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# HOW TO PREPARE A SUCCESSFUL GRANT APPLICATION

## THIS STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE WILL HELP YOU PLAN, PREPARE AND APPLY FOR GRANT FUNDING TO YOUR ORGANIZATION

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# Editor's Note

Many municipalities and nonprofit organizations, such as schools, police and fire agencies, public works, etc., cannot solely rely on tax revenue or donations to fund equipment, operational and programmatic needs. Grant funding is one solution that every public and nonprofit entity should consider to supplement their annual budgets.

If you are just beginning your search for grant funding or are familiar with grants but unsure of how to prepare, this guide offers a timeline of best practices to implement when searching for and applying for grant funds. The timeline covers:

1. **Strategic Planning**

2. **Approval Process**

3. **Administrative Requirements**

4. **Research Grants**

5. **Assembling the Grant Team**

6. **Developing the Investment Justification Statement**

7. **Submitting and Tracking the Application**

We hope that you will use this timeline to guide you through the pre-award process through to a successful application submission.

Stay safe,

Sarah Wilson, Vice President of the Grants Division at Lexipol

# About the Authors

**Stephanie Bays**, MPA, has led in a direct service role and in an administrative capacity for the public and nonprofit sectors for 13 years. Securing and maintaining a competitive award amount of $3.1 million, she served as the grant manager for the Dallas County Juvenile Department, where she directed a team in pre- and post-award grant processes. At Lexipol, she manages and supports the Grants Division's project management team, consultants and content for the grants database.
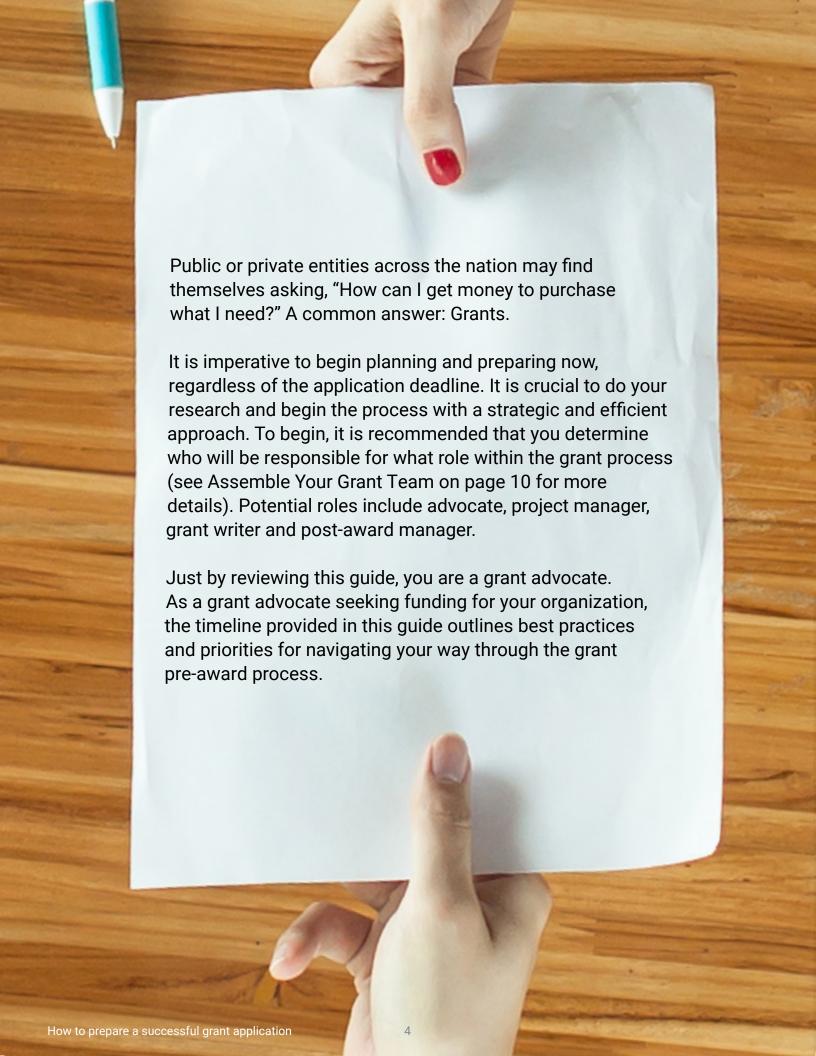
**Therese Matthews** is a highly respected grant professional with over 25 years of experience in grant writing, grants management and program development. Prior to her retirement in 2015, she was the grants manager for the New Jersey Department of Corrections and successful in obtaining over $140 million in federal, state and private grant funding for the agency. The grant award portfolio included federal funding from the departments of Justice, Education, Homeland Security, Health and Human Services, Labor and FEMA, along with several state and private foundation sources.

