

How to Assemble a Successful Government Grant Proposal

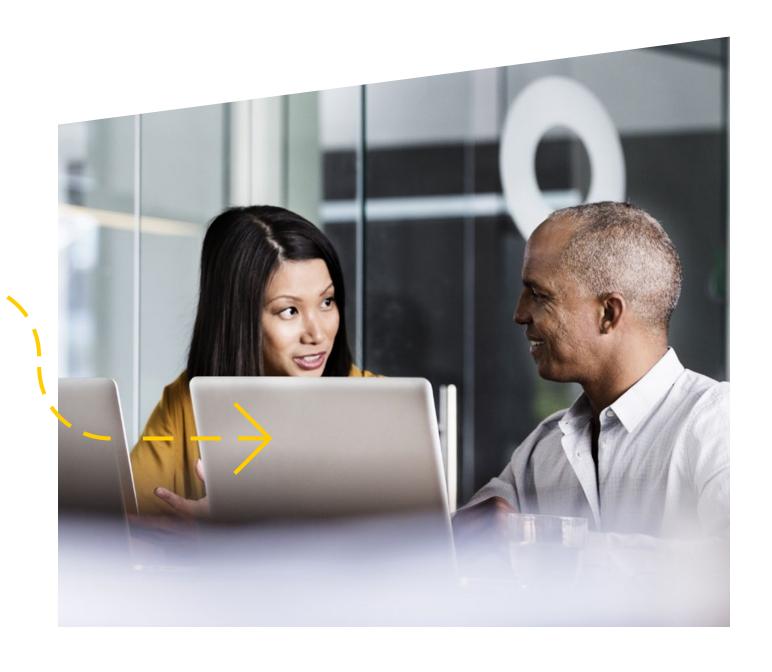




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Executive Summary

With huge revenue shortfalls facing state, local, and tribal governments (over \$400 billion over the next three years), and communities in dire need of economic and health-based aid, it's especially important that those in charge of grants know how to ask for and successfully acquire the funding they need.

At eCivis, one of the most frequently asked questions in our community of government professionals has been, "Is there a template out there for putting together a strong government grant proposal?"

While no single template can address the complex and myriad types of government funding opportunities, this playbook aims to give you a templated process that you can use to know what it takes to put together a more successful government grant proposal "Is there a template out there for putting together a strong government grant proposal?"

as well as help you get started. Specifically, this playbook will focus on the top government funding streams that can help during these difficult economic times:

- Economic Development Grants
- Infrastructure Grants
- Emergency Services



Whether you're new to grant writing or a pro, we recommend these six overarching steps to the grant writing process that can be broken down into smaller, practical steps:

- 1. Identify the need
- 2. Build your team and timeline
- 3. Gather information (supporting documentation/statistics)
- 4. Determine the funding amount
- 5. Develop your methodology
- 6. Prepare your application

The grants writing process can get overwhelming pretty quickly. By aligning your process with these six steps, you can determine the feasibility of putting together an application, use advice from government grant specialists to help you quickly get started, and ensure you have a more competitive application to present to awarding agencies. Each section will have some templates you can start filling out on your own or reference as you go through the grant writing and application process. Feel free to print out the fill-in sections and get thoughts down onto paper!

*Pro Tip

If you have further questions or are interested in using a grants management system to help you find the right grants to apply for and get funding faster, reach out to our team: info@ecivis.com. Our Certified Grant Management Specialists have years of government experience and are ready to help in any way they can.



Types of Grants to Pursue in Addition to COVID-19 Funding



The vast majority of the Coronavirus Relief Fund has been distributed to state, local, and tribal governments. And since the <u>new relief package of 2021</u> does not offer more direct aid to state and local governments, many of you may be wondering—where else can we go if we need more grant funding?

Depending on your agency's mission and the communities you serve, there are a host of other grant funding opportunities. Here is a <u>breakdown</u> of some of the most important types of grant programs government entities can pursue.

Economic Development Grants

Economic development grants and loans can help revitalize distressed communities in urban, rural, and tribal regions. These types of grants often come from the Department of Commerce (DOC) and its bureaus, including the International Trade Administration (ITA), Economic Development Administration (EDA) and National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST).

A well-known example of an economic development grant is a <u>Community</u> <u>Development Block Grant</u> (CDBG). CDBG programs support the development of viable urban communities by funding entitled cities and counties to provide decent housing and living environments as well as expand economic opportunities for low and moderate-income individuals. CDBG-Disaster Relief funding is widely available in the wake of the pandemic and the subsequent economic crises in communities.





