

Building a Successful Grants Strategy

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Agenda

- Before You Apply
- Finding the Right Fit
- Building a Competitive Proposal



Before You Apply



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Readiness Factors



Administrative & Financial Infrastructure

Ability to manage grant funds and required financial documentation

Procurement and contracting processes that meet funder requirements

Experience tracking project expenditures and match contributions

Systems in place for financial oversight and reporting



Strategic Alignment & Priority Fit

Project aligns with destination plans, tourism strategies, or economic development priorities

Clear connection between the project and community benefit

Project supports long-term organizational goals rather than chasing available funding



Programmatic & Operational Capacity

Realistic timeline for completing project activities

Access to partners, consultants, or contractors needed for success

Experience managing similar initiatives, events, capital projects, or partnerships

Grant Readiness Factors (cont)



Data, Evaluation, & Performance Infrastructure

Access to visitor, occupancy, economic impact, or other tourism-related data

Ability to establish baseline conditions before the project begins

Capacity to collect and report performance information required by funders



Compliance & Risk Readiness

Understanding of grant requirements before applying

Ability to meet reporting deadlines and documentation requirements

Awareness of match requirements, reimbursement structures, and audit expectations

Internal processes for monitoring project progress and managing risk



Community Engagement & Stakeholder Alignment

Support from key tourism stakeholders and community partners

Alignment with local governments, destination organizations, and businesses

Evidence of stakeholder input in project development

Ability to demonstrate community support through partnerships, letters, plans, or data

Readiness Reflection

Can we answer "yes" to these questions?

- ✓ Do we have a project we are truly prepared to implement?
- ✓ Do we have the staff, partners, and systems needed to manage funding?
- ✓ Can we measure and communicate project success?
- ✓ Do we have support from the people needed to make the project successful?
- ✓ If awarded, are we prepared to begin?



Grant Ready Doesn't Mean Pursue

Just because a grant exists does not mean it is the right opportunity.

Organizations should consider:

- Strategic alignment
- Eligibility
- Required partnerships
- Administrative burden
- Long-term sustainability

The goal is to win the RIGHT grants.



From Readiness to Fit



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From Opportunity Chase to Strategic Seeking

Reactive Approach

Grant Opens → Write Proposal → Hope It Fits

Strategic Approach

Priority Identified → Assess Readiness → Identify Funders →
Pursue Best Opportunities



Example: Funding Matrix

Categories May Include:

- Funder name
- Funding priorities
- Geographic focus
- Average award size
- Eligibility requirements
- Match requirements
- Application deadline
- Proposal complexity
- Contact information
- Alignment with organizational needs

Funder	Hilda & Preston Davis Foundation	International Paper Company Foundation	Lois & Lucy Lampkin Foundation
Grant Name	Grants Program	Grants Program	Grants Program
Website	hpdavis.org	ipgiving.com	truistmanagedfdns.org/g/lampkin
Funder Type	Private Foundation	Corporate Foundation	Family Foundation
Funder Interest	Provides funds to charitable organizations whose programs advance the development of all areas of the lives of children	Supports projects focused on education, hunger, health and wellness, and disaster relief in communities where International Paper operates	Supports education, religion, health, children, and the arts
Geographical Specifications	United States	United States, in communities where International Paper operates	Georgia
Eligibility Criteria	Nonprofit organizations focusing on child development	501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations, public schools, or qualified governmental entities	501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations

How a Funding Matrix Improves Grant Success

Questions the Matrix Should Answer:

- Does this funder support our mission?
- Are we eligible?
- Is the award size worth the effort required?
- Have organizations like ours received funding before?
- Does the timeline fit our capacity?
- How competitive is this opportunity?

Outcome

Organizations can:

- Focus limited resources on high-potential opportunities
- Increase proposal quality
- Reduce wasted effort
- Build a long-term grant strategy



Funding Matrix to Support Strategic Decisions

Without a funding matrix:

- Opportunities are evaluated inconsistently
- Important details are overlooked
- Staff spend time pursuing poor-fit grants
- Deadlines and requirements can be missed

With a funding matrix:

- Compare opportunities side-by-side
- Identify funders that closely align with mission and programs
- Prioritize grants with the highest likelihood of success
- Track deadlines and application requirements
- Create a funding pipeline for future submissions

Key Principle: The goal is not to find *every* grant. The goal is to find the *right* grants.



From Fit to Submitting Competitive Applications



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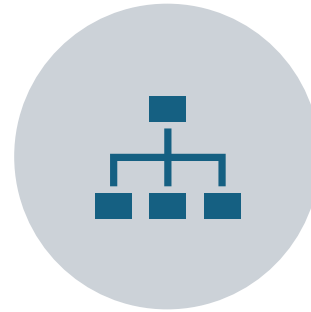
4 Questions Every Proposal Should Answer



WHY THIS PROJECT?



WHY NOW?



**WHY YOUR
ORGANIZATION?**



**WHAT CHANGES
BECAUSE OF THE
INVESTMENT?**

Project Planning as the Foundation

- Planning → Partnerships → Data → Project Design → Proposal



What Funders Are Really Looking For

- Need
- Alignment
- Capacity
- Partnerships
- Sustainability



Statement of Need

Weak Framing

"We want to develop a heritage trail."

Strong Framing

"Visitors and residents lack connections between key historic assets, limiting economic and cultural opportunities within the community."



Evidence of Need

Sources of Evidence

- Visitor surveys
- Occupancy and lodging data
- Attraction attendance
- Economic impact studies
- Community engagement
- Local plans and assessments
- Stakeholder feedback



Narrative Section: Moving from Activities to Outcomes

Activity

Install wayfinding signage



Output

25 signs installed



Outcome

Visitors navigate attractions more easily



Impact

Increased visitor engagement and local spending



Organizational Capacity Section: Funders Invest in Organizations Too

Reviewers Ask:

- Can they manage the project?
- Can they manage the funding?
- Can they coordinate partners?
- Can they achieve the proposed outcomes?



Demonstrating Capacity Includes:

People

- Staff
- Leadership
- Contractors

Systems

- Financial management
- Reporting systems

Experience

- Similar projects
- Past accomplishments

Partnerships

- Organizations sharing responsibility



Partnerships

Supporter

"I support this project."

Partner

"I have a role in making this project successful."



Partnership Roles Matter, Be Explicit

Instead of:

"Partners will support the project."

Consider:

- Local government will oversee construction.
- TDA will coordinate marketing.
- Nonprofit partner will lead volunteer engagement.
- Chamber will recruit participating businesses.



Sustainability



**THE QUESTION EVERY
REVIEWER ASKS:**



**WHAT HAPPENS WHEN
THE GRANT ENDS?**

Four Sustainability Strategies

Institutionalization

Embed activities into regular operations

Capacity Building

Leave behind skills, systems, or infrastructure

Partnerships

Share responsibility among organizations

Future Funding

Diversify resources and revenue streams



Think Like a Reviewer

Reviewer Questions

- Is the need compelling?
- Is the project feasible?
- Are outcomes realistic?
- Is capacity demonstrated?
- Are partner roles clear?
- Is the project sustainable?



If I Read Your Grant Tomorrow

Would I understand:

- ✓ The need?
- ✓ The opportunity?
- ✓ The partners?
- ✓ The outcomes?
- ✓ Why your organization is positioned to succeed?

If the answers are clear, your application is already becoming more competitive.



Common Mistakes

- Weak Need Statement
- Vague Outcomes
- Undefined Partner Roles
- Overpromising Results
- Limited Capacity
- Missing Sustainability Plan
- Budget Misalignment



Questions?



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