports within 120 days (90 days for recipients) of the end of the period of performance.
- Resolve any outstanding issues (e.g., disallowed costs, equipment disposition).
- Retain records for at least 3 years post-closeout.

**Key Activities:**

- Program implementation.
- Financial and performance reporting.
- Audit and monitoring.
- Grant closeout and final reconciliation.

**Understanding the grant life cycle helps:**

- Applicants prepare competitive proposals
- Recipients maintain compliance and manage funding responsibility

## Next Steps & Recommendations

- Agencies ensure accountability and program success

**For New Applicants:** Begin registrations early and review NOFOs thoroughly.

**For Grant Managers:** Develop internal checklists and SOPs for each phase of the grant life cycle. Invest in training and systems that support compliance and performance.

**For Agencies:** Promote transparency and capacity-building for underserved applicants throughout the grant lifecycle.

## Additional Resources

- [Grants.gov - The Grant Lifecycle](#)
- [eCFR: 2 CFR Part 200 -- Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards](#)
- [OMB Circular A-11](#)

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