

Quick Guide: How to Tell if a Grant Is Worth Pursuing

ARCvi Domain: Finding and Sustaining Funding

Finding the right grant is a process. Funders look to see if your organization's values, mission, and programs align with their values. In addition, not all grants will align with your organization's mission and scope of work. For these reasons, it is important to carefully read the grant eligibility criteria before spending time on an application.

Grant Eligibility Criteria

Every grant has eligibility criteria. Key criteria to check for are:

- Topic areas: Does the funder support violence prevention? Reentry? Youth development?
- Target populations: Are there requirements about who you serve? Age, geography, formerly incarcerated, youth, families?
- Geographic focus: Is this neighborhood-specific? City? State? National?
- Organizational status: Do they require 501(c)(3)? Or can you apply with a fiscal sponsor?
- Grant amount: Are they funding \$10,000 or \$500,000? Be sure to determine what the spending parameters are. Many funders have excluded categories (e.g., equipment) and often exclude overhead, administrative expenses, and general operations.

Have a realistic, thoughtful budget that shows you understand the different related costs for your organization. Keep in mind that every grant has a cost in staff time and organizational energy. Here are some tips:

Grant Range	What It Usually Requires	Good For
\$5,000 – \$20,000	Short narrative, basic budget, light reporting	New or emerging orgs, pilot programs, specific activities
\$20,000 – \$75,000	Full proposal, organizational financials, evaluation plan	Organizations with some track record and basic infrastructure
\$75,000 – \$200,000	Strong proposal, audited financials, logic model, detailed outcomes	Established nonprofits with staff and systems
\$200,000+	Full organizational capacity, federal compliance, annual audit, detailed formative feedback and/or evaluation plan	Mature organizations with administrative infrastructure

Common places where organizations get confused and run into trouble are:

- Not reading the eligibility criteria before investing time in an application.
- Misunderstanding if the grant funds only programs, operations, or both.
- Missing deadlines: LOI deadlines, full proposal deadlines, and budget submission dates are often different.
- Writing a generic proposal instead of tailoring it to the specific funder's language and priorities.
- Underestimating the time and staff capacity required to complete a strong application.
- Not following application formatting requirements exactly (page limits, font size, required attachments).

What should I know before applying for a reimbursement-based or highly restrictive grant?

Keep in mind that every grant has a cost in staff time and organizational energy. Before applying for a grant, find out the following information:

- Is this reimbursement-only?
- Can my organization float those costs?
- How difficult are the reporting requirements? Are the reporting requirements more work than the grant is worth?
- Are the grant funding components/aspects of my program aligned with my mission, or would it pull us off course?

When should I not apply for a grant?

One of the most important decisions in grant-seeking is knowing when NOT to apply.

A key principle is to protect your mission because it is your most valuable asset. Don't lose yourself. Chasing funding that doesn't fit your mission will cost you more than what you gain. Key considerations include:

- If a grant requires you to reframe your work in ways that feel dishonest, it's probably not the right fit.
- If a grant's reporting requirements are more than your capacity, it may not be worth it.
- If accepting a grant means serving a different population than your community, it could fracture the trust you have already built.
- Funders will notice if your proposal doesn't genuinely match their priorities. It's not worth it.

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[ARCvi.org](https://arcvi.org) is an initiative of the [Public Policy Lab](https://publicpolicylab.org) in Temple University's College of Liberal Arts. The website was designed to deliver curated resources and tools to community-centered programs focused on reducing community violence. This effort has been supported in part by the Stoneleigh Foundation and the Green Family Foundation.