Assessing Staff Readiness

This quick guide provides a starting point for organizations to assess staff readiness and their ability to pursue and successfully manage grants.

Building Grant Readiness: A Guide to Staff Assessment

Publish Date	**DATE**
Background	Evaluating staff readiness is a critical first step in determining an organization's true preparedness for pursuing grants. This evaluation goes beyond operations; it's a strategic endeavor that demands leadership engagement, dedicated time and effort from management, input from staff, and, in some cases, investment in external expertise or specialized tools.

Organizations must evaluate whether their leadership and personnel are prepared to both pursue grant opportunities and manage the associated responsibilities. Federal and state grants are rigorous and often come with legal, financial, and compliance-related obligations. These must be understood, reviewed, and managed by qualified staff or designated representatives.

To effectively assess staff readiness, organizations should apply structured tools and methods to evaluate and prioritize:

- Staff competencies and capabilities
- Role clarity and alignment
- Willingness and capacity to support grant activity

One such method is the **G**rant **R**eadiness **A**ssessment **S**trategy **P**reparedness (GRASP) Tool, introduced by Diane H. Leonard, GPC, in her article *"Grant Readiness Score: Analyzing Strengths and Areas for Improvement"* (Journal of the Grant

Professionals Association, Fall 2017). GRASP provides a practical framework for evaluating organizational preparedness and identifying key areas for improvement.

Additionally, concepts from project management theory—such as readiness checklists, skills matrices, and stakeholder questionnaires—can be adapted to support internal assessments.

Key Components

Effective grant management begins with a strong foundation in staff readiness. Federal agencies, guided by 2 CFR 200 Uniform Guidance, assess not only the quality of grant proposals but also the organizational capacity to manage awarded funds responsibly. This readiness encompasses several interconnected components:

1. Staffing and Management Capacity

Organizations must demonstrate financial stability, sound management systems, and the ability to comply with federal requirements. Having the right staff and technical expertise is essential for application development, grant execution and management. Under **2 CFR 200 Uniform Guidance** (2 CFR 200.206), federal agencies are required to conduct risk assessments that examine an organizations:

- Financial stability.
- Past performance.
- Staffing and management systems.
- Ability to comply with statutory and regulatory requirements.

"Does my organization have the ability to complete the application and demonstrate the capacity to effectively manage awarded funds? Consider whether your organization has the necessary staff and technical expertise to develop a strong application." - U.S. Department of Transportation, DOT Navigator

2. Leadership and Organizational Structure

Strong leadership ensures clear roles, oversight, and access to professional development. This includes:

- Defining staff roles and responsibilities.
- Ensuring appropriate oversight.
- Providing access to ongoing professional development and support.

Staff members should have proven expertise in their functional areas and be supported with educational and training opportunities to remain current with evolving federal guidance and programmatic requirements.

3. Organizational Capacity

While individual staff members may bring significant experience, organizational capacity must be assessed holistically.

Consider the following:

- Direct and indirect contributors to grant efforts.
- Cross-departmental impacts of grant activities.
- Succession planning and mitigation of risks related to staff turnover.

If internal capacity is limited, organizations can explore strategic partnerships to expand their capabilities. Collaborating with other entities can provide access to specialized knowledge, broaden training opportunities, and share responsibilities across teams.

4. Staff Experience

Understanding existing internal experience is key to identifying gaps and leveraging strengths. Leadership should assess:

- Who has written, submitted, or managed grants in the past
- Which roles are best suited for proposal development, compliance, and implementation
- Where additional training or support is needed

This experience informs the composition of an effective grants team and the development of targeted capacity-building efforts.

5. Knowledge and External Resources

Building staff readiness for grant success may require support beyond internal capabilities. When in-house expertise is limited, external resources can play a vital role in strengthening organizational capacity:

- **Academic Partnerships:** Local colleges and universities offering programs in nonprofit management, public administration, or social work can be valuable allies. These institutions may provide access to interns or practicum students, bringing fresh perspectives and technical skills through faculty and student networks.
- **Professional Associations:** National organizations such as the Grant Professionals Association (GPA) and the National Grants Management Association (NGMA) offer robust training, certification programs, and networking opportunities. Their local chapters can help staff stay current with federal guidance and enhance grant management competencies.