**Fatima Rasul** has an MPA, focusing on nonprofit management and policy. Through several years serving at-risk communities and the city of Dallas and at Lexipol, she has been able to assist with securing over $7 million in grant funding for public safety, including law enforcement, fire and community safety.

# About the Sponsor  MOTOROLA SOLUTIONS

Motorola Solutions provides mission-critical communications products and services to public safety, local government and commercial customers around the world. Our innovations, products and services play essential roles in people's lives. We help firefighters see around buildings, police officers see around street corners and school personnel communicate without boundaries. We provide the situational awareness first responders need when a moment brings catastrophe. We do this by connecting them to seamless communication networks, applications and services, by providing them with real-time information and by arming them with intuitive, nearly indestructible handheld devices. Many of these solutions are eligible for grant funding. Visit Motorola Solutions for more information.

Public or private entities across the nation may find themselves asking, "How can I get money to purchase what I need?" A common answer: Grants.

It is imperative to begin planning and preparing now, regardless of the application deadline. It is crucial to do your research and begin the process with a strategic and efficient approach. To begin, it is recommended that you determine who will be responsible for what role within the grant process (see Assemble Your Grant Team on page 10 for more details). Potential roles include advocate, project manager, grant writer and post-award manager.

Just by reviewing this guide, you are a grant advocate. As a grant advocate seeking funding for your organization, the timeline provided in this guide outlines best practices and priorities for navigating your way through the grant pre-award process.

# 1. Strategic Planning

A strategic plan can be a formal or informal process. This begins by identifying the need within the community you serve, or within your department, and establishing measurable goals and objectives that address it.

A formal process includes multiple stakeholders closely examining data and constructing a formal document that can be used for years to come. Your city, county or nonprofit agency may already have a formal strategic plan in place.
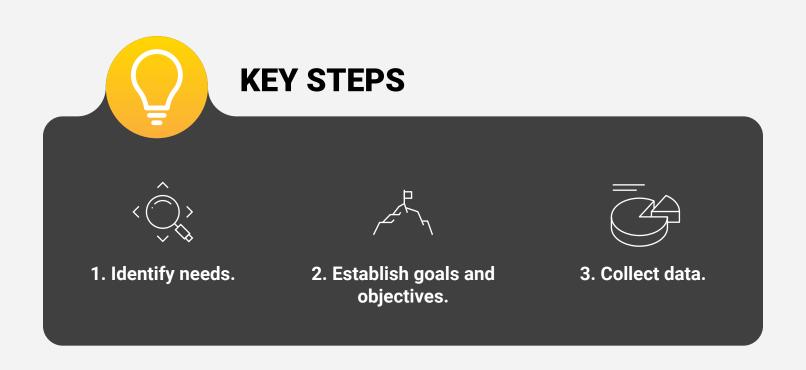
An informal process may consist of having appointed leadership, program managers, board members or city officials identify needs for the upcoming year.

Along with goals and objectives, the strategic planning process also validates your organization's need for funding by collecting quantitative and qualitative data. Some additional items to collect include:

- Organizational history (mission statement, background, community facts, etc.).
- Demographics (population, average household income, etc.).
- Financial information (operational budget or audits).

This information will assist you in searching for grant programs by concentrating your searches on grant applications that address the needs of your community or organization.

## KEY STEPS

1. Identify needs.

2. Establish goals and objectives.

3. Collect data.

# 2. Approval Process

Most grant programs require approval from an authorized official representative (AOR) in order to submit and receive awards. The AOR is the individual with legal authority to sign grant documents, give assurances, enter into contracts and execute documents. This can be the city manager, the police or fire chief, county judge, etc.

It is recommended to begin this process as early as possible. For instance, if the grant cycle is already open, immediately seek approval from your agency's or organization's leadership. If you have planned ahead and determined potential grant programs to apply to for the year, plan to seek approval within one to two months of the application period's start date.

To prevent a delay in submitting your application – or worse, missing the deadline – obtaining the permission of your entity's AOR and other leadership team members is key. This will also ensure that you have your leadership's buy-in when it comes to searching for and submitting grant applications.

When you secure their approvals early in the process, your leadership team will not be taken by surprise when you need to request their assistance, helping to make sure you achieve an on-time application submission.

> *THE AOR IS THE INDIVIDUAL WITH LEGAL AUTHORITY TO SIGN GRANT DOCUMENTS, GIVE ASSURANCES, ENTER INTO CONTRACTS AND EXECUTE DOCUMENTS.*

# 3. Administrative Requirements

Don't put off the administrative requirements. Start now! Most grant programs require the applicant to have an up-to-date System for Award Management (SAM.gov) registration or some other form of registration before being applying.