Infrastructure Grants

Many infrastructure grants are issued by government agencies but can also be funded by private entities. Types of infrastructure can also fall under economic development grants, such as the former Economic Development Assistance Program. Additionally, the latest Coronavirus Relief Package for 2021 includes \$1 billion in grants directed to tribal governments for broadband connectivity as well as \$300 million to support broadband infrastructure deployment to rural areas and those lacking broadband.

Another example of infrastructure grants include <u>Civil Infrastructure Systems</u> (CIS). As part of the Civil, Mechanical, and Manufacturing Innovation unit under the National Science Foundation (NSF), this funder encourages innovative research for designing, constructing, managing, maintaining, operating, and protecting sustainable civil infrastructure systems, i.e. transportation, construction engineering, and infrastructure management.

Emergency Services

Emergency Services such as (EMS) grants provide funding for expenses like emergency medical services, public health, equipment, training, and salaries in order to protect communities. These are typically issued through the Health and Human Services Department (HHS) and the Homeland Security Department (DHS), as well as the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

One well-known grant that many public safety agencies turn to is the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Firefighter Grant Program. This grant is designed to help increase the number of frontline firefighters or rehire laid-off firefighters to better respond to fire hazards and emergencies.

Now that you know a few of the types of funding out there for public-sector organizations, it's time to dive into the six steps you can use to put together a successful government grant proposal. Some steps may be taken concurrently as you go through the process.



Step 1

Identify the Need





While there will be no shortage of needs to address in 2021 and beyond, it's especially important to be targeted and focused in where you want to direct your grant funding.

Some important questions to start with are:

- · Whom will this funding benefit?
- · What outcomes are we hoping to achieve?
- · How does this need align with the mission of my organization?
- Will this be for a new project or services, project expansion, or community needs?

A thorough way to understand what need you're addressing is to conduct a needs assessment. That way, you can determine what will align with leadership goals,

departmental and/or agency goals, and what best serves public interest. In fact, the needs assessment is a critical component of your grant proposal because it's also where you make the case for the amount of funding you need. So, how to get started?



A thorough way to understand what need you're addressing is to conduct a needs assessment.



If you don't have a pulse on the biggest challenges facing your surrounding community, put out a survey and see what's top of mind for people. The Center of Urban Research and Learning and the Department of Psychology Loyola University Chicago have an excellent <u>guide</u> to conducting an indepth community needs assessment.

Here's a sample of qualitative questions they recommend to include for survey respondents:

- What are 3 things you like most about living in your community?
- What are 3 things you would like to improve about your community?
- What is an effective way to get residents involved in their community?

Here's an example of quantitative questions they recommend to include:



For example	How important is this to you	How satisfied are you with
Availability of good grocery stores	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
Availability of affordable daycare centers	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4

The above scale is:

Please circle the appropriate score using the following scale:

1 = completely unimportant 1 = completely unsatisfied

2 = unimportant 2 = unsatisfied 3 = important 3 = satisfied

4 = very important 4 = very satisfied



Identify the Need: Fill it Out Yourself!

Questions to start with:

•	Whom will this funding benefit?		
••••			
••••			
••••			
	What outcomes are we hoping to achieve?		
••••			•••
••••			
••••			
•	How does this need align with the mission of my o	organization?	
••••			***



•	Will this be for a new project or services, project expansion, or community needs	?
••••		
	ample of qualitative questions to include in the survey. dd more of your own:	
•	Whom will this funding benefit? What outcomes are we hoping to achieve? How does this need align with the mission of my organization? Will this be for a new project or services, project expansion, or community needs	?
•		?
•		?
•		2
•		?



Fill out your own quantitative questions!

Question 1	How important is this to you	How satisfied are you with
	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
The above coals is:		

The above scale is:

Please circle the appropriate score using the following scale:

1 = completely unimportant 1 = completely unsatisfied

2 = unimportant 2 = unsatisfied
3 = important 3 = satisfied
4 = very important 4 = very satisfied

Question 2	How important is this to you	How satisfied are you with
	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4

The above scale is:

Please circle the appropriate score using the following scale:

1 = completely unimportant 1 = completely unsatisfied

2 = unimportant 2 = unsatisfied
3 = important 3 = satisfied
4 = very important 4 = very satisfied



Question 3	How important is this to you	How satisfied are you with
	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
The above scale is:		

Please circle the appropriate score using the following scale:

