Grants Management
Lunch and Learn Series
Session 1: *Improving Your Grant Writing Skills*

On behalf of the State of New Jersey
Department of the Treasury, Grants Management Office
July 9, 2025

GRANTS MANAGEMENT OFFICE
RUTGERS

Grant Basics

- Grants are--an implicit or explicit agreement/contract
- Even grants for operating support carry with them an obligation to use the funder's resources wisely to help continue the work of the organization
- Involves deliverables, restrictions/agreements, such as cost-share/match
- Contains specific start and end dates
- Financial and programmatic reporting is often required
- Unexpended funds may need to be returned
- Non-governmental sponsors often use the terms "gifts" and "grants" interchangeably, but they have different reporting requirements and may require fiduciary management/reporting

Organizational Responsibilities

- Financial Reporting Requirements
- Cost-sharing/Matching
- Recordkeeping
- Performance Reporting
- Audit
- Purchasing Equipment with Federal Grant Funds
- Sanctions for Violating Regulations, Compliance, etc.

The Grant Lifecycle

- Pre-Award Phase-funding opportunities and application review
- Award Phase-award decisions and notifications
- Post-Award-implementation, reporting, and closeout

Always Avoid Mission Drift

Funding dilemma

- Settle for the best fit vs. hold out for the exact fit

Grant funding should help your organization become:

- Sustainable
- Focused
- Productive

Writing Style

- Be sure to mention the funder's name and align to their mission
- Be direct and concise
- Avoid word repetition
- APA Style
  - Font-unless specified, Times New Roman, 12 point (one font)
  - Margins are 1 inch on all sides
  - Justify paragraphs (neatness counts)
  - Name figures and graphs (use crisp images and reasonable size)
  - Table of Contents (if space allows)

Style Matters

- A grant proposal demands a different style of writing
- Consider it a document of persuasion
- Statistics and facts, rather than personal opinions and assumptions
- Citable sources
- Convey confidence, pride, and most importantly passion

Why Pre-Planning Makes the Difference

- It helps increase your competitiveness in the application process
- Allows for proactive planning for application details
- Allows for maximum buy-in from collaborators and staff
- Allows for redundancy in the feedback loop from your grant team and partners
- Reduces stress and anxiety of individuals involved in the process

Coordination is Needed

- Determine who fill facilitate the pre-planning process, whether an outside facilitator, internal grant professional, or an external grant professional
- Looking at previously funded applications and previous Request for Proposals to understand the information that will likely be required as part of your proposal
- Identifying key timelines and objectives for the pre-planning process based on the anticipated release of an opportunity
- Holding an initial grant team meeting to ensure coordination of efforts

Registrations, Usernames, & Passwords

- Registration is often a one-time process
- Once you are properly registered, you should receive an email notification
- For Federal opportunities, registrations can take anywhere from 3 business days to as much as 4 weeks
- Depending upon the site, some accounts expire 60 days after inactivity
- Keep Usernames and password information in a safe place
- Be sure to log-in prior to the submission deadline

User Guides

- For Federal opportunities be sure to download the Applicant-User Guide
- For Foundational/Corporate opportunities directions are typically found on the sponsor's website
- Make every effort to listen to Webinars and review grant resources

Quick Steps for Checking the Fit

- Goals and priorities
- Eligibility requirements
- Deadlines
- Amount of funding available
- Limitations on funding
- Evaluation criteria
- Cost sharing or matching
- How payments will be received
- Application procedure
- Any other detail that might impact your project's successful fit with the funding

GRANTS MANAGEMENT OFFICE
RUTGERS

Bring More Federal Grant Opportunities to Your Community

Grant Finder Webpage Video Demo

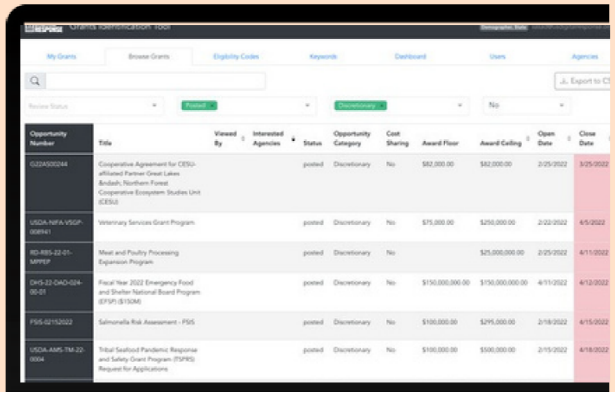
https://www.nj.gov/treasury/grants-management/federal-grant-finder/

