



EXPANDING YOUR

GRANT WRITING

TOOLKIT

Grant research, identification, and writing are often perceived as challenging tasks. However, they need not be overwhelming. Here are five concise tips to assist you in navigating the realm of grant acquisition effectively:

CLEARLY DEFINE YOUR PROJECT

Before starting your grant research, have a clear understanding of the purpose, goals, and objectives of your project. This will help you identify grants that align with your mission and increase your chances of receiving funding.

RESEARCH FUNDING SOURCES

Use online databases, grant directories, and funding websites to identify potential grants that are a good fit for your project. Look for grants that have previously funded similar projects or organizations to increase your chances of success.

TAILOR YOUR GRANT APPLICATION

Once you have identified potential funding sources, take the time to tailor your grant application to meet the requirements and priorities of each funder. Address how your project aligns with the funder's mission and goals.

TELL A COMPELLING STORY

Use data, evidence, and personal stories to make a compelling case for why your project deserves funding. Be clear, concise, and persuasive in your writing to capture the funder's attention and demonstrate the impact of your work.

REVIEW, REVISE, AND SEEK FEEDBACK

Before submitting your grant application, be sure to review it carefully for any errors or inconsistencies. Consider seeking feedback from colleagues, mentors, or grant writing experts to ensure that your application is strong and competitive.

ESSENTIAL GRANT WRITING COMPONENTS

A strong grant proposal typically includes the following key sections:

- Letter of Intent or Cover Letter – A brief, compelling overview of your proposal.
- Statement of Need – Clearly outline the problem your nonprofit is addressing.
- Project Description – Describe the program, objectives, and expected impact.
- Budget – Provide a detailed and realistic financial plan.
- Sustainability Plan – Explain how the project will continue beyond grant funding.
- Evaluation Metrics – Define how success will be measured.

QUICK GRANT WRITING TIPS

- ✓ Know Your Funder: Research grant guidelines and align your proposal with their priorities.
- ✓ Be Clear and Concise: Avoid jargon; use straightforward, compelling language.
- ✓ Tell a Story: Use real-life examples to make your proposal engaging.
- ✓ Use Data: Support your case with statistics and research.
- ✓ Follow Instructions: Stick to formatting, word limits, and required attachments.
- ✓ Proofread & Edit: Have someone else review for clarity and errors.

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

- ✗ Missing deadlines – Always submit well before the due date.
- ✗ Weak need statement – Clearly define the problem with supporting data.
- ✗ Unrealistic budget – Ensure costs are justified and align with project goals.
- ✗ Lack of measurable outcomes – Funders want to see impact, so specify success metrics.
- ✗ Ignoring funder priorities – Tailor your proposal to the specific grant requirements.

GRANT WRITING CHECKLIST

- ✓ Identify an eligible grant opportunity using reliable research databases
- ✓ Gather required documents
- ✓ Write a compelling needs statement and use data to support it
- ✓ Define clear goals and objectives
- ✓ Develop a strong, detailed budget
- ✓ Include letters of support (if applicable)
- ✓ Proofread and review before submission
- ✓ Submit before the deadline

GRANT IDENTIFICATION DATABASES

- ✦ BOOST Cafe (https://boostcafe.org/grants_and_funding)
- ✦ Society for Nonprofits (<https://www.snpo.org/publications/fundingalert.php>)
- ✦ Candid (<https://philanthropynewsdigest.org/rfps>)
- ✦ Funding for NGOs (<https://www.fundsforngos.org/>)



DIVERSIFYING

YOUR FUNDING

STREAMS

The Funding Stream Feasibility Matrix is a tool to help nonprofits evaluate different revenue streams based on key factors: sustainability, effort required, and risk. This helps organizations prioritize the most viable funding sources that align with their capacity and long-term goals.

Funding Source	Sustainability	Effort Required	Risk	Total Score (Higher Score = Best Viability)

Scoring Scale (1-5)

- Sustainability: 1 = One-time/short-term, 5 = Ongoing, reliable revenue
- Effort Required: 1 = Minimal effort, 5 = Requires significant resources/time
- Risk: 1 = Low restrictions/stable, 5 = High uncertainty/restrictions

Tip: The higher the total score (Sustainability – Effort – Risk), the more viable the funding stream is for your nonprofit.



