



Successful Grant Writing: When Opportunity Meets Preparation

TIP SHEET

INTRODUCTION

According to a 2023 Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS), most Michigan local government leaders believe their jurisdiction has at least some ability to pursue future state or federal grant funding, but relatively few express a high level of confidence.

When asked what would help their government find, apply for, or administer state and federal grants, local officials often mention a need for more local expertise in applying for grants (e.g., funding for a grant writer, training, etc.) and better communication about available grants.*

This guide was written with local downtown managers, board members, volunteers, and business and property owners in mind. This resource pulls

from a variety of sources and is intended to help you build local capacity, empower board members and volunteers to assist with grant development, and support proactive grant development planning.

You can use this tip sheet as a checklist to prepare a grant application. Also, if you identify your assets and challenges upfront, the Main Street Oakland County team can better assist you with additional training, resources, connections, and more.



PROACTIVELY ENGAGE STAKEHOLDERS

The **statement of the problem** is a critical component in every grant application. Ask your stakeholders (e.g., residents, volunteers, business owners) to identify opportunities and challenges and work together to brainstorm possible solutions. **Hosting community conversations fosters buy-in** and can lead to important partnerships, in-kind donations, and letters of support. Keep stakeholders informed of new opportunities or projects that align with their interests.



ENSURE ORGANIZATIONAL FIT AND COMMUNITY ALIGNMENT

A foundational aspect of grant writing is to **know your organization's mission, vision, and strategic plan** and be able to thoughtfully weave your story into the grant application. The grant program should align with the goals and values of your community or business.



All ways, MOVING FORWARD

THE FIVE R'S OF GRANT WRITING



1 READINESS

Know your organizational needs and capacity. Recruit a team and plan out your year. Assemble a grant readiness toolkit including boiler plate information such as the mission, organizational background, executive and board profiles, financial information, case statements for different project types, draft project briefs and a contact list for letters of support.

2 RESEARCH

Take a deeper dive. Recruit a team to review the grant requirements, application timeline, eligible expenditures, review process and evaluation criteria.

3 RELATIONSHIPS

Get to know the funder through personal interaction. Learn from past grant award recipients. Connect with local partners and advocates to garner their support.

4 WRITING

Tell your story in clear and concise language. Stay focused but make sure to connect the dots to relevant programs, initiatives, and goals. Remember to review and revise your application.

5 REPORTING

Be prepared to manage the grant. This includes ensuring compliance with grant requirements as well as tracking progress and impact over the lifetime of the grant and sometimes beyond.



EVALUATE GRANT CAPACITY

Every grant needs a researcher, a writer, and an administrator. While the same individual may perform multiple duties, it is important to ***be realistic about time, resources, and organizational bandwidth.***



CONSIDER YOUR APPLICATION REVIEWERS

Start with a well-thought-out idea and strive for clarity. Remember that application reviewers may not be familiar with your community or the proposed project; so, ***you will need to describe the project in a way that they can understand why it is important and what impact it will have.***



USE QUALITY VISUALS

While a well-written grant can provide a compelling narrative, photographs and illustrations can bring the story to life. Make your data more visual with graphs and charts. For building projects, maps, plans, and renderings will help the reviewers envision the design, context, and overall experience of the improved space. ***Conveying the qualitative and quantitative aspects of your project visually will make your application more effective.***



DEFINE SUCCESS

Prepare an evaluation plan for the project. **What does success look like?** Consider your goals and mission, existing conditions and intended outcomes, barriers, resources, activities, and interventions.

Will you measure success through surveys, engagement, observations of behaviors and environmental conditions, or changes in specific community-level indicators?

Think about long-term sustainability. **Funders want to maximize their return on investment (ROI) by funding organizations that will deliver the greatest value in social outputs over time.** You can convey high returns by communicating the stability of the organization, the significance of the project and long-term plans to sustain programs or maintain physical improvements beyond the grant.



PREPARE A BUDGET

Funders expect a comprehensive funding plan that outlines the overall budget, clearly states what you want to accomplish with grant funding and identifies additional funding sources—which may include matching funds or in-kind support. **Make sure to connect your project narrative to the grant eligible expenses within your proposed budget,** providing budget justification for each item.

Common budget line items associated with a grant project can be staff salaries, taxes, fringe benefits, indirect costs, in-kind items, rent and utilities, equipment, technology, supplies, marketing and postage, and travel. For built projects, remember to include architectural or engineering fees in addition to materials and labor.



TYPICAL GRANT PROPOSAL COMPONENTS

- Cover Letter, Title Page and Abstract
- Statement of the Problem or Needs Statement
- Project Description
- Evaluation Plan
- Budget Request and Budget Justification
- Applicant Qualifications
- Future Funding Plans / Plans for Sustainability





TYPES OF GRANT SOURCES

- **Federal grants:** Federal agencies cover a wide range of grant topics and generally offer the highest dollar amounts. However, they also have some of the most stringent application and reporting requirements and may require disclosure of other governmental grant sources.
- **State agencies:** Michigan offers several sizable grant programs. Grants typically include baseline eligibility requirements that align with that specific state-level program or initiative.
- **Private foundations:** Grants from private donors come in all sizes. Foundations tend to be value-based and focus on projects that align with their goals. They may be more likely to become long-term partners and may be open to funding general operating expenses if the mission alignment is clear.
- **Corporate foundations or other types of corporate giving:** Corporate giving generally follows one of two paths—in communities in which they operate, corporations may support projects related to their industry or projects to which their employees are committed. Projects that can benefit from in-kind contributions (e.g., equipment, materials, and volunteers) are particularly suited for this type of funding partner.
- **Community-based foundations, utility providers, and civic groups:** These groups accept applications for a wide range of activities that broadly benefit the local community. They often have the least complex application requirements, but they also tend to have the smallest pool of grant dollars.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) member communities are eligible for planning and transportation alternatives (TAP) grants as well as grant support for infrastructure projects. SEMCOG also offers scholarships to attend the Grant Writing USA grant writing or grant management workshops.

semcog.org/grant-opportunities
grantwritingusa.com/

MI Funding Hub is a joint venture between the Michigan Municipal League and the Michigan Department of Labor of Economic Opportunity. Resources include a Help Desk, Resource Library, Grant Search Tool, and Training Sessions.

mifundinghub.org/

Federal Funding Sources for Main Streets (Summer 2024, Version 1.0) can be found in the Main Street Knowledge Hub. This guide includes practical advice as well as relevant grant opportunities from Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Department of Agriculture (USDA), Department of Transportation (DOT), Department of the Interior (DOI), Department of Commerce, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and National Endowment of the Arts (NEA).

tinyurl.com/2s44z943

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SOURCES

The Five Rs of Grant Writing: Tips for Creating a Compelling Application, Charity Village - tinyurl.com/3bwzp4rx

Applying for Grants, Community Tool Box, University of Kansas - tinyurl.com/mrxz46x5

Alexandra Borngesser, (former) Director of Grants & Philanthropy, City of Pontiac, Grant Writing Training, City of Pontiac (Sept 2023) - tinyurl.com/3xxv6su7

Grant Writing Strategies for Success, Wisconsin Economic Development - tinyurl.com/5cd3ayhz

* More information on the survey is available at closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/mpps-2023-spring.