Nava

GRANTS MANAGEMENT OFFICE

Bring more federal grant opportunities to your community

With improved search and notification capabilities plus the ability to collaborate across agencies, The Federal Grant Finder can help state and local governments find relevant federal grants faster and increase cooperation between different grant-seeking teams.



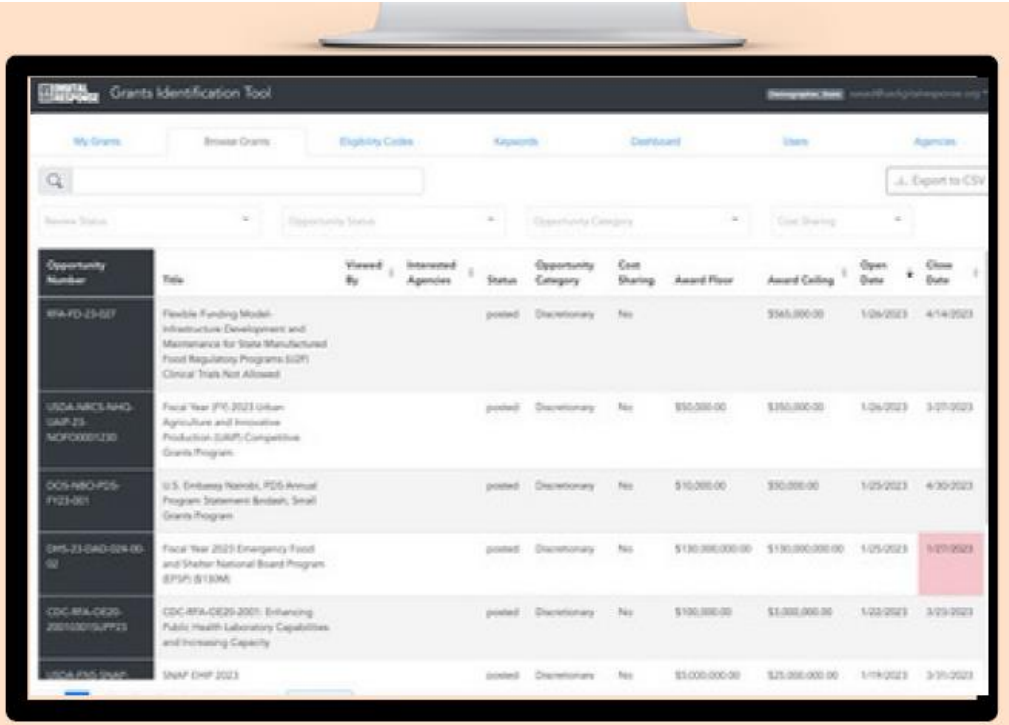
GRANTS MANAGEMENT OFFICE

RUTGERS

Bring More Federal Grant Opportunities to Your Community (Continued)