DIVERSIFYING YOUR FUNDING STREAMS

Before committing to a funding stream, assess your nonprofit’s capacity using the following **Organizational Capacity Scale**.

Capacity Factor	Low (1 to 2)	Medium (3)	High (4 to 5)
Staff Expertise	No dedicated grant/fundraising staff	Some experience but limited staff	Experienced team in place
Time Availability	Limited staff capacity	Moderate ability to focus on fundraising	Strong team dedicated to fundraising
Financial Stability	Organization is financially struggling	Some financial cushion	Strong financial health
Donor and/or Funder Network	Small or new network	Growing network but needs development	Established donor base & funder relationships

- **Assess Each Funding Source:** Have key staff or board members score each funding stream using the table.
- **Prioritize High-Scoring Options:** Focus on funding streams with the best balance of sustainability, effort, and risk.
- **Align with Organizational Capacity:** Ensure your team has the expertise and resources to pursue high-priority funding streams.
- **Take Action:** Develop a plan to diversify revenue sources based on your nonprofit’s strengths and strategic goals.

Tip: If your organization scores mostly in the Low (1-2) range, prioritize lower-risk, lower-effort funding sources first (e.g., individual donors, small grants). If you score in the High (4-5) range, you may be ready to pursue larger, higher-effort opportunities like corporate sponsorships or government contracts.

BRIGHT FUTURES LEARNING HUB

Review the fictional OST program scenario and the two grant opportunities provided. Assess each opportunity and decide whether the organization should **Apply, Wait, or Walk** based on alignment, capacity, and sustainability. Be prepared to justify your decision using information from the scenario. There is no single correct answer. The goal is to practice strategic grant decision-making rather than applying for every available opportunity.

Mission Statement: Bright Futures Learning Hub empowers elementary and middle school students in under-resourced communities by providing high-quality afterschool academic support, literacy enrichment, and social-emotional learning experiences that strengthen school success and family engagement.

Bright Futures Learning Hub is a community-based OST program serving approximately 120 elementary- and middle-school students in a historically under-resourced neighborhood. The program offers afterschool academic support, literacy intervention, homework help, and enrichment activities, including STEM clubs and social-emotional learning groups. Family engagement includes quarterly literacy nights and parent workshops focused on supporting learning at home. The organization partners with a local elementary school, public library, and a community health nonprofit to provide wraparound services. Bright Futures operates with an annual budget of \$185,000, supported by modest program fees, individual donations, and a small private foundation grant. The organization employs one full-time Program Director, two part-time site coordinators, and hourly youth instructors. The board is moderately engaged, but fundraising participation is inconsistent. Bright Futures previously received a small community foundation grant but has not received significant government funding. They are seeking funding to expand literacy programming, hire additional staff, and strengthen data collection and evaluation systems.

Bright Futures Learning Hub has experienced steady enrollment growth over the past two years, driven by increased referrals from local schools and word of mouth from families. However, program staff are stretched thin, and outcome data are inconsistently collected across sites. While the organization has strong community trust, leadership recognizes that its internal systems, particularly evaluation and board fundraising engagement, need strengthening before pursuing larger, more competitive funding opportunities. The organization is beginning to formalize partnerships through MOUs and is exploring how to better align programming with school-day academic goals.

Questions to Consider:

- Does this grant clearly align with the organization's mission and the programs it currently offers (not a brand-new idea)?
- Does the organization have the staff time, systems, and expertise to apply for and manage this grant if awarded?
- Is the funding amount and reporting burden appropriate for the organization's budget, experience, and infrastructure?
- Is the organization ready to pursue this opportunity now, or would it be stronger after addressing key gaps (data, partnerships, board support)?
- If awarded or not, how would this decision impact the organization's sustainability and overall funding strategy?

NEXT LEVEL YOUTH

Review the fictional OST program scenario and the two grant opportunities provided. Assess each opportunity and decide whether the organization should **Apply, Wait, or Walk** based on alignment, capacity, and sustainability. Be prepared to justify your decision using information from the scenario. There is no single correct answer. The goal is to practice strategic grant decision-making rather than applying for every available opportunity.