1 = completely unimportant 1 = completely unsatisfied

2 = unimportant 2 = unsatisfied
3 = important 3 = satisfied
4 = very important 4 = very satisfied

Question 4	How important is this to you	How satisfied are you with
	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4

The above scale is:

Please circle the appropriate score using the following scale:

1 = completely unimportant 1 = completely unsatisfied

2 = unimportant 2 = unsatisfied 3 = important 3 = satisfied 4 = very important 4 = very satisfied



Step 2

Build Your Team and Timeline

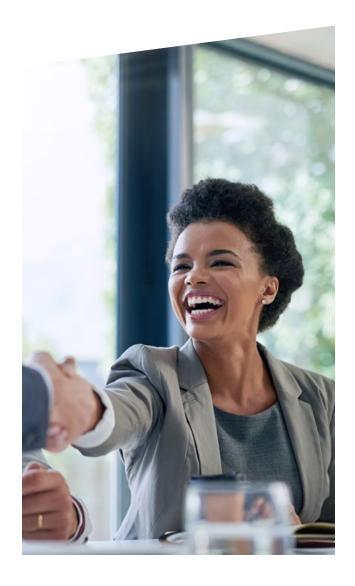




This is the stage where you need to assemble the key players and determine the length of time your grants project will take to actually implement.

Assemble Your Team

Having the right leadership in place is especially important to helping you work towards establishing control around oversight, transparency, and accountability. If you don't have a centralized grants office, then (at the very least) you need a centralized grants management team composed of individuals with the right communication and grants management skills to help you navigate the grant proposal process as well as monitor, coordinate, and report any incoming funds you'd be receiving.





Ideally, your centralized grants management team should include the following:

Coordinating Officer

Your coordinating officer or grants coordinator can help you manage at the organizational level (from start to finish) and is typically held by someone with mid-to-senior level experience managing projects and motivating staff.

Grants Manager

This could be your position but if you do not have a grants specialist on your team already, this person should at least have an accounting or financial management background. They'll help ensure compliance and that you adhere to the minute details of grant funding requirements.

Senior Procurement Officer

This person provides cradle-to-grave assistance with the subaward/ subcontracting and procurement support for grant funding. They oversee what's being provided for and act in a supervisory role to help draw up the plan for designating funding for services and equipment.

Financial Accountant

It's important to have someone from your finance department to help you balance the books at the end of the day. You want to make sure you're taking on a grant program that actually aligns with fiscal needs and will not over-extend your department or agency's budget.

Internal Auditor

This person must be engaged by the team (and especially your grants coordinator) on a continual basis. They have to be aware of all grants activity and able to provide general guidance to ensure your agency creates a clear audit trail and is in compliance. Essentially, they're your guide to help provide situational awareness for the team in terms of any legislative or agency requirements from the funder—and help you avoid audit findings.





Build Your Timeline

This step is probably one of the most important in ensuring a successful grant proposal. One of the most universal challenges we see is people pursuing a grant without understanding the time it actually takes to develop a competitive proposal. You need to have a sense of what's feasible in terms of time you'll need to research and gather data, write, and edit that proposal, keeping in mind the reviews and inputs from members of your team and organization.

For some grants, the data you provide from surveys or other sources must be collected for over a year.

That's why, if possible, give yourself 6 months to a year in advance to properly prepare. When building out your timeline, determine the length of time it will take to set up the project all the way to completion. Make sure you're realistic and ask your team for input.



*Pro Tip

Did you know eCivis' grants management system is composed of the largest professionally curated database of government grants? What this means is a whole team of dedicated researchers gather and summarize available grant awards for you, so you can save time by avoiding the grunt work of scouring grants.gov and reading through all the funding requirements.

Learn more by reaching out to info@ecivis.com.



Build Your Teamand Timeline: Fill it Out Yourself!

Use this task sheet with specific to-dos for everyone you identify on your grants team and use it to help you build out the timeline for your grants project. The more specific you can be, the stronger your application.