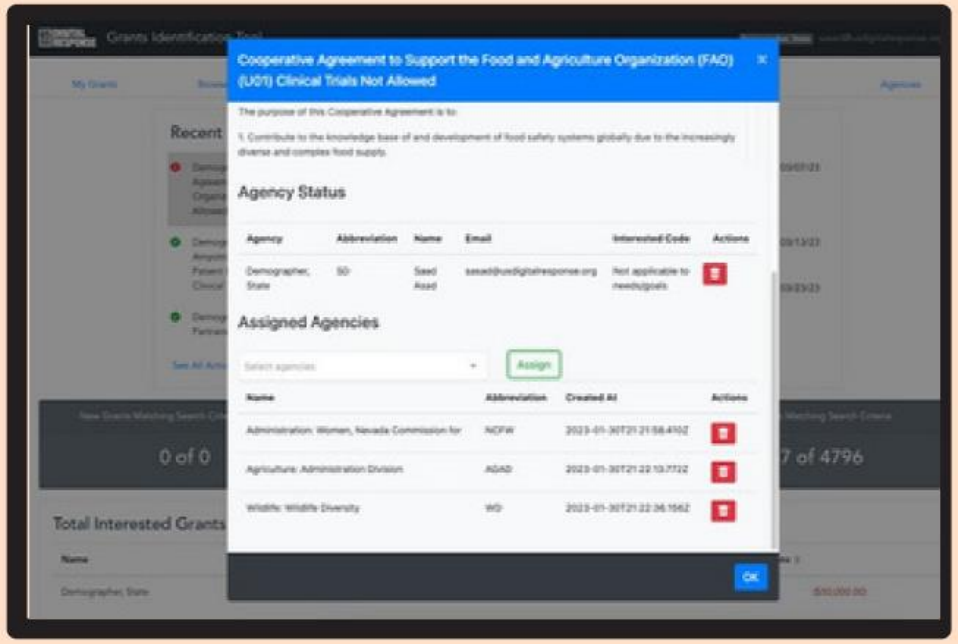
Find federal grants faster than on grants.gov

- Use a saved keyword search so you never have to re-enter the same keywords again
- Receive daily email notifications when new grants relevant to your saved keywords pop up
- Sort and filter grants by award amount, cost-sharing requirements, close date, and more



GRANTS MANAGEMENT OFFICE
RUTGERS

Bring More Federal Grant Opportunities to Your Community (Continued)



Empower regional collaboration with strong project management

- Empower joint applications for grants by providing visibility into each program teams' federal grant focus
- Track all the federal grants your organization is applying for across different teams
- Assign federal grant opportunities to other teams or indicate support for other teams grant interests

GRANTS MANAGEMENT OFFICE
RUTGERS

Grant Research Services

- If you need support identifying federal funding opportunities, feel free to contact the Grants Management Office.
- Be sure to complete a Grant Research Request on our website.
- This form includes a brief series of questions to help us understand your organization's funding needs and areas of interest.
- Once submitted, a member of our team will follow up with tailored grant opportunities based on your responses.

Grant Research Request Form

GRANTS MANAGEMENT OFFICE
RUTGERS

Understanding Federal Funding Announcements

- The Overview Information-program or application changes since prior year. includes the agency name, opportunity title, announcement type (new or modification), funding opportunity number, CDFA number, key dates and other general additional information. Eligibility information-eligible applicants, match, etc.
- Executive Summary-is a summary of the grant program and requirements to help an applicant determine whether they wish to apply. The information found here may include the objectives of the grant (the activity grant funds can be used to support) and who is eligible to apply for the grant (the types of applicants—nonprofits, for profits, individuals, etc.) It also describes the beneficiaries the population the grant must serve.
- Congressional Legislation that authorizing the issuing agency to make funds available for specified grant opportunity.

Understanding Federal Funding Announcements-Continued

- The Funding Opportunity Description-contains required forms, submission dates and times, estimated total program funding (ceiling, floor, and awards).
- Describes in detail the content that must be included in the proposal narrative. It will also contain instructions on how the documents must be titled.
- Also, provides guidance on program goals, impact requirements, and project types. This is key information for how you form your application goals, objectives, details regarding how to apply, and suggested references, etc.
- Be sure to check Grants.gov. Certain Federal agencies are notorious for updating RFP after publication.
- Required and Optional Forms to be completed, which may require an Authorized Official Signature from your organization. For example: SF-424, 424a, and other special forms.

Application Review Criteria

- Most government grants are awarded on a competitive basis, meaning your proposal will be evaluated against all other proposals submitted.
- Project need/adherence to the program priorities; project sustainability; soundness of your approach; probability of achieving results; financial management capability; viability of matching funds.
- To be considered “responsive,” the proposal narrative must contain all sections described in the RFP, but also all the content requested in each section.
- Experience with grant program activities and the applicant’s past performance as a grantee, among other things.
- Always clearly address the factors listed within the evaluation criteria section.

