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Resources for Grantseekers

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Summary

This report describes key sources of information on government and private funding, and outlines eligibility for federal grants. Federal grants are intended for projects benefiting states and communities. Individuals may be eligible for other kinds of benefits or assistance, or small businesses and students may be eligible for loans. Free information is readily available to grantseekers, who generally know best the details of their projects. The Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) describes more than 2,200 federal programs, more than half of them grants, and can be searched by keyword, subject, department or agency, program title, beneficiary, and applicant eligibility. Federal department and agency websites provide additional information and guidance, and they provide state agency contacts. Once a program has been identified, eligible grantseekers may apply electronically for grants at the website Grants.gov through a uniform process for all agencies. Through Grants.gov, grantseekers may identify when federal funding notices and deadlines for a CFDA program become available, sign up for email notification of funding opportunities, and track the progress of submitted applications.

Because government funds may be limited, the report also discusses sources of private and corporate foundation funding. The Foundation Center is a clearinghouse for information about private, corporate, and community foundations, with collections of resources in every state.

This report includes sources of information on writing grant proposals. See also CRS Report RL32159, *How to Develop and Write a Grant Proposal*, by Julie Jennings and Maria A. Kreiser.

Additional sources are also included in the CRS web page, "Grants and Federal Assistance." See also CRS Report RL34035, *Grants Work in a Congressional Office*, by Julie Jennings and Maria A. Kreiser.

This report will be updated at the beginning of every Congress and as needed.

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Introduction

Congressional offices are often approached by constituents seeking grants for projects, including local governments, nonprofit groups, community organizations, small businesses, and individuals. Though many hope for federal funding, such assistance is often limited. Other funding sources such as private foundations may also be an option.

Federal grants are not benefits or entitlements to individuals. Grants are 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 soup kitchens or after-school tutoring programs benefitting entire communities.

For others, such as for individuals seeking financial help, starting or expanding a small business, or needing funds for education, 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 useful the website GovBenefits.gov at <http://www.govbenefits.gov>.
- Students seeking financial aid can search Student Aid on the web at <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/>.
- To start or expand a small business, the federal government provides help in the form of loans and advisory and technical assistance. See the Small Business Administration (SBA) website at <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 should also be considered. State and community foundations may be particularly interested in funding local projects; 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 fund-raising 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, identifying appropriate programs, and then contacting federal and state agencies early in the process, before submitting formal applications, is recommended. State-located federal offices 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. Typically, most grantees fall into the following categories:¹

¹ Grants.gov website, “Who is Eligible for a Grant?,” at <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/learn-grants/grant-eligibility.html>.

- Government Organizations
 - State Governments
 - 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
- Non-Profit 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.

But, warns the FTC, these "money for nothing" grant offers usually are misleading, whether you see them in your local paper, through the Internet, or hear about them on television or receive a phone call. Consumers 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 (General Services Administration)

<https://www.cfda.gov>

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

The Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) is the primary source of information on federal grants and nonfinancial assistance programs. Actual funding depends upon annual budget appropriations. For example, some authorized federal programs may be described in the Catalog but Congress may choose not to fund them in a certain budget year. Key features of CFDA include the following:

- Describes some 2,200 federal domestic assistance programs, financial and nonfinancial assistance programs administered by the departments and agencies of the federal government; approximately 1,700 of these are grants programs.
- Allows grantseekers to identify federal programs that might provide support for their projects, either directly, or through grants to states and local governments that in turn make sub-awards to local grantseekers.
- Available free to the public, searchable full-text, and updated continuously on the web.
- Enables searching by keyword; or by other useful browsable listings, such as by subject, by department or agency, by applicant eligibility, by beneficiary, or by other category.
- For each program, describes objectives of the program, eligibility requirements, the application and award process, post assistance requirements, past fiscal year obligations and future estimates, program accomplishments and examples of funded projects, related CFDA programs, and information contacts, including regional or local offices of federal agencies if applicable.
- Links to department and agency websites and to Office of Management and Budget (OMB) circulars affecting program management and record-keeping requirements.
- Includes information on developing and writing grant proposals: provides guidance in formulating federal grant applications, proposal development, basic components of a proposal, review recommendations, and referral to federal guidelines and literature.

Grants.gov

<http://www.grants.gov>

FedConnect

<https://www.fedconnect.net>

After grantseekers identify federal programs in CFDA 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 obtaining Dun and Bradstreet (DUNS) numbers and registering with the System for Award Management (SAM); both required for all federal grants (follow instructions at <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/organization-registration.html>).

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 Contacts in States and State Administering Agencies

For eligible state and local governments and nonprofit organizations, after identifying appropriate programs it is recommended grantseekers contact federal and state agencies early in the process, before submitting formal applications. 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.

Federal Agency Regional and Local Office Addresses (from CFDA)

<https://www.cfda.gov/?s=appendix&mode=list&tab=list>

Many federal departments and agencies have state or regional offices that grantseekers can contact for additional program information and application procedures. 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 call the department or agency in question before applying for funding to obtain the most up-to-date information.

