## Federal Grants Research

1. **Two Key Resources**

Become familiar with Grants.gov (<http://www.grants.gov>), which provides information about federal grants, and the *Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance* (<http://www.cfda.gov>), a comprehensive resource of about 15 different kinds of assistance you can seek from federal agencies. The catalog is the older resource: Starting in the 1960s, it was published by the Government Printing Office twice each year. Since it has become an online resource, it is regularly updated and easy to search.

Both websites are frequently revised and our description below of where you may find information or search functions may change from year to year. We recommend you supplement our discussion below by reading the helpful introductory material that both sites feature.

Likely Grants.gov will provide all the information you seek, but the two websites are interrelated and use the same indexing system. After poring over grant opportunities on Grants.gov, you may want to turn to the *Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance* to find contracts, loans, and other forms of financial support listed alongside the same grant opportunities you find in Grants.gov.

Although the amount of information on these sites is daunting, they’re designed to be used by novices as well as experts and to be user-friendly. When starting out, move slowly and keep notes of any terms or requirements you don’t understand. Often you can find details about federal circulars, audits, or requirements through a simple Internet search or you can call and ask agency staff for guidance.

*The Nonprofit Kit For Dummies* focuses on nonprofit organizations, but some kinds of federal funding are available to individuals, for-profit businesses, state and local governments, and federally recognized Native American tribal governments — not just nonprofits. You want to pay attention to applicant eligibility when you review your options.

***Grants.gov***

Grants.gov describes itself as a storehouse of information about 1,000 federal grant programs. We recommend you begin by learning about the site and steps to take if applying for federal funding. At the bottom of the home page, you will find a “Grants Learning Center” that provides a helpful overview. You’ll also find a section titled “Applicants,” which describes applicant eligibility and connects you to where you must register (either as an individual or as an organization) if you are going to apply for funding.

On the home page, you can easily find the link to its search functions and you have several choices as you begin. One option is to browse opportunities by the following four categories:

* **Browse Newest** to find opportunities that may not have been available in the past.
* **Browse Categories** to identify opportunities in broad subject areas such as grants for education or disaster prevention and relief. You can look here for grant programs in your general field of work.
* **Browse Agencies** is helpful if you know you want to look at opportunities managed within the Department of Agriculture, or any other of the federal government’s 27 departments.
* **Browse Eligibilities** identifies programs available to 16 types of applicant organizations, with one of them being nonprofit organizations with 501(c)(3) status.

To move beyond browsing into a more active search, choose “Search Grants,” which you will find at the bottom of the home page in the section titled “Applicants.”

* **Search** turns up active programs whose deadlines lie ahead (those identified as “posted”) as well as programs anticipated in the future (identified as “forecasted”). It also you to crosscheck funding instrument type (for example, “grants” or “loans”) with agencies, categories, and eligibility.
* **Key Words** can find results for everything from “apples” to “zoonotic.” You may identify sources of funding for your kind of project within federal agencies or departments that didn’t immediately occur to you as prospects.
* **Funding Opportunity Number** enables you to quickly find guidelines for a specific program. Perhaps you already know about a particular federal grant opportunity and want to learn more.
* **Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number** is helpful if you know the number assigned to a particular grant opportunity you want to pursue. The CFDA and Grants.gov use the same numbering system for each grant program, so it’s easy to cross-reference the two systems.

If you decide to apply for a federal grant, you need to follow a five-step registration process with Grants.gov. (Read “Organization Applicant Registration” within the “Applicants” menu). Steps to take include the following:

1. Secure a Dun and Bradstreet number (<http://fedgov.dnb.com/webform>). This steps takes one or two business days.
2. Register with System Award Management (<https://www.sam.gov/portal/SAM>). This step takes seven to ten business days.
3. Create a Grants.gov username and password. Your username and password likely will be confirmed the day you apply for it. Note that passwords expire every 60 days, so if you apply for federal funding once each year, you need to update your password.
4. Identify an EBiz Point of Contact (also called an “EBiz POC”), authorizing an organization representative (AOR) who can submit proposals on behalf of your organization. The AOR may be the same person as the E-Biz POC who signed up your organization in Step 2 of the process, but the government needs to be told this is the case. See <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/organization-registration/step-4-aor-authorization.html> for assistance with this step. This phase of the process generally goes quickly and is confirmed the day that the POC submits her information.
5. Check that your AOR’s status has been approved.

Each of these steps takes just a few minutes to complete; the information is checked, its completion verified, and you move on to the next step. **To be on the safe side, we recommend completing the registration process at least two weeks before you want to submit a proposal,** just in case questions arise while your information is being reviewed.

You don’t need to register to search for funding possibilities on Grants.gov or to download and fill out an application form, but you do need to be registered before you can submit that application. After you have signed up, you remain registered for future application opportunities.

***The Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance***

The *Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance* (<http://www.cfda.gov>) covers a broader scope of information. The government offers “assistance” in many ways and the CFDA covers 15 kinds of assistance: loans, contracts, advice from experts, technical services, insurance, and more. As part of your introduction to the CFDA, read the Type of Assistance section, which defines these possibilities. You want to understand them before digging deep into the program descriptions.

Before you start your CFDA search, check the User Guide and Frequently Asked Questions — both helpful introductions. You can dig deeper by looking at the Applying for Federal Assistance and Writing Grant Proposals sections.