Sponsor Name & the Flow of Grant Funding

- Where does sponsor's funding derive from?
- What is mission of organization?
- Familiarize yourself with their strategic plan.
  - To align with the current administration's priorities, many sponsors will update their strategic plans.
- What is their funding history?
- What is the political history of the organization?
  - Is the organization tied to any specific legislation?

Sponsor's Web Links Can Become a Proposal's Lifeline

- There will be critical information on the funder's homepage that may provide resources connected to the RFP's purpose
- If the submission is listed on grants.gov, revisions to the RFP will be available there
  - Continue to check, even on the day of submission
- Make notes of the contacts and the rules for communicating with the sponsor
- Webinars are always a good source of information

Grant Program Names Can Inspire You

- What is the name of the grant program?
- Note the name and think about how it informs the RFP's purpose
- Consider using the grant program name to inspire ideas the proposal name
- Be sure to review the RFP to see if the funder has already determined the name of the program. If it is not specified, creativity is encouraged.

Diversifying Your Funding

- Diversifying income streams is crucial to funding a vibrant project that is relevant and responsive
- Sponsored projects can help accomplish programming and projects that would not be possible otherwise.
- The economy can influence funding. Unfortunately, Federal budgets are always changing, and the future is uncertain. State funding is variable as well. Consider an approach that incorporates foundational and corporate sponsorship, when possible.

It’s Competitive Out There

- Agencies like to fund partnerships. Be sure to get partnerships and in-kind donations in writing.
- Try to avoid duplicating services already in the community
- Don’t stretch what you are truly capable of doing
- Follow the grant instructions precisely
- You are responsible for the actions of your grant writers, consultants, and partners
- Identify the most appropriate sources of funding early in the process to ensure that the effort expended is worthwhile

How to Quickly Review a Grant Announcement

- Overall project timeline (start and end dates)
- Evaluation criteria
- Expectations on collaboration
- Frequency of payments
- Reporting expectations
- Other details that might impact your project's fit with funding

Reality Check

- Does this fit with the mission of your organization and the grant?
- Is the scale correct in terms of time, funding levels, and necessary skill sets to accomplish your grant program?
- Do you have everything you need to accomplish your objectives?
  - Either on hand or via grant expenditures
- Discuss and review appropriate benchmarks, implementation plan, defining impacts, outcomes, results, monitoring, evaluation, reports, and budget

Develop a 1-pager that

- Concisely presents and promotes your idea on an easy-to-read, single page
- Can help you identify clear objectives and focus them, identify issues, target your thinking, and fine-tune your pitch
- Demonstrates your ability to plan and proposes specific action to be taken
- Recognizes your readers' knowledge, experience, good judgement, allowing them to act quickly and decisively

Strategies for a One-page Pitch

- Demonstrate the need for the program/project
- How strong is the evidence?
- Can you assemble the necessary resources and stakeholders?
- Will the impact be broad enough?
- Can we develop support for this?
- What will it take to sustain it?
- Explain your concept concisely and in non-technical terms
- List your objective(s), methods and expected outcomes
- Stress the project's uniqueness
- How the outcome(s) will address an important problem or contribute to the field of knowledge

GRANTS MANAGEMENT OFFICE
RUTGERS

Why LOI's Are Declined

- Poorly written
- LOI had been previously submitted for the same program within 12 the past months
- The Foundation already funds a similar program or service
- For organization and programs serves individuals outside of the Foundation's geographic focus
- No track record
- Organization has had significant leadership turnover
- The organization has already received a grant in the current fiscal year

Grant Proposal Elements

- Cover Sheet
- Abstract/Proposal Summary
- Narrative
- Objective
- Approach
- Evaluation
- Budget

Cover Sheet

- Date of application
- Name of the organization to which the grant would be paid. Please list the exact legal name
- Purpose of the grant (one sentence)
- Address of organization
- Telephone, Fax, and Email
- Executive Director, Financial Contact—include title and appropriate contact information
- Is your organization an IRS 501 (c)(3)
- Project name
- Grant request: $
- General support or Project support
- Period of performance
- Total project budget

