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Research Service**

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Resources for Grantseekers

Updated October 17, 2019

Congressional Research Service

<https://crsreports.congress.gov>

RL34012

Summary

This report describes key sources of information on government and private funding, and outlines eligibility for federal grants. Federal grants are intended to accomplish public purposes through projects benefiting states and communities. Individuals may be eligible for other kinds of benefits or assistance, and small businesses or students may be eligible for loans.

Free information is readily available to grantseekers, who generally best know the details of their projects. The Assistance Listings database at beta.SAM.gov describes more than 2,200 federal programs, more than half of them grants, and can be searched by keyword, 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 (some federal grant opportunities may be administered by state-level agencies).

Once a program has been identified, eligible grantseekers may apply electronically for grants at the website Grants.gov through a uniform process for many agencies. Through Grants.gov, grantseekers may identify when federal funding notices and deadlines for a 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 publicly-accessible collections of resources in every state.

The report includes sources of information on writing grant proposals. See also the CRS Report RL32159, *How to Develop and Write a Grant Proposal*, by Maria 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 Maria 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. In some cases, other funding sources such as private or community foundations may be an additional (or alternative) 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 subawards 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 food kitchens or after-school tutoring programs—for faith-based grant recipients, projects must benefit the community at large and not solely the groups' members or parishioners.

For individuals seeking financial help (such as starting or expanding a small business, or educational assistance), 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 [Benefits.gov](http://www.benefits.gov) at <http://www.benefits.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 (such as business counseling). 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; however, 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. Federal offices located in states or regions 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

- 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
- Nonprofit 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 the FTC warns that these “money for nothing” grant offers are usually 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

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

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

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

Assistance Listings at beta.SAM.gov (General Services Administration)

<https://beta.SAM.gov/>

Official descriptions of more than 2,200 federal assistance programs (including grants, loans, and other financial and nonfinancial assistance) can be found on beta.SAM.gov. The website, produced by the General Services Administration (GSA), is currently in beta, and it houses federal assistance listings previously found on the now-retired Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA). Each federal assistance program has a corresponding CFDA program number; these CFDA numbers are still used as numerical program identifiers. Programs are searchable at the “Assistance Listings” domain at beta.SAM.gov; descriptions are updated by departments and agencies, and they cover authorizing legislation, objectives, and eligibility and compliance requirements. The site will eventually be renamed SAM.gov.

About 1,800 assistance programs are classified as grants. Assistance listing descriptions include the following:

- federal agency administering a program
- legislation authorizing the program
- objectives and goals of program
- types of financial or nonfinancial assistance
- uses and restrictions
- eligibility requirements
- application and award process
- criteria for selecting proposals
- amount of obligations for some past and current fiscal years
- range and average of financial assistance
- regulations, guidelines, and literature relevant to a program
- information contacts and headquarters, regional, and local offices
- related programs
- examples of funded projects
- formula and matching requirements, where applicable
- requirements for post-assistance reports

Grants.gov

<http://www.grants.gov>

FedConnect

<https://www.fedconnect.net>

After grantseekers identify federal programs in beta.SAM.gov 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 are required for all federal grants (follow instructions at <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/organization-registration.html>).

One significant limitation to Grants.gov and FedConnect.net is the exclusion of state-level grant program information. For example, Grants.gov provides information only about the funding opportunities for primary grant recipients (federal grant funds may be passed through the state to the local level; state government departments and agencies administer federal formula and block grants, and also fund projects). A local constituent would not be able to access information on Grants.gov about how to apply for federal funds available from a pass-through state-level agency, for example.

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

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.

After eligible local governments and nonprofit organizations have identified appropriate programs, it is recommended that they contact federal and state agencies early in the process and before submitting formal applications. Some agencies may also offer pre-application trainings for grant programs, to provide prospective applicants with information on the federal application process. 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.

State Administering Agencies or Contacts

Many federal grants, such as formula and block grants, are awarded directly to state governments, which then set priorities for funding 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
<https://www.commerce.gov/locations#2/40.5/-13.0>
- 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>
- 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
<https://www.transit.dot.gov/about/regional-offices/regional-offices>
- Veterans Affairs State/Territory Offices
<http://www.va.gov/statedva.htm>

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

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

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/SPOC-February-2019.pdf>

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.

OMB Circulars (Office of Management and Budget)

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/information-for-agencies/circulars/>

OMB establishes government-wide grants management policies and guidelines through circulars and common rules. OMB circulars are cited in beta.SAM.gov Assistance Listing program descriptions. Circulars target grants recipients and audit requirements for educational institutions, state and local governments, and nonprofit organizations.

Private, Corporate, and Additional Funding Sources

Candid (formerly the Foundation Center and GuideStar)

<https://candid.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. Candid 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:

- Introduction to Finding Grants
<https://grantspace.org/training/courses/introduction-to-finding-grants/>
- Foundation Finder
<http://foundationcenter.org/find-funding/fdo-quick-start>
Search for information about more than 90,000 private and community foundations.
- Introduction to Proposal Writing Short Course
<https://grantspace.org/training/introduction-to-proposal-writing/>
Free tutorial on developing a good grant proposal.

- Foundation Center Funding Information Network
http://foundationcenter.org/find-us#lookup_form
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://tgci.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)

<https://libguides.lib.msu.edu/grants>

The site provides government and private grants resources, primarily internet, by subject or group categories. Web pages include

Researching Potential Funders

<https://libguides.lib.msu.edu/c.php?g=96743&p=769466>

Grants for Nonprofits

<https://libguides.lib.msu.edu/c.php?g=96743&p=622545>

Grant Proposal Writing Websites

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

- 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
<https://bizfluent.com/write-grant-proposal-non-profit-organization-5490.html>
- Introduction to Proposal Writing Short Course
<https://grantspace.org/training/introduction-to-proposal-writing/>
- 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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Acknowledgments

This report was originally prepared by Merete F. Gerli, formerly an information research specialist at CRS.

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