Mission Statement: Next Level Youth prepares middle and high school youth for postsecondary success through leadership development, workforce readiness, mentorship, and career-connected learning that expands economic opportunity and community impact.

Next Level Youth serves approximately 90 middle and high school students through leadership development, workforce readiness, and college and career exploration programming. Services include mentorship, paid internships, financial literacy workshops, and youth-led community service projects. The organization has strong partnerships with local businesses, a community college, and a workforce development agency, and hosts regular family engagement sessions focused on postsecondary planning.

Next Level operates with an annual budget of \$420,000 and has a strong board that actively participates in fundraising, strategic planning, and community advocacy. Staffing includes an Executive Director, a Program Manager, a part-time Development Coordinator, and contracted facilitators. The organization has previously been awarded 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) funding and several corporate and private foundation grants. They are seeking funding to scale their internship program, expand employer partnerships, and invest in a dedicated evaluation consultant to strengthen outcome reporting.

Next Level Youth has built a strong reputation among local employers and schools for preparing youth for postsecondary success. Demand for paid internships exceeds available slots, and staff are increasingly focused on sustainability and long-term scaling rather than pilot programs. The organization has robust outcome data on graduation rates, college enrollment, and workforce placement, but leadership is cautious about overextending staff with complex grant compliance requirements. Their board is actively exploring multi-year funding to stabilize core programs.

Questions to Consider:

- Does this grant clearly align with the organization's mission and the programs it currently offers (not a brand-new idea)?
- Does the organization have the staff time, systems, and expertise to apply for and manage this grant if awarded?
- Is the funding amount and reporting burden appropriate for the organization's budget, experience, and infrastructure?
- Is the organization ready to pursue this opportunity now, or would it be stronger after addressing key gaps (data, partnerships, board support)?
- If awarded or not, how would this decision impact the organization's sustainability and overall funding strategy?

LITTLE STEPS AFTERSCHOOL

Review the fictional OST program scenario and the two grant opportunities provided. Assess each opportunity and decide whether the organization should **Apply, Wait, or Walk** based on alignment, capacity, and sustainability. Be prepared to justify your decision using information from the scenario. There is no single correct answer. The goal is to practice strategic grant decision-making rather than applying for every available opportunity.

Mission Statement: Little Steps Afterschool supports elementary-aged youth by offering safe, engaging afterschool programming that promotes academic growth, creativity, and healthy development while strengthening family and community connections.

Little Steps Afterschool provides OST programming for 65 elementary students, focusing on academic enrichment, arts integration, and healthy lifestyles. Programming includes tutoring, visual and performing arts workshops, nutrition education, and recreational activities. Family engagement is informal but consistent, with daily communication, volunteer opportunities, and monthly family events. Community partnerships include a local arts council and a neighborhood recreation center.

Little Steps operates on a \$95,000 annual budget, primarily funded through program fees, small individual donations, and in-kind support. The organization has one full-time Program Coordinator, part-time instructors, and volunteers. The board is minimally engaged and primarily focused on compliance rather than fundraising. Little Steps has not received major grants but has been awarded small local and faith-based foundation grants in the past. They are seeking funding to stabilize staffing, cover program supplies, and reduce financial barriers for families through scholarships.

Little Steps Afterschool is deeply rooted in its neighborhood and highly valued by families, but it operates reactively rather than strategically. Leadership is informal, systems are largely manual, and financial reserves are minimal. While program quality is strong, the organization lacks a formal evaluation framework and relies heavily on volunteers. The board has expressed interest in fundraising training but has not yet taken an active role. Little Steps is at a critical juncture where small, flexible funding could stabilize operations and allow leadership to plan for growth.

Questions to Consider:

- Does this grant clearly align with the organization's mission and the programs it currently offers (not a brand-new idea)?
- Does the organization have the staff time, systems, and expertise to apply for and manage this grant if awarded?
- Is the funding amount and reporting burden appropriate for the organization's budget, experience, and infrastructure?
- Is the organization ready to pursue this opportunity now, or would it be stronger after addressing key gaps (data, partnerships, board support)?
- If awarded or not, how would this decision impact the organization's sustainability and overall funding strategy?