GRANTS MANAGEMENT OFFICE
RUTGERS

Abstract/Proposal Summary

- One-half page, maximum. Summarize in a short paragraph the purpose of your organization
  - Who I am
  - What I propose to do
  - How I propose to do it
  - Why this is important
  - What are the objectives
  - What are the outcomes you hope to achieve
  - If applicable, how much it will cost

GRANTS MANAGEMENT OFFICE
RUTGERS

Narrative

Five pages maximum

Background—Describe the work of the organization, addressing each of the following:

- A brief description of its history and mission.
- The need or problem that your organization works to address, and the population that your agency serves, including geographic location, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, physical ability, and language.
- Current programs and accomplishments. Please emphasize the achievements of the recent past.
- Number of paid full-time staff; number of paid part-time staff; number of volunteers.
- Your organization's relationships — both formal and informal — with other organizations working to meet the same needs or providing similar services.
- Please explain how you differ from these other agencies.

Narrative (Continued)

- Should meet a need or solve a problem
- Explain the problem, causes of the problem, and make the case for why it is necessary to fund the idea
- Include the nature and extent of the problem or need. Be sure to clearly identify the picture of the existing situation.
- Always provide local statistics or data to show impact
- Include relevant references to past work
- Refer to funding agency's purpose and program goals and describe the likely results and benefits of the research for the end users
- Draw connections between your work and the mission of the agency
- Use evidence of your accomplishments

Objective

- Always enumerate your objectives. This helps with clarity, logic and order.
- An objective is a measurable outcome of a project
- Be able to measure, within a set timeframe
- Indicate a change in the problems
- Be linked to the data provided in the problem statement
- For example: to increase…to decrease…to reduce

Rationale and Significance

- Connect your proposal to the purposes of the competitive grants program to which you are applying to and speak directly to the requested service
- Relate your proposed research to the purpose of your institution. Don’t tailor your organization to the proposal just for assistance. You’re submitting a proposal because you are familiar with the work in question.
- Be reasonable in the size or the dimension of the project and make sure you are supported by facts, statistics and relevant literature

Demonstrate Your Knowledge of the Topic

- Include all the relevant preliminary data that you have collected or to which you have access
- Describe how your proposed project fits into your program's research agenda, contributes to your science discipline, and relates to research outside your discipline

Developing Project Goals

- Broad purpose and impact statements
- Capture the imagination of the reader
- Your proposal should build upon and extend present knowledge
- How your project is different or better
- Relate your project goals to specific objectives

Goals vs. Objectives

- Goals are intangible, while objectives are tangible
- Clearly defined goals and objectives can greatly aid in the development of a proposal
- It is important to communicate the goals and objectives to any party involved in the proposal submission

Approach

- The approach explains the specific activities that will be conducted to achieve the objectives
- Always relate back to the reasons and causes of the problem or need
- Justify the amount of funding requested
- Clearly identify who will be served by the project
- Identify the specific activities of the proposal, who will be conducting the activities, and when the activities will occur. Be sure to clearly explain the methods and procedures that you will be using

Things to Consider Project Implementation

- How and when your project will be implemented?
  - Be sure to develop a work plan with specific activities/actions and a defined timeline.
- Be sure to identify the participants/grant beneficiaries
- Describe where the project will be conducted
- Explain why these methods accomplish the project goal(s)
- Roles for partners should be defined. Be sure to explain who is responsible for what.
- Be sure to demonstrate that your organization has the capacity to complete the necessary work

Reality Check

- Does this fit with the mission of your organization and the grant?
- Is the scale correct in terms of time, funding levels, and necessary skill sets to accomplish the grant program?
- Do you have everything you need to accomplish objectives?
  - Either on hand or via grant expenditures
- Have you included Benchmarks, defining impacts, outcomes, results, monitoring, evaluation, reports, and budget?

