

An Overview of Best Practices for Pursuing Private and Government Grants

Getting Started

Project Development

Applicants should develop a clear project plan with an intended, measurable outcome. Knowing the research or outcome you want to pursue will help you determine which funders support this type of work, help you focus your efforts on the programs with purposes that best fit for your project, and prepare you to make the case for your project to be selected for funding. It is advisable to complete this planning work as thoroughly as possible, even before a funder is identified.

Identify the Players

If you plan to include other collaborators on your project, give some thought to individual roles. Identify who will serve as the principal investigator (and lead contact with the grantor agency) and who your co-collaborators will be. Consider how each of these roles strengthens the project, as well as the length of commitment required of team members.

Timeline

Campus grant offices suggest timing applications for approximately six months prior to when project funds will be needed. Conducting your search for funding opportunities a year ahead of the semester in which you intend to apply will allow you to have the longest lead time possible for proposal preparation and the greatest choice among available opportunities.

Resources for Finding Private Grant Opportunities

Foundations

[GrantWatch](#) is a reasonably priced subscription that provides weekly email alerts for grant opportunities within your specified geographic area and topical field(s) of interest. Subscribers can also search the GrantWatch database at any time. (Please note that government grants can be included in search results by checking a box.)

Foundation Directory Online is a searchable database useful for finding information about private foundations with limited or no website presence. Corporate, Foundation, and Family Relations (CFFR) maintains a subscription and can generate search results or profiles to meet your needs.

Corporations

Corporate partners can offer myriad benefits which may or may not be useful for your project. If you are open to cultivating long-term connections between corporations and your department, please reach out to Jenny Akins to discuss your interests and potential support CFFR can provide.

Gifts Versus Grants

Some private funders direct support as unrestricted gifts to avoid the legal relationship a grant creates. Managing a gift provides more flexibility but nevertheless requires attention to completing planned activities, maintaining communication with the funder, and evaluating results. These are best practices for stewarding any voluntary contribution.

For further assistance with identifying private funding opportunities, including confirming institutional eligibility, please contact Jenny Akins.

An Overview of Best Practices for Pursuing Private and Government Grants

Resources for Finding Government Grants

Federal Grants

The best source for researching *federal* grant opportunities is [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov). This is the official site for accessing information about federal grants and is searchable without a login.

Keywords can be entered into the search tool to find what opportunities have been posted or are forecasted to open. The site allows users to narrow their search further by selecting certain parameters, such as Eligibility (e.g., private institutions of higher education), Category (e.g., environment, health, or science/technology/R&D), or a specific Federal Agency (e.g., Department of Energy or National Science Foundation). The search results will provide links to funding programs that might fit your research topic. Clicking on a link to one of the programs will lead the user to an overview of that program (e.g., description, application deadline, eligible applicants, award ranges) with additional links to more detailed information, such as evaluation requirements. Grants.gov also offers many helpful videos and other resources to help you navigate the federal grant application process.

State Agencies and Grants

Some federal programs are administered through state agencies to ensure alignment with state priorities and initiatives. For example, applications to the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) and other federal programs generally start with the [Kentucky Department for Local Government](https://www.ky.gov). Applications for ARC funding are first submitted to the state, which determines which projects to recommend for ARC funding. Developing relationships with contacts at state agencies can also help faculty and staff stay updated about new funding opportunities. Some state agencies may offer periodic newsletters that are distributed by email and contain information about funding opportunities.

Professional and Academic Associations

Faculty can also learn about both private/foundation and government grant opportunities through professional and academic associations. Colleagues at other institutions may have received government funding for projects in your field of study. Taking advantage of networking opportunities may yield valuable leads for further exploration. In addition, many large publicly funded universities have sizable government grants that permit subawards to other institutions that perform work that contributes to the overall project.

Approvals

Please keep in mind that your project must be approved by your Division Chair/Supervisor and the applicable Administrative Committee member before the proposal process can continue. The approval form for government grants is available on the Office of Academic Affairs webpage. Updated forms will be available online in the coming months. In the meantime, please contact Jenny Akins or Davey King for more information.

Preparing the Proposal

Timeline

Preparing a grant proposal, particularly a federal or state proposal, is often a very complex and time-consuming process. It is extremely important that you start the planning process early to ensure that you have time to gather all the necessary information and complete all required forms when a funding opportunity is announced. Applicants are strongly advised to submit proposals at least a week before

An Overview of Best Practices for Pursuing Private and Government Grants

the deadline in case there are technical problems with online portals. In the event of a late final draft, grant allies may be unable to complete your submission by the funder deadline.