By leveraging these external resources, organizations can supplement internal knowledge, foster continuous learning, and ensure their teams are well-prepared to pursue and manage grants effectively.

Staffing resources are a critical factor when assessing the overall readiness for pursuing grants. Successful grant strategy and execution requires employees to dedicate significant time, expertise, and energy. To determine whether your organization is prepared, consider whether your staff has the knowledge and capacity to perform the following essential grant-related tasks:

- **Identify, evaluate, and prepare grant applications** aligned with your mission and funding priorities.

- **Ensure compliance** with financial, programmatic, and regulatory requirements before, during, and after the grant period.

- **Design new projects or programs**—including developing budgets—that align with strategic growth and organizational goals.

- **Complete grant contracts and agreements**, and manage post-award responsibilities such as reporting, branding/acknowledgment, and regulatory adherence.

- **Oversee project or program deliverables** and fulfill administrative requirements such as activity tracking, time and effort reporting, and indirect cost management.

- **Problem-solve and adapt** when facing unexpected challenges or shifting deliverables.

Evaluating your organization's ability to perform these activities is a vital step in building a grant-ready workforce.

Understanding the Impact

Organizations that proactively assess staff capabilities and establish a well-defined structure for managing both pre- and post-award grant activities are better equipped to achieve meaningful outcomes. Key benefits of strong staff readiness include:

- **Sustainable Growth**: Strategic resource development and effective program implementation contribute to long-term organizational sustainability.

- **Risk Mitigation and Compliance**: A well-prepared team ensures grant activities align with regulatory and reporting requirements, reducing compliance risks.

- **Enhanced Collaboration**: Credibility and demonstrated capacity strengthen relationships with stakeholders, peer organizations, and industry partners.

- **Expanded Institutional Expertise**: Investing in staff readiness builds internal knowledge and skills, enabling the organization to scale and sustain grant strategies over time.

By prioritizing staff readiness, organizations lay the groundwork for successful grant engagement and long-term impact.

Next Steps & Recommendations

Leadership

- **Assess Organizational Capacity:** Evaluate current staff capabilities to pursue and manage grants effectively.

- **Strategize for Growth:** Develop a long-term plan to build staff capacity through professional development, training opportunities, and targeted incentive programs.

- **Champion a Grant-Ready Culture:** Lead efforts to embed grant readiness into organizational priorities and performance planning.

Managers

- **Implement Assessment Tools:** Create and deploy tools to capture data on staff experience, skills, and knowledge related to grants.

- **Set and Support Competency Goals:** Collaborate with leadership to define grant-related competency benchmarks and close identified gaps through training or staffing adjustments.

- **Align Resources with Readiness:** Ensure teams are equipped–through either internal development or additional hiring–to meet strategic grant objectives.

Grant Professionals

- **Contribute to Strategic Planning:** Actively advocate in developing readiness strategies.

- **Evaluate and Build Capacity:** Use proven tools and frameworks to assess staff readiness within your organization, including skills, knowledge, and abilities.

- **Provide Capacity Support:** Offer ongoing staff training or technical assistance to address deficiencies and enhance long-term capability.

- **Adapt to Evolving Needs:** Continue to adjust and reassess as staffing requirements shift with changing grant landscapes and opportunities.

Additional Resources

- U.S. Office of Personnel Management: Planning & Evaluating
- Grant-Readiness-Assessment
- Grants Workforce: Actions Needed to Ensure Staff Have Skills to Administer and Oversee Federal Grants | U.S. GAO
- GPC Comptencies and Skills 2017
- Grants Management Training Agency Guide.pdf
- Plan Within Your Organization | Grants & Funding
- eCFR : 2 CFR Part 200 -- Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards

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