Methods

- This section should flow from the stated problems to be addressed and the associated project/program objectives
- Be sure to clearly explain the methods and procedures that you will be using the research

Rationale and Significance

- Connect your proposal to the purpose of the competitive grants program to which you are applying to
- Relate your research to the purpose of the sponsor. Don't tailor your organization to the proposal just for assistance. Remember you are submitting a proposal because you are familiar with the work in question.
- Be reasonable in size or the dimension of the project and make sure you are supported by facts, statistics and relevant literature

Impacts and Evaluation

- Be sure to explain how you will measure the effectiveness of your activities. What do you expect your beneficiaries to do?
- Describe the criteria for a successful program and the results you expect to achieve by the end of the funding period.
- Evaluation is the key to future funding. Applications should contain some form of evaluation.
- Provide a means for measuring the outcome of the project
- Provide a system for measuring how the project was implemented and feedback for the improvement for operations
- Be related to the objectives and problem or need
- Describe your planned statistical analysis. (Economic, Social, or Environmental)
- Describe the likely outcomes of the projects and alternatives to unanticipated problems

Connecting Impacts and Evaluation

- Don’t forget—Evaluation is the key to future funding
- What do you expect your beneficiaries to do?
- How can your accomplishments be assessed?
- How will you track progress on goals and objectives?
- How will you measure impacts of your project?
- Evaluate and measure impacts—economic, social, and environmental, etc.
- This is the key to project replication and sustainability!

Timeline

- This section should be organized in a logical sequence and target the dates for the task completion
- Be sure to indicate times at which you would expect to notify the granting agency that the research activities have been accomplished
- Plan using quarters
- Always allow enough time to effectively evaluate your project
- Be flexible and reasonable

Outreach & Marketing

- How will the project be promoted?
- How will you create buy-in from the project team and stakeholders?
- How will you communicate success?
- How will you communicate who benefited from the project?

Budget

- Review the Request for the Proposal
- What is allowed to be charged to the grant?
- Know your limits—look for cost sharing requirements and indirect cost exceptions
- Always round to whole dollars
- Request a reasonable amount of money to do the work, not more, not less
- Remember **CARA:** Consistent, Allowable, Reasonable, Allocable

Budget Narrative

- 1-2 paragraphs
- State the total project cost and the amount request from the sponsor
- Indicate the categories to be funded
- Review the RFP for allowable categories
- Include other sources of funding, both cash and in-kind
- If appliable, indicate your organization plans to contribute

General Operating Support Advice

- Statement about its purpose
- The population that you plan to serve
- How this population will benefit from the project
- Strategies that you will employ to implement your project
- Proposed staffing pattern for the project, and the names and titles of the individuals that will direct the project
- Anticipated length
- How this support contributes to your organization’s overall mission

Most Common Reasons Grant Proposals Fail

- Fierce competition
- Unclear outcomes
- Lack of collaboration
- Not understanding the audience
- Scope of work is too vague, too narrow, too broad
- Evaluation plan is disjointed
- Late/incomplete submission
- Length exceeds guidelines
- Requested amount exceeds award ceiling and inefficient or costly practices
- Reviewers can smell a sloppy copy a mile away.
- Ensure all statements are complete and well-researched

GRANTS MANAGEMENT OFFICE
RUTGERS

Award Notification

- Varies from sponsor to sponsor
- Award paperwork often includes a Notification of Award, an Agreement/Contract, Purchase Order
- Always make sure your award is accurate and communicate errors immediately
  - If an error is found, reach out immediately to your sponsor
    - Technical/Programmatic issues: Program Officers
    - Changes/Financial Officers: Grant Officer
- Be sure to look for provisions that are incompatible with your organizations policies

Be Sure to Attend Our Future Sessions!

August 6 at 1:00 p.m.

Strategic Grant Management-
Navigating Changes and Mitigating Risk

September 10 at 1:00 p.m.

Best Practices for
Documenting Grant Impact and Success

For questions or information, contact:

Jennifer Figueroa
Jennifer.Figueroa@treas.nj.gov

GRANTS MANAGEMENT OFFICE
RUTGERS

Any Questions?

Elaine Griffin
Coadjutant Instructor
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station
Office of Continuing and Professional Education
E-mail: Rutgerswd@NJAES.Rutgers.edu

GRANTS MANAGEMENT OFFICE
RUTGERS