Task Sheet

Project:	
Due Date:	Mode of Submission:



Responsibilities (Insert Project Director/Team Name)	
Application Development	Due Date
 Complete Data Sheet and Abstract and return original, signed through the appropriate line of approval, to Project Development. Review Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA), outline, task sheet and other relevant documents. Communicate and engage with the Project Developer and Budget Analyst weekly or as needed to provide progress updates and relevant information. Attend additional task meetings as needed. Correspond with the proper staff if the project requires services under another division's range of operation. 	Ongoing
(Insert Project Director/Team Name) is responsible to: • Attend Phone Conference	
(Insert Project Director/Team Name) is responsible to: • Attend Task Meeting or Phone Conference	



Application Content	Due Date
(Insert Project Director/Team Name) is responsible to:	
 Write in third person. Create an outcome tracker to define how the success of the grant will be measured and tracked (what data is to be collected?). Will provide data to Project Development and Review at the close of the project period. Provide all necessary documents according to program requirements in the NOFA and AP guidelines. 	
Budget and Budget Narrative assigned to: (Insert Names)	
• Note	
Benefits Cost Analysis assigned to: (Insert Names)	
• Note	
Narrative assigned to: (Insert Names)	
• Note	

(Cont.) Application Content	Due Date
Other Required Document: assigned to: (Insert Names)	
Note	
Attachments assigned to: (Insert Names)	
List of attachments	
Space under the list for attachments you find out	
about as you go. • Note	

Application Review	Due Date
(Insert Project Director/Team Name) is responsible to:	
 Provide feedback and edits to Project Development in a timely manner. Verify edits are accurate and approve application. 	



Project Development Responsibilities

Application Development	Due Date
(Insert Project Developer Name)	
Project Development is responsible to:	
 Provide Data Sheet and Abstract forms to Project Director. Review NOFA and other relevant documents. Create task sheet and outline. Communicate and engage with Project Director and Team weekly or as needed. Attend additional task meetings as needed. Communicate with the funding agency as needed. 	Ongoing
(Insert Project Developer Name) is responsible to:	
Attend Phone Conference	
(Insert Project Developer Name) is responsible to:	
Attend Task Meeting or Phone Conference	



Application Review	Due Date
(Insert Project Developer Name) is responsible to:	
 Review materials provided by Project Director and Team. Ensure requirements are complete, in accordance with agency instructions, AP guidelines and organization standards. Provide feedback and edits to Project Director and Team in a timely manner. Generate application package for administrative review and signatures. 	(8 days before admin review)

Application Submission	Due Date
(Insert Project Developer Name) is responsible to:	
 Open application online according to Notice of Funding Announcement (NOFA). Prepare and submit the following documents by submission deadline: Form 1 Form 2 Narrative item Budget Submission-related note if necessary Budget narrative Submission-related note if necessary Other documents Attachments 	(Submission Deadline)



Date

Signature	
Project Director Name:	
Alternate:	
Project Director Signature	Date



Project Developer Signature



Step 3

Gather Information





Now is the time to start gathering your supporting documentation and statistics. In other words, dig into the data.

The more thorough you can be, the better. You can break down this step into three critical stages:

1. Determine the area of demographics

Look closely at the population numbers of the community you intend to serve. Are you targeting a specific sector inside the service area, i.e. homeless populations in your county or women and children in low-income households? Your goal in this step is to make sure you capture everyone who will be impacted by this project and services. Your needs assessment in Step 1 should be a helpful reference here.

2. Analyze the project data

Determine your who, what, where, and when? For example, if you're looking to do a construction project, where would you build? Do you need an environmental study completed? What population would it be—urban vs. rural? Are you collaborating or sharing services with another organization? What does that collaboration look like? Make sure you have thought out every detail ahead of time.

3. Identify stakeholders

Lastly, you want to present all the relevant data and include all relevant stakeholders for this potential grant program. This can include a project manager, leadership whose buy-in you need, the community, and your grants team. Make sure that, if they're not on your team already, procurement and finance teams are kept in the loop at all times.





Gather Information: Tool for Reference

This <u>sample template</u> from the Data Center in New Orleans is an excellent tool to help you double check that you're capturing and presenting the right type of data. Consult it as you progress through your information gathering stage.



NOT Helpful



Helpful

Data that represents geographic areas larger than the area you are targeting (like cancer rates for the whole state of Connecticut when you are only going to be doing cancer screenings in the housing developments in one town).

Data that represents the specific neighborhood(s) where you are working.

Raw numbers that describe the problem in your area.

vs Raw numbers AND percentages that show the proportion of the total proportion in your area that is affected by the problem.

Only numbers that represent the geographic area where you work without any comparison data.

vs Comparison data at a state, national town level and other geographic levels of interest to the funder.





NOT Helpful



Helpful

Data that is not relevant to the problem (like infant mortality rates when you are going to be providing asthma services).

vs Data that scientific research has demonstrated is related to the problem you are addressing (like data about pregnancy-related deaths when you are going to be providing prenatal care).