ELEVATE YOUTH NETWORK

Review the fictional OST program scenario and the two grant opportunities provided. Assess each opportunity and decide whether the organization should **Apply, Wait, or Walk** based on alignment, capacity, and sustainability. Be prepared to justify your decision using information from the scenario. There is no single correct answer. The goal is to practice strategic grant decision-making rather than applying for every available opportunity.

Mission Statement: Elevate Youth Network advances equitable outcomes for elementary, middle, and high school youth through comprehensive out-of-school time programming that integrates academic enrichment, wellness supports, family engagement, and community partnerships.

Elevate Youth Network is a multi-site OST organization serving over 300 youth across elementary, middle, and high school programs. Services include academic support, STEM enrichment, mental health-informed programming, and summer learning experiences. The organization has robust partnerships with multiple school districts, a university, local government agencies, and mental health providers. Family engagement is embedded through advisory councils, bilingual workshops, and regular feedback surveys.

Elevate Youth Network operates with a \$1.2 million annual budget and a highly engaged board with strong financial oversight and fundraising capacity. Staffing includes an Executive Director, a Director of Programs, a Development Manager, a Finance Manager, site coordinators, and program staff. The organization has successfully managed federal, state, and local government grants, including 21st CCLC, as well as multiple large foundation awards. They are seeking funding to expand mental health supports, enhance program evaluation infrastructure, and pilot a data-driven continuous improvement model across all sites.

Elevate Youth Network is in a phase of strategic expansion and refinement. While the organization has successfully managed multiple funding streams, leadership is focused on improving cross-site consistency and deepening impact rather than rapid growth. Recent family survey data revealed increased mental health needs among youth, prompting leadership to explore trauma-informed and mental health-integrated programming. The organization is also preparing for leadership succession planning and long-term sustainability beyond government funding.

Questions to Consider:

- Does this grant clearly align with the organization's mission and the programs it currently offers (not a brand-new idea)?
- Does the organization have the staff time, systems, and expertise to apply for and manage this grant if awarded?
- Is the funding amount and reporting burden appropriate for the organization's budget, experience, and infrastructure?
- Is the organization ready to pursue this opportunity now, or would it be stronger after addressing key gaps (data, partnerships, board support)?
- If awarded or not, how would this decision impact the organization's sustainability and overall funding strategy?

BUDGET MATCH: PATHWAYS AFTERSCHOOL

Use the program description to build a realistic, funder-aligned grant budget totaling \$75,000. Select appropriate budget line items, assign reasonable amounts, and ensure each cost clearly supports the program activities described. You do not need to be exact; focus on logic, alignment, and allowability, not perfection. Multiple budgets could be appropriate if they are aligned and justified.

Pathways Afterschool is a community-based out-of-school time (OST) program serving 120 middle school students across two school sites in a mid-sized urban community. The program operates four days per week during the school year and focuses on academic support, social-emotional learning (SEL), and career awareness. Core program components include homework help and tutoring, weekly SEL small groups, monthly career exploration workshops led by community partners, and family engagement events held twice per semester.

Pathways employs one full-time Program Manager, two part-time Site Coordinators, and six hourly instructors. The organization has an engaged school district partner that provides free space and limited transportation support. The total annual organizational budget is \$350,000, and Pathways is seeking a \$75,000 one-year foundation grant to support direct program costs, staffing time, supplies, and evaluation related specifically to the middle school afterschool program.

Budget Line Items

Select from the list below. Not all items should be included.

- Staffing - Program Manager (portion of salary) - Site Coordinators (part-time) - Hourly Instructors - Executive Director (oversight only)
- Program Costs - Youth program supplies - SEL curriculum/materials - Career workshop supplies - Snacks/meals for youth - Transportation support
- Evaluation & Data - Data tracking software - External evaluator (limited scope)
- Administrative / Indirect - Office supplies (portion) - Insurance (portion)

Guiding Questions

- Which costs are essential vs. flexible?
- What activities can be scaled back without compromising quality?
- What costs could be covered by other funding sources?

Core Takeaways

- • Budgets are strategic tools, not just financial documents
- • Every dollar should connect to an activity or outcome
- • Funders look for clarity, realism, and alignment

Disclaimer: This program description and budget scenario are fictional and intended solely for training and professional development.

