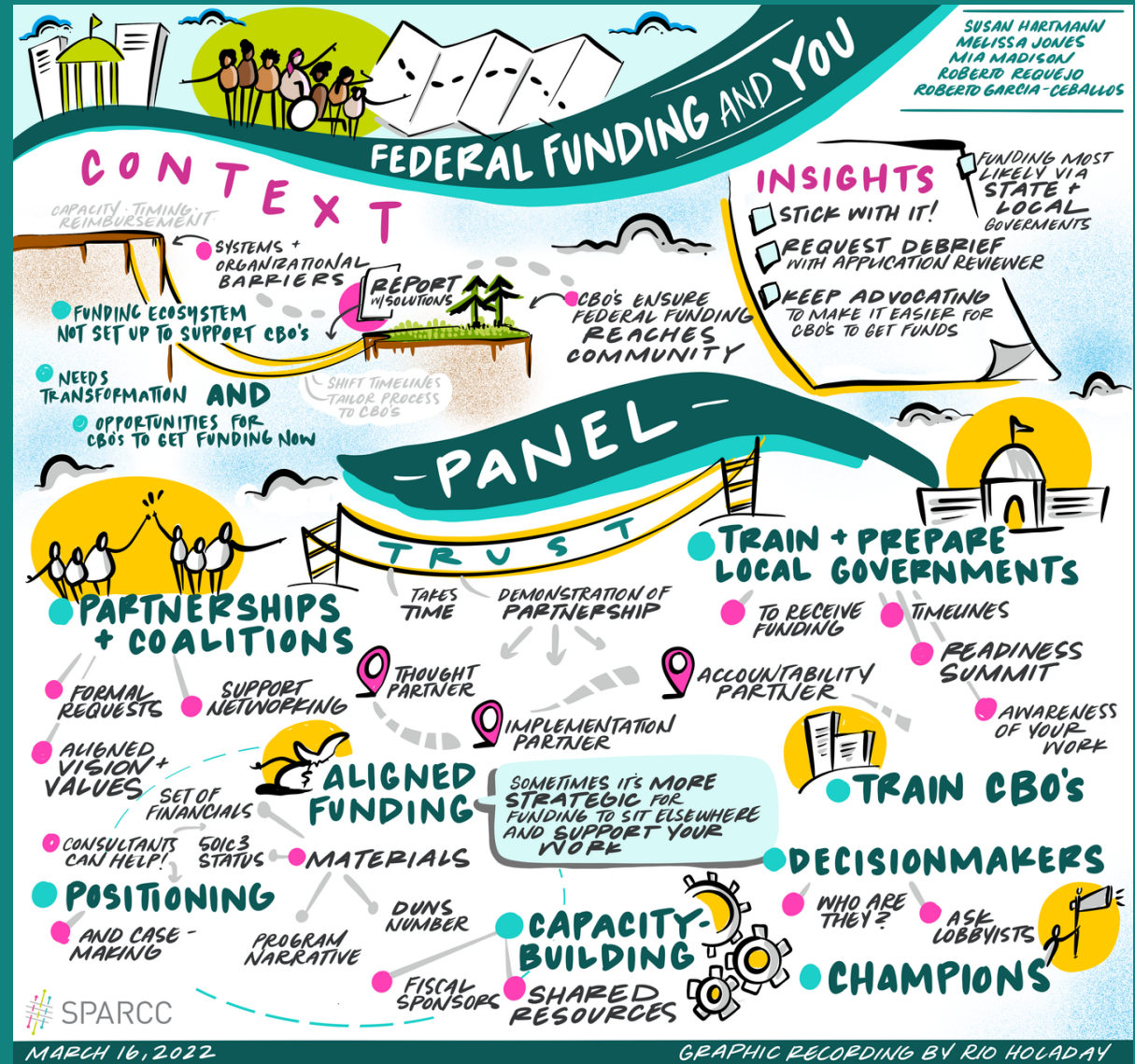


How To Apply for a Discretionary Federal Grant?

This checklist speaks to funding where federal resources are the original source, and it can also be helpful for federal funding that may be available through state or local entities.



TIP:

MOST FEDERAL DOLLARS GO DIRECTLY TO ENTITIES LIKE STATES AND CITIES.

Mayors and state governments dictate a large percentage of how federal funds are spent. In addition to competitive grants from the federal level, look out for grants made available from states and cities/localities that may have originated from the federal government.