Data from newspapers, magazines, and TV news programs – sources that are not in the business of distributing reliable data. (Newspapers, for example, are in the business of selling newspapers, of course.)

Data from reputable sources such as government agencies, national associations, and peer-reviewed journals.

Data that are old (like 1990 Census data on race).

Recent available data from the chosen data source (like 2017 Census data on race).

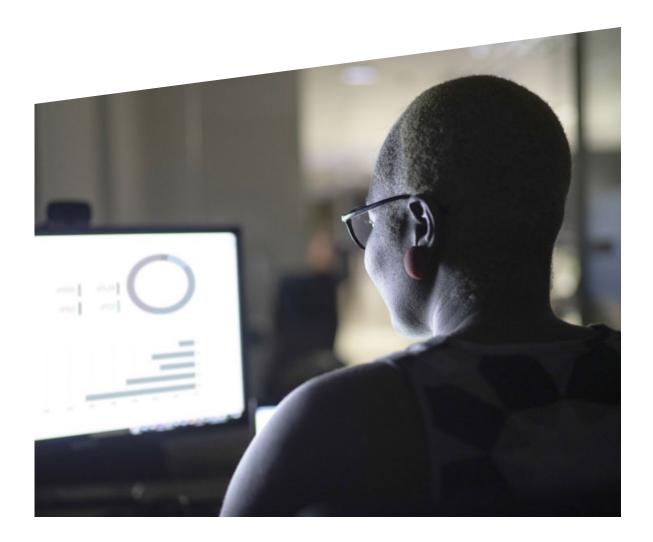
All the data you've ever found that relates somewhat to the problem. We call this "data dump."

vs Data carefully selected and narrowed down from the entire list of all the data you found and presented in a targeted, compelling, concise problem statement.



Step 4

Determine the Funding Amount





After all the hard work of conducting a needs assessment, building out how much time and how many people are going to help manage this project, and gathering the data you need, now is the time to determine the dollars needed to fund this project.

Many agencies make the mistake of under-estimating the costs of a project and ask for too little, realizing they could have used more to cover needs like indirect costs (i.e. IT, administrative, etc.). At the same time, borrowing more than you need can lead you into serious trouble—think of audit findings and having to return money to the federal government.

To ensure you ask for what you need, carefully review the funding opportunity. Remember, no funding opportunity is the same. Take the time to read the requirements carefully and make sure your proposed program or project not only aligns with the mission of your organization but also the mission of the funding entity and the particular grant program as well.

One tool that can help streamline the search for COVID-19 related grants and other important funding streams (as opposed to searching for hours on grants.gov) is <u>eCivis' grants research</u> <u>database</u>. Additionally, you can check your state's website or contact your state agency directly to see what available funding opportunities they have.

Here are the primary questions you want to consider when determining the funding amount. This will help you determine your limits to stay within for your project, i.e. if you have a \$100,000 project but an agency is only offering \$50,000 in grants:

- How many awards is an agency planning to offer?
- What makes your organization competitive?
- Are you competing against 10 or 100 other departments or agencies?
- What is the maximum amount they will award?

Again, we cannot stress this enough.

Make sure you look at the Notice of
Funding Opportunity (NOFO) carefully,
which will tell you if a cash match is
required. Some agencies offer a waiver
for the match. There are also other
items you can use for a cash match like
unrecovered indirect costs. You can
learn more about indirect costs in this
free guide here.





Determine the Funding Amount: Tool for Reference

Refer to this comprehensive eCivis diagram so you can get a better understanding of what occurs on the grantor vs. grantee side and get your cost allocation plans in line.





Step 5

Develop Your Methodology





Having a <u>clear description of your methods in your</u> <u>grant proposal</u> that shows how you will accomplish your project objectives will make your application much more competitive.

Developing a methodology is not only helpful for the awarding agency but also allows you to address how you expect to use awarded funds.

The bulk of your methodology – as part of the proposal narrative – should contain detailed descriptions of what project activities will be conducted and how they will be carried out. For example, if your agency is applying for community development grants to provide more emergency hospitals for COVID-19 patients, the methodology should detail how you plan to acquire shelter facilities,

offer services, and reach out to those in need of the facilities.

You will also want to demonstrate external approval to support the viability of the project, i.e., studies related to feasibility, market analyses, site control and data collection (this is where Step 3 will be very important). Additionally, you need to demonstrate the resources that you have available to achieve your project objectives such as personnel and how they will be selected.