For your research needs, select the “Advanced Search” choice on the home page. If you’re familiar with the Search function of the Grants.gov website, you’ll feel right at home. When you get to the Advanced Search web page, you can search by type of assistance, applicant eligibility, use of assistance, and other characteristics of your organization and project to identify programs related to your activities. Your search can include checking how you fit:

* By Type of Assistance, whether they are grants, loans, contracts, insurance, or other supports. You also can check for programs requiring Executive Order 12372 Review. It’s not likely you’ll begin your search through this category, but it’s good to know about. When you see evidence of this executive order being required, it means that you’ve found a federal assistance program that awards support in consultation with state and local governments. It’s a fancy (maybe more bureaucratic than fancy) way of saying that your state or local government will have worked out a review process for funding allocations in conjunction with the federal government, and you’ll have to pass muster locally before the federal agency will act on your request. As a grant applicant, you’ll communicate with both your state or local government and the federal agencies. Not sure where to go? Don’t worry: The federal government’s application package will direct you to the right point of contact in your state.
* By Applicant Eligibility, identifying the kinds of entities — such as branches of government, nonprofit organizations, or individuals — that can apply for the funds
* By Beneficiary, identifying who is supposed to benefit from your work (for example, preschool students)
* By Functional Codes, or broad subject areas
* By Deadlines, to ensure you have time to complete and submit an application
* By Subject, identifying content areas that are more narrowly defined than the Functional Codes
* Interesting CFDA listings may include references to related programs. You want to include them on your list of programs to research. Some federal programs tell you that you can submit the same exact application to more than one program.

**2. Keeping Things Straight**

If you’re confused about who is who and what is where, remember that government entities are organized around complex constellations of agencies, bureaus, divisions, institutes, and programs. A portal to a vast array of information about the federal government’s legislative, executive, and judicial branches and their activities is the Government Printing Office website (<http://www.gpo.gov>). Its mission is “keeping America informed,” and it includes overviews of the U.S. government in several easily digestible sections.

The Government Printing Office website also is a good way to check on regulations, circulars, and requirements — providing answers to some of the questions you may have jotted down while reviewing a funding program profile on <http://www.grants.gov> or <http://www.cfda.gov>.

**3. Keeping Current: Reading and Reviewing Habits**

For breaking news about grant opportunities, rules, proposed rules, and notices of federal agencies and organizations — as well as executive orders and other presidential documents — consult the Federal Register (<https://www.federalregister.gov>), the daily newspaper of the changing federal grant scene. It’s published by the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). Before a grant program becomes a law, early notification of intent to create a new program is usually published here as a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPR). You can search for both current documents and past information in issues of the Register dating back ten years.

**4. Refining Your List and Digging Deeper**

Having developed a list of prospective sources, it’s time to move forward with further research into any programs your initial search into Grants.gov or the CFDArevealed*.*

* Contact the office of the agency to which you intend to apply. If you aren’t sure of this information from reading the listing, some points to include in that conversation are the following:’
* Ask about the current year’s budget and estimates on funds available to new grantees.
* Check to learn whether regulations governing the program are likely to change in the near future.
* Introduce your project and ask whether the agency contact is willing to review a draft of your proposal.
* Contact your senators and representatives (find the phone number and address through the Government Printing Office website) and alert their offices about your intent to apply for funds. If you must choose between your representative and your senator, choose the office with greater expertise in the arena in which you’re working (look up her or his committee appointments) and the one with greater clout. Ask for public laws and House/Senate hearings on the latest amendments to the program to which you wish to apply. Remember that your representatives want to see more resources coming to their district or state. Although their aides are very busy, some of them have the time and knowledge to assist grant seekers by reviewing a proposal draft or making a key phone call on your behalf. Don’t be pushy, but you may find help.
* Review the authorizing legislation that’s listed at the top of the funding program description in the CFDA under the subheading “Authorization.” In most cases, you may note the exact title of the legislation and use a search engine to find it. The Publications section of the Government Printing Office website (<http://www.gpo.gov>) is another source to search. Reading the legislation may help you understand the program’s purposes.
* Federal assistance programs are established through legislation (a process called “authorization”), but after they’re created, they also need to be included in the federal budget before they have any money to give away. You can check on the current year’s budget data in the latest Office of Management and Budget report, but that’s a daunting way to understand what you want to know when researching a specific program. Often you want to ask the program to which you’re applying about their budget. They won’t always know until an amount has been approved for the year.

1. **Taking Steps to Apply**

* Create a proposal development submission timeline that includes adequate time to register on Grants.gov and take any required pre-application steps; ask follow-up questions; and draft, edit, and refine your proposal.
* Register yourself and your nonprofit organizations through Grants.gov (described above). Plan on this process taking two weeks to be completed.
* Download or request appropriate application materials. Federal applications use standardized online forms available through Grants.gov.
* Return to theCFDA listing to see whether any pre-application coordination is required. Follow any pre-application instructions if they are required. For example, some proposals require you to submit your proposal to a state clearinghouse for its staff to evaluate prior to your being permitted to submit the grant request.
* Review compliance requirements, agency policies, and Office of Management and Budget policies pertaining to the program
* If they’re willing to assist you in this way, send a proposal draft to the agency or to the aides to your local members of Congress and follow up with a telephone call or brief appointment.
* Write and submit your proposal!

1. **Workspace**

Grants.gov has introduced a tool for grant seekers to keep track of their research and applications called “Workspace,” and we recommend that you use it to organize your search. While both tools are called “Workspace,” the federal government’s and the Foundation Directory Online’s Workspace tools are not integrated with one another.

1. **Remember to Keep Your Eye on Possible Sources of State Funds**

* Note interesting federal programs available for state application. Find out from the federal agency whether your state has received funding from these programs.
* Review your state’s government telephone book and check the mission statements for agencies matching your interests. Visit appropriate agencies’ websites for further information.
* In some states, the website for the governor’s office includes a section on grant opportunities.