How To Apply for a Discretionary Federal Grant?

☒ 1. My community project

- You have an idea or have been planning for a project and it's time to seek funding.
- Reaffirm the project vision with community residents and coalition partners.
- Cultivate relationships with regional and local organizations and city leaders who might either support, partner or lead on an application.
- If your project is not well known, socialize it for more support and learn about other proposals.

☐ 2. Get ready

- Conduct an internal review about operations and administrative procedures that would need to be changed or added in order to comply with federal requirements.
- Prepare internal plans for operations and program administration in the event that you receive a federal award or need to show that you are ready to administer a federal grant.
- Assess your needs: Do you need grant writing support? Do you need application support? Do you need a fiscal sponsor? Is it best to join an application with a prime application lead? Do you need money for matching requirements? Do you need backbone administrative support?
- If support is needed, consider reaching out to another non-profit in your region or nationally who might be positioned or knowledgeable in receiving federal funding (they might be a larger non-profit who can subgrant funds or be the lead applicant.)

☐ 3. Where do I find funding?

- [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) is a one stop shop for federal funding. This website is searchable by govt. agency and topic.
- Federal agency websites have their own funding notices, i.e. Dept of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Department of Transportation (DOT).
- Check the Notice of Funding Opportunities (NOFO) on the [Federal Register](https://www.federalregister.gov).
- For funding related to the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) check <https://www.whitehouse.gov/build/>
- Some state and local opportunities are often listed on government websites, newsletters or newspapers. Local funding received through block grant formula is usually received yearly and the local, regional or state government should provide you with a transparent timeline of when those funds are received.
- Some national organizations and coalitions list grant opportunities, funding allocation breakdowns and/or guides to navigating resources such as Brookings Institute, Communities First Infrastructure Alliance, Emerald Cities Collaborative, and the Equitable and Just National Climate Forum (e.g. [Justice40+ Community Benefit Playbook](https://www.justice40plus.org), and [Funding Finder](https://www.fundingfinder.org)).

LOOK IN DIFFERENT PLACES!

FUNDING MAY EXIST IN AN AGENCY OUTSIDE OF THE MAIN FOCUS OF YOUR PROJECT.

For example, funds for improving the energy efficiency of homes or funds to support a climate resilient community may be found at either Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Dept. of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) or Dept. of Energy (DOE).

How To Apply for a Discretionary Federal Grant?

☐ 4. What are the different categories of funding?

Understand the different funding sources and how they might address your needs:

Mandatory: Federal money sent to states, local governments, and tribal entities to reallocate and use for local needs. Funds are allocated based on an amount legislatively set by a formula (based on factors such as population and census data) or general-purpose use block grants, e.g. Community Development Block Grant (CDBG).

Discretionary: Money that funds a specific set of program parameters (like equitable TOD) and grants at an agency (e.g. RAISE grant at Dept. of Transportation which supports transportation infrastructure). These grants are often awarded on a competitive merit-based process.

Project based (Congressional Directed Awards): Money directed by Congress earmarked for a specific project, initiative, or service. These can fund a local government, non-profit, or private entity.

Some of these funding streams might be appropriated yearly.

☐ 5. Do we qualify to apply?

Is your organization an eligible recipient or project partner? Eligibility information is usually found in the NOFO.

If yes eligible

Go to the [project team](#) section.

If not eligible

- Can we partner with an eligible agency or organization in our community, such as a non-profit already eligible for grant funds, Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), city, transit or housing agency? OR can we apply to one of those organizations directly for funding depending on fund type?
- Do we need a champion to contact an eligible entity to either partner or join an existing application? If so, make a list of supporters and reach out, they could be an elected official, city agency, or community organization.
- In the event the grant type requires partnership with a community-based organization and a city or eligible entity is already working with a similar group on that grant, you may need to find a different funding source or opportunity. Groups can also seek to partner in other ways if that project is integral to the work and mission.
- Some groups often find a grant of interest and take time to get ready and apply another year.



Step 6

ADVOCACY!