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

If you are planning a project that will involve human subjects, allow time for IRB review and approval. This process needs to be built into your proposal timeline.

Letters of Support

Some proposals may need letters of support from internal or external partners. Be sure to review the guidelines and allow adequate time to prepare and collect those letters well before the deadline.

Developing the Narrative

Guidelines for each grant opportunity can vary significantly. Read the proposal guidelines carefully before you begin developing the narrative. Answer each question directly, clearly, and completely, and limit instances of repeated phrasing and responses between sections as much as possible. Fully address project details before working on summaries and introductions. Thorough yet concise responses leave less room for reviewers to question the details or to doubt your readiness to undertake the project. It is beneficial to assume that the reviewer is not familiar with Berea College, Kentucky, your previous work, or the type of project you are proposing, so it is important to provide compelling context before describing the project itself. Campus grant offices can provide examples of effective responses for specific application questions and formats.

Completing the Application

Pay close attention to formatting requirements. Many grant programs have specific requirements for forms and templates, font size, margins, page numbering, section cover sheets, and word/character counts, for example. Additionally, plan ahead and arrange for others not involved in preparing the proposal to review it for content, clarity, grammar, spelling, punctuation, and adherence to formatting. Campus grant services offices can assist with this, as well. Review by the appropriate office is strongly advised for new submissions to funders that have a history of supporting the College.

Budget Requirements

When preparing the budget, please work collaboratively with the appropriate campus grant services office to ensure all allowable expenses are considered for the budget (contact Jenny Akins for private grants and Davey King for government grants). Human Resources can provide the current fringe benefits rate, and the Office of Academic Affairs has current values for course releases for the various classifications of faculty members. When permitted by the grantor, it is the College's practice to seek the maximum allowable rate for indirect costs, which are critical for funding the administrative services that will support your project. While grant offices can provide guidance, the Principal Investigator or Project Director must secure final budget approval from their supervisor and department leadership.

Some grant programs require cost-sharing or match commitments and may allow in-kind sources or limit match to cash contributions to the project. It is important to consider potential funding sources you could access to satisfy these requirements. As you do so, please keep in mind that the College is unlikely to approve a grant opportunity that will require an additional fundraising commitment to meet match obligations.

An Overview of Best Practices for Pursuing Private and Government Grants

Next Steps after Funding Decision

If your proposal is approved, please be sure to reach out to Jenny Akins (private grants) or Davey King (government grants) for next steps. Although the main responsibility for grant management falls to the Principal Investigator/Project Director, the appropriate grant office will assist you with implementing your grant through the applicable Finance and other processes, reporting requirements, and close-out procedures at the end of the grant term. Please contact your grant liaison immediately when considering changes to planned activities/spending as these may require formal grant modification and/or extension requests.

Many grants can be highly competitive, so an initial proposal may not be funded. However, many agencies will entertain requests for feedback on your proposal and suggestions for strengthening it for the next round. Your materials can also be used for future proposals to other grantmaking entities. All submissions, regardless of success, are stored by the College to maintain a complete record of Berea's relationship with external funders.

For More Assistance

With Foundation and Private Grants:

Jenny Akins

Director of Foundation and Corporate Relations

akinsj@berea.edu

Ext. 3004

With Government Grants:

Davey King

Director, Government Grant Service

kingd3@berea.edu

Ext. 3635

An Overview of Best Practices for Pursuing Private and Government Grants

Bibliography

Newell, Bridget & Caves Jr., Thomas C. (2015) *Best Practices Guide for Grant Writing*. International Association of Chiefs of Police. US Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Assistance. Office of Justice Programs web site. <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/best-practices-guide-grant-writing>.

Nordelo, Juan Carlos. *Grant Writing 101*. (2020) State of New Jersey web site. <https://www.nj.gov/state/assets/pdf/chprd/2020-0108-grant-writing.pdf>.

Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) Tips. (2023) Center for Disease Control and Prevention web site. https://www.cdc.gov/publichealthgateway/grantsfunding/docs/foa_factsheet.html.

Planning and Writing a Grant Proposal: The Basics. (2017) University of Wisconsin-Madison Writing Center web site. <https://writing.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/535/2018/07/grants.pdf>.

Tips for Preparing Grant Proposals. (2022) US Department of Health and Human Services web site. <https://www.hhs.gov/grants/grants/get-ready-for-grants-management/tips-for-preparing-grant-proposals/index.html>.