State Administering Agencies or Contacts

Many federal grants, such as formula and block grants, are awarded directly to state governments, which then set priorities and allocate funds within that state. 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:³

- Agriculture Rural Development State Contacts
<http://www.rd.usda.gov/contact-us/state-offices>
- National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Partners
<https://www.arts.gov/partners/state-regional>
- Commerce Offices and Services
<http://2010-2014.commerce.gov/about-commerce/services>
- Education (ED) State Contacts
<http://www2.ed.gov/about/contacts/state/index.html>
- Energy (DOE) Efficiency & Renewable Energy in My State
<http://apps1.eere.energy.gov/states/>
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Grant Regional Office
<https://www.epa.gov/grants/regional-grants-information>

³ Compiled by the Congressional Research Service (CRS) from executive department and agency websites.

- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) State Offices and Agencies
<http://www.fema.gov/emergency-management-agencies>
- Health and Human Services (HHS), Social Services Block Grants State Officials & Program Contacts
<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ocs/resource/ssbg-state-officials-program-contacts>
- 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
http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/field_policy_mgt/localoffices
- National Endowment for the Humanities (NEA) State Councils
<http://www.neh.gov/about/state-humanities-councils>
- Office of Justice Programs (OJP) State Administering Agencies
<http://ojp.gov/saa/>
- Labor (DOL) Employment and Training Administration, State and Local Contacts
<https://www.doleta.gov/regions/>
- Small Business Administration
<https://www.sba.gov/tools/local-assistance/districtoffices>
- Transportation, Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Regional Offices
<http://www.fta.dot.gov/12926.html>
- Veterans Affairs State/Territory Offices
<http://www.va.gov/statedva.htm>

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

http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants_spoc

States often 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). The state offices listed here coordinate government grants development and may provide guidance to grantseekers.

Related Federal Sources

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

<https://www.usa.gov/federal-agencies/a>

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, Grants and Loans
<https://www.usa.gov/benefits-grants-loans>
- Businesses and Nonprofits
<https://www.usa.gov/for-business-owners>
Links to federal department and agency information and services, including information on starting a nonprofit organization.

Grants Management Website (Office of Management and Budget)
http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants_circulars

OMB establishes government-wide grants management policies and guidelines through circulars and common rules. OMB circulars are cited in CFDA program descriptions. Circulars target grants recipients and audit requirements for educational institutions, state and local governments, and non-profit organizations.

Private, Corporate, and Additional Funding Sources

Foundation Center

<http://www.foundationcenter.org/>

Information gateway to the grant seeking process, private funding sources (including national, state, community, and corporate foundations), guidelines on writing a grants proposal, addresses of libraries in every state with grants reference collections, and links to other useful Internet websites. The center maintains a comprehensive 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:

- Guide to Funding Research
<http://foundationcenter.org/getstarted/tutorials/gfr/index.html>
- Foundation Finder
<http://foundationcenter.org/findfunders/foundfinder/>
Search for information about more than 90,000 private and community foundations.
- Proposal Writing Short Course
<http://foundationcenter.org/getstarted/tutorials/shortcourse/index.html>
Free tutorial on developing a good grant proposal; also in Spanish, French, and other languages.
- Foundation Center Funding Information Network
<http://foundationcenter.org/fin>
Libraries in every state providing the Foundation Directory Online and free funding information for grantseekers.

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://tgei.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)
<http://staff.lib.msu.edu/harris23/grants/index.htm>

The site provides government and private grants resources, primarily Internet, by subject or group categories, and is updated frequently. Webpages include

Funding for Business and Economic Development
<http://staff.lib.msu.edu/harris23/grants/2biz.htm>

Grants for Nonprofits
<http://staff.lib.msu.edu/harris23/grants/2sgalpha.htm>

Grants for Individuals (primarily financial aid and scholarships)
<http://staff.lib.msu.edu/harris23/grants/3subject.htm>

Grant Proposal Writing Websites

A number of websites provide guidance, tips, and sample proposals. Constituents may also request from congressional offices CRS Report RL32159, *How to Develop and Write a Grant Proposal*, by Julie Jennings and Maria A. Kreiser, which discusses standard content and formats. Websites that may be useful include the following:

- Developing and Writing Grant Proposals (CFDA)
<https://www.cfda.gov/?static=grants&s=generalinfo&mode=list&tab=list&tabmode=list>
- 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>
- How to Write a Grant Proposal for a Non-Profit Organization
http://www.ehow.com/how_5915785_write-grant-proposal-non-profit-organization.html
- How to Write a Non Profit Grant Proposal
http://www.ehow.com/how_7455798_write-non-profit-grant-proposal.html
- Proposal Writing Short Course (Foundation Center)
<http://foundationcenter.org/getstarted/tutorials/shortcourse/index.html> (also has sample proposals)
- Tips on Writing a Grant Proposal (Environmental Protection Agency)
<https://www.epa.gov/grants/tips-writing-competitive-grant-proposal-preparing-budget>
- Writing a Successful Grant Proposal (Minnesota Council on Foundations)
<https://www.mcf.org/writing-successful-grant-proposal>

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