Any entity receiving federal funding must have an active registration in the System for Award Management. Many states will have their own registration requirements as well. If these requirements are not complete at the time of application, you will not be allowed to apply.

Below is a list of common registrations required to submit grant applications, including common federal application portals and administrative requirements with important links:

**DUNS** – Data Universal Numbering System

- DUNS provides a unique 9-digit identifier for your organization.

**SAM.gov** – System for Award Management

- Identify your point of contact (POC)/ authorized organization representative (AOR).
- Registration can take anywhere from three to five weeks.
- Create a Grants.gov account and assign roles.
- Requires yearly maintenance to ensure it stays active/renewed.

**FEMA Portal (i.e. FEMA GO)**

- AOR should have permission to submit the application.
- Login will be an email address and secure password.

**JustGrants**

- Grants management system used across the Department of Justice (COPS, OJP, OVW).
- Streamlined processes for data entry and electronic forms.
- Multiple users with access to all applications in progress across DOJ through this single portal.

**Unique State Agency Portals**

- Check your state government's website for specific grant programs managed by states (i.e. Homeland Security or criminal justice funding).
- See the "State Administering Agency" section on the next page for more details.

# 4. Research Grants

Once the needs of your department/organization are determined and the strategic planning process is complete, the next step is to begin the search for potential grant programs. The project your organization establishes will help determine which grant programs that are the right fit. Researchers use various methods and resources when searching for the perfect match.

**Grants Databases:** Both free and fee-based databases are available. These databases regularly enter new grant programs, as well as track and update existing grant programs. They typically include descriptions of each grant, plus a search function and categories to help filter and find grant programs that address your identified needs.

**Your State Administering Agency:** For state-funded and federal pass-through grant programs, the State Administering Agency is responsible for creating the solicitation and application, as well as establishing the awards process. The SAA decides how to apply and who is awarded. Depending on your type of organization, this can be separate agencies within your state's government.

The best practice for tracking funding, once the administering agency or grantor is identified, is to sign up for email notifications via their website, regularly check the website and reach out to the grant program's point of contact.

**Straight to the Source:** If you are searching for federal grant opportunities, Grants.gov is the database to search for every grant program at the federal level. For instance, if your agency is searching for a grant to implement a major project through the Office of Justice Programs, you would be able to search for opportunities via Grants.gov.
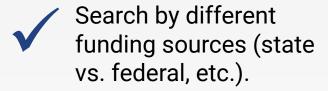
When performing your search, it helps to narrow your focus. Here are a few tips to keep in mind:
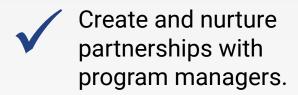
- Break down your search to different levels/types of funding sources: federal, state, local or foundation/corporate programs.
- Instead of searching for grant programs across the state, search with the specific project you would like to implement in mind. For instance, is the funding sought for equipment, personnel, training or a combination thereof?
- Cultivate relationships. Create and nurture partnerships with program managers.
- Manage strategic outreach. Follow up on the opening dates, deadlines, eligibility requirements and deliverables for the opportunities you choose to pursue.

When you find a grant program that coincides with your project's scope, it is important to ensure that your organization is eligible to apply. Often, eligibility is restricted by type of organization or geographic location. For instance, are those entities eligible to apply only extended to nonprofit organizations? If so, partnering with a nonprofit will be beneficial.

Finally, when reviewing the grant program's solicitation, be sure to review reporting requirements, which are due after the award is accepted and intended to ensure that the award will cover the cost of the project. If the award won't cover the whole amount, you should develop a plan to fund the remainder of your project's cost.
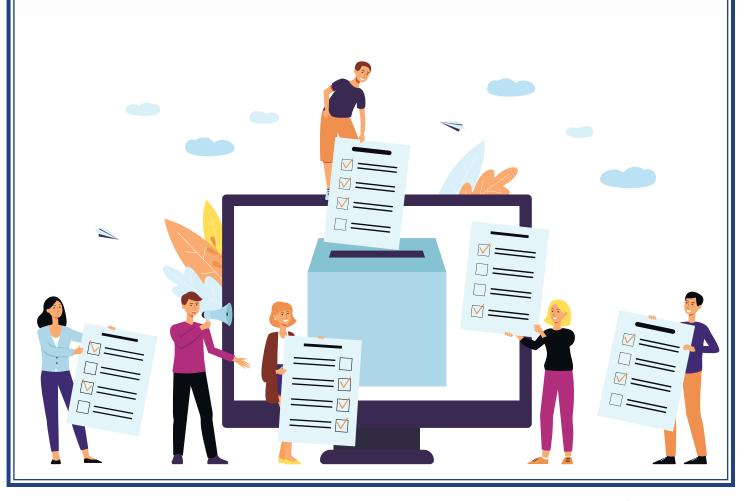
# PRO TIPS FOR YOUR GRANT SEARCH

✓ Search by different funding sources (state vs. federal, etc.).