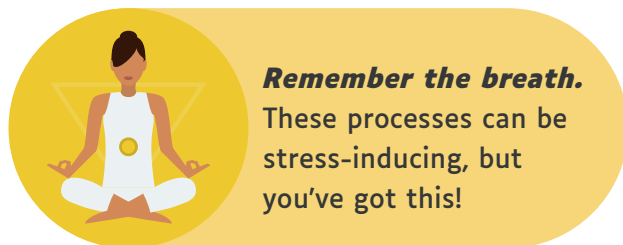
Many Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian and Pacific Islander and People of Color-led organizations are asked to provide their expertise to projects for free or for very minimal resources to larger organizations and/or city agencies after millions of dollars in federal funding has been secured. This often looks like participation on advisory boards or working groups with very small compensation. In finding your funding source and collaborating with agencies, advocate that community-based organizations (CBOs) who are not included in the application process but integral to a successful project receive reasonable funding to implement the project. The [SPARCC Pathways to Community Prosperity Platform](#) suggests a minimum of 10% of project budgets for planning and infrastructure be allocated to CBOs. And in another example, requirements in the DOT Thriving Communities Capacity Builders NOFO asks for a 60% allocation for activities that directly support communities, this includes subgrants to community-based organizations.

How To Apply for a Discretionary Federal Grant?

☐ 6. Create a project team

(if one is needed based on the grant type)

- Depending on the grant type, mobilize to create an application team if one is not already in place.
- Get a letter of support from implementing entity and/or from org providing local match resources if needed.
- Consider creating an MOU or agree on principles of engagement based on a shared understanding of a valuable and equitable partnership. See the [Communities First Principles](#) as an example.



PARTNERSHIP!

Find a national, regional or local organization who might be able to support the grant application process via funding, leading the application, grant writing or help in planning ideas. National intermediaries receive [Section 4 Capacity Building](#) funds which might support the application process.

☐ 7. Check Guidelines

Federal grant announcements are sometimes called Request for Proposals, NOFO or Solicitation for Grant Applications. Information on how to apply can be found in those documents or at the relevant federal, state or local agency website. Federal agencies often host informational sessions and webinars on how to apply for the grant. Depending on grant source, some local governments offer info sessions as well. Also, some agencies offer technical assistance, or a local organization or non-profit may be a technical assistance or consultant provider for federal programs (e.g. [Thriving Communities Program](#)). Capacity builders can help navigate the application and project.

Understand the timeline:

- The timeline and release of funding is one of the most important elements in understanding funding opportunities. Timelines are not always transparent and might require some research.
- Locally, CDBG fund applications are often open between June and July and align with City and County comprehensive planning processes. Funding categories for CDBG are often listed on local government websites. Mobilize to influence the comprehensive planning process, which can then influence the funding categories for use of CDBG funds. Find out who makes the decisions and organize to attend the meetings.

Get clear on:

- What are the program parameters and applicant eligibility? What's the deadline to submit?
- Does my organization need pre-approval in the Grants.gov system or other submitting system? Check and get approved.
- Does my organization need match funding, if so, who will provide it? Secure your match commitment.
- Does my organization need a fiscal sponsor or agent?
- Does my organization need additional insurance coverage to carry out the work beyond what you may currently have? Often state and localities require additional coverage that a federal agency might not ask for.

Think ahead:

- What are the grant management, reporting and oversight requirements?
- What do I need to prepare for potential auditing, during and after the grant is complete?

How To Apply for a Discretionary Federal Grant?

☐ 8. Create project proposal

- If project has multiple partners, define and clarify roles of each entity.
- Create a project scope, detailed approach, timeline and budget according to the application requirements.
- If a large funding source with multiple partners, ensure that money for community-based organizations focused on equity and justice are included in the budget.
- Ensure protections exits for anti-displacement or identify actions to mitigate any issues (e.g. funding for renter and tenant protections).
- If applying for a competitive grant, applicants are encouraged to include project items that increase competitiveness such as job creation, good labor standards, and apprenticeship programs, etc. Highlight the multiple benefits to the community and describe it using language that best speaks to the grantmaker.

☐ 9. Submit application

- Go to [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) or relevant location to submit.
- Be prepared to negotiate budget and scope from your original scope.
- Take a moment to celebrate a completed step with your team!



Helpful reminder – it's not the end of the road if you don't receive funding the first time you apply. Reach out to federal, state and local entities about the application and either identify where application can be stronger in a next round and/or identify system inequities in the process and suggest changes that would work best for organizations of your size.

A Note from the Team:

It takes a lot of time and resources to engage in grant application processes that aren't designed to facilitate small and mid-sized community-based organizations, Black, Indigenous and People of Color-led organizations, and women-and minority owned businesses. These questions are intended to serve as prompts to consider as you navigate the funding cycles. Reach out to sforbes@nrhc.org if you have questions on this resource.