Demonstrate Previous Success

This goes hand in hand with developing your methodology but demonstrating previous performance on grant projects as well as how you plan to measure success on an award application will go a long way. Data visualization dashboards can come in handy for synthesizing this data and presenting it to awarding agencies.

Tying the grant back to measurable results is key. You'll want to show measurable indicators like:

- Number of active grants
- Total grant portfolio
- Spending health
- Task and files health
- · Performance health
- Overall health

*Pro Tip

Did you know eCivis' grant management system has a goals and metrics feature that allows you to track all of these indicators automatically on any grants you plan to pursue and are awarded?

Learn more by reaching out to info@ecivis.com.



Develop Your Methodology: Fill it Out Yourself!

This <u>sample of a methods section</u> from Mim Carlson, Tori O'Neal-McElrath, and Jossey-Bass's 2009 "<u>Winning Grants</u>" and reprinted by The Balance Small Business is a helpful way to structure your methodology.

Objective One

Ensure that a minimum of 75 Spanish-speaking seniors with Type II diabetes who complete our disease management classes maintain stabilized blood sugar levels for three consecutive months.

Methods

- Some City Senior Center will hire a program assistant and a full-time bilingual nurse who specializes in chronic disease management. Establish an outreach committee co-chaired by two of our Latino and/or Spanish-speaking board members that include diverse community representation (geography, race, ethnicity, gender, and occupation).
- The bilingual nurse and program assistant will adapt the center's current diabetes self-management classes, including classroom tools and materials, to make them linguistically and culturally appropriate for Spanish-speaking seniors.
- The bilingual nurse and program assistant will develop the protocols for testing and tracking program participants for three consecutive months after completing the classes.
- Staff will develop a formal referral system and feedback mechanism between our center and all appropriate community agencies to provide referrals to our Spanishspeaking diabetes management classes.
- Staff will hold weekly Spanish-language diabetes self-management classes.
- Staff will track participants' progress on a weekly basis for three months following completion of the classes.
- The program assistant will formally chart the progress of each participant.



Y	Your Objective				
••••					
••••					
Y	our Methods				
•					
•					



Y	our Methods (cont.)



Step 6

Prepare Your Application





Now that you've put in all the hard work, it's time to turn everything you completed into a palatable plan for an awarding agency to review.

A well-formatted proposal must include the following components:

Introduction: Two to three sentences that summarize your agency's goals and why your agency should be selected for a grant award.

Organization description: A summary of your agency or department, any previous grants you have won, and the work your agency does.

A statement of need: This is essentially the "problem statement" of the grant proposal. You'll need to explain who will benefit and how the funds will be implemented. The needs assessment from Step 1 will be very important here.

Project narrative (methodology):

A clear description of the methods that will be used to accomplish your project objectives. Refer to Step 5 of this playbook.

Goals and objectives: These are details of desired outcomes of your project and how success will be measured so the awarding agency can better picture how funds will be put to use. Steps 4-5 should be helpful here.

Personnel/resources: Provide a summary of how many will be working on the project and their roles as well

as tools that will be required (i.e., technology, equipment or facilities). Remember putting together your grants team in Step 2? Refer to your project task sheet here.

Timeline: When do you expect to start the project and when is the expected end date? Go into as much detail as possible for each phase of the project (i.e., how many weeks or months before next phase). Again, Step 2 and your timeline will come in handy here.

Budget Summary: This should be a breakdown of anticipated costs to complete the project (justifying your ask for the amount of funding). Provide full justification for all expenses. Hello, Step 4!

Reporting: The awarding agency may already spell out some of these requirements but you will want to be proactive in your own summary. How will the performance and success of the grant be measured while aligning with the goals of the awarding agency? How will the reports be delivered (i.e., virtual vs. paper)? What steps will your agency take to ensure compliance and transparency? Make sure to spell it out with the help of all your hard work from Step 5.



Ready to fill out your own application?

Use the next several pages to jot your thoughts down or prepare your final drafts and print it out!

Introduction



Organization description				



A statement of need	



Project narrative (methodology)			
	• • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • •		



Goals and objectives			



Personnel/resources	



Timeline		



Budget Summary				



Reporting	



Additional notes		



Additional notes	



eCivis is trusted by over 1,000 public-sector entities and offers the most widely used grants management solutions for state, local, and tribal governments. eCivis simplifies grants management through software that streamlines the process, giving precious time back to organizations to focus on and carry out their community-based goals.

If you need a solution to quickly find, get, and manage your grants, reach out to info@ecivis.com.