✓ Create and nurture partnerships with program managers.

✓ Search with your specific project in mind.

✓ Follow up on opening dates, deadlines, eligibility requirements and deliverables.

How to prepare a successful grant application

# 5. Assemble Your Grant Team

To avoid potential delays, missed deadlines and misallocation of resources, it is crucial to identify key stakeholders who will play essential roles in researching, collecting data, completing and submitting the application. You can start now!

Appointing someone to assume the roles and manage the steps described below will ensure that the next tasks – approving and submitting – are hassle-free.

- **Advocate:** Just by reviewing this timeline, you are acting as the grant advocate. The advocate can be responsible for identifying and voicing needs, building the team and locating grant opportunities. The grant advocate will also identify who will manage the pre-award and post-award process.
- **Project Manager:** The project manager can be responsible for locating grant opportunities, maintaining administrative and registration requirements, coordinating stakeholders, compiling memorandums of understanding and ensuring timely submission.
- **Grant Writer:** The grant writer develops the application's narratives, identifies and collects data for the narratives and submits the application. (If you need assistance, contact the Lexipol Grants Team for assistance.)
- **Post-Award Manager:** The post-award manager ensures that all reporting/ purchasing requirements and project deliverables are met after the award is accepted.

You may identify with some or all of the assigned responsibilities. By proactively identifying which stakeholders take on which responsibilities, the pre-award process will be organized and efficient.

Grant applications can be challenging to navigate. To help, Motorola Solutions has partnered with Lexipol's grant experts to offer a wide range of free grant assistance programs.



These programs include:

- Free customized grant research specific to department needs.
- Grant alerts for upcoming grants.
- Unlimited free grant consulting from senior grant consultants.
- Discounted grant writing services.

Whether you're just getting started or are just looking to receive grant alerts, grant consultants are available to help. Get started and equip your agency with the technology that will keep your community safer.

# 6. Develop Your Investment Justification Statement

Once a target grant has been selected and roles identified, many applicants will wait until the grant cycle opens before taking any further action. However, **now** is the time to begin developing your application narratives.

Start with the investment justification. Using key information, such as data and financial summaries taken from your strategic plan, the investment justification explains the extent of the problem you aim to address and how the project to be implemented will meet the need.

When developing your investment justification, it is important to consider whether you are applying to an equipment or programmatic grant program.

- **Equipment grants** tend to focus on providing funding for agencies/ departments with equipment needs. This is common for public safety agencies like fire departments and law enforcement agencies that must have certain supplies available in order to respond to a crisis or to provide safety for first responders.

- **Programmatic grants** focus on providing funding to develop or expand programs or services to a targeted population in order to solve an identified problem. The benefit of this grant type is that the applicant can identify what to include in the budget, with some restrictions, as long as the budget request is an allowable cost that is justified within the project narrative and shown to be an essential request that addresses solving the problem. This can include various expenses, from hiring personnel to equipment and software needs.

# 7. Submit and Track Your Application

Probably 90% of the work occurs before a grant cycle even opens. By planning ahead, as soon as the opportunity opens, you'll be prepared to finish gathering required documents (such as documents that require the authorized official representative's signature) and assemble the application components efficiently.

Once you submit your application, be sure to check the application portal regularly for additional requests from the grant maker for information/documentation. Depending on the grantor, award notifications are typically made four to six months after the application is submitted.

# RESOURCES

**PoliceGrantsHelp**



**FireGrantsHelp**



**GovGrantsHelp**



**EducationGrantsHelp**



**Government Grants**

# FREE GRANT ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE

## POLICE GRANTS
PoliceGrantsHelp.com

## GOVERNMENT GRANTS
GovGrantsHelp.com

## FIRE GRANTS
FireGrantsHelp

## EDUCATION GRANTS
EducationGrantsHelp.com

Grant applications can be challenging to navigate. To help you receive additional funding for your projects., Motorola Solutions has partnered with the grant experts to offer you a wide range of free grant assistance programs.

**These grant assistance program includes:**

- Free customized grant research specific to department needs
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Take advantage today. Whether you're just getting started, or are just looking to receive grant alerts, grant consultants are available to help. Get started and equip your agency with the technology that will keep your community safer.

https://www.motorolasolutions.com/en_us/solutions/government-grants.html

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