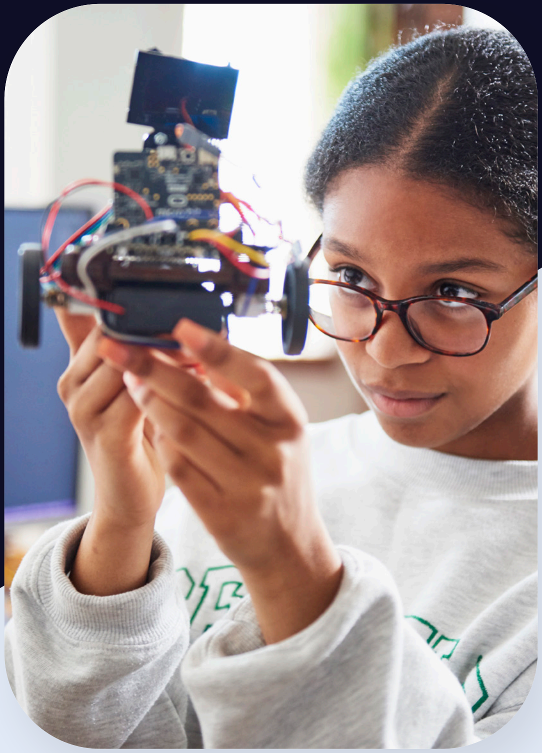
COMMUNITY FUNDING ACCELERATOR

Grant Writer's Guide



Introduction

The Walton Family Foundation (WFF) is providing this resource as part of a broader coalition-based approach to addressing community needs related to education. We believe that mutually supportive collaborations between educational institutions and organizations, such as local and state educational agencies, non-profit organizations, and business partners, create interdependencies that maximize a community's ability to solve complex problems.

In addition, an influx of federal dollars will allow these partners to work together for catalytic change. By supporting coalition members with federal grant submissions, the WFF seeks to nurture coalitions and develop workplans for innovative, high-impact ideas. Federal grant awards will amplify the impact that organizations currently make relying on the existing funding from other sources and organizations.

This guide is provided as a resource for education-focused entities that are considering pursuing federal funding. It is specific to education grants and will be most appropriate for the applicant that has little to no previous experience with federal grants, although experienced applicants may also benefit from this guide.

The WFF hopes this Grant Writer's Guide will help your organization establish powerful coalitions, plan innovative projects, and win transformative federal awards.

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Federal Grant Basics

Applying for federal grant funding can provide numerous benefits to individuals, organizations, and communities. In 2021 alone, $700 billion in federal funds were awarded to applicants in various sectors, including education, community development, health, infrastructure, and transportation. Funds are awarded for innovative and impact-focused ideas and projects, offering incentives for grantees to focus on positive outcomes for stakeholders.

Federal Grant Sources

Federal grant seekers in education should begin at Grants.gov. The purpose of this portal is to provide a centralized online platform for applicants to find and apply for federal grants. Grants.gov allows grant seekers to search for funding opportunities offered by 26 different federal agencies and to submit grant proposals. Education grants are typically offered by the U.S. Department of Education, National Science Foundation, Department of Labor, and Americorps. Another useful resource for identifying funding opportunities is NSF Grant Search, a beta site that provides information about grant competitions from the National Science Foundation. Note that the grants listed on this site also appear on Grants.gov.

How to Determine if a Grant is Right for You

The *solicitation* (otherwise known as a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) by Americorps, the Notice Inviting Applications (NIA) by the Department of Education, and Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA) by the Department of Labor) is a document issued by the federal government that provides information on a funding opportunity, including the purpose and goals of the program, the eligibility requirements, the application process, and the evaluation criteria. In order to understand a federal solicitation, it is important to carefully read and review the entire document, paying attention to several key details, such as the following:

- **Specific goals and objectives** for the grant program. These goals and objectives will communicate what the program hopes to accomplish and will clearly delineate the focus and scope of the funding opportunity.
- **Eligibility requirements** outline what entities are eligible to apply and what types of entities can be included as partners.
- **The timeline** will indicate when the program begins and how many months or years it will last. It is also important to be aware of the application timeline so as to submit all required materials before the deadlines.

- **The amount of funding available** is usually provided as an average grant award either by year or in total. It is important to carefully review this information to ensure that your proposed project is feasible given these parameters.

Finally, it is useful to review any **additional requirements** like matching funds. Matching funds require the grantee to provide a portion of the funds for the project. In other words, the grantee must "match" the funds provided by the federal government (cash or in-kind) with their own funds or funds from other non-federal sources.

Portal Registration

See How to Register in the System for Award Management and the Quick Start Guide for Getting a Unique Entity Identifier to set up an account and obtain a UEI.

Once you have decided on an appropriate grant competition, it is time to register in the appropriate portals and learn about the application process. Note that as a grantee, you will need an active System for Award Management (SAM) account, Unique Entity Identifier (UEI, obtained through the SAM registration process), and portal login. Start with the System for Award Management because registration on this site can take up to 10 days.

Then register on the appropriate application portal. For Department of Education and Department of Labor grants, register on Grants.gov. Make sure you create an account as well as add a profile. For NSF grants, you can either register on Grants.gov or register on Research.gov (grant proposals may be submitted through either site). For AmeriCorps grants, register on the AmeriCorps portal.

Be sure to use the same email address for all entries, and allow several weeks to complete the entire registration process and become eligible to apply for federal dollars.

Learn about the Application Process

After registration is complete, use the resources provided on Grants.gov and from the sponsoring agency to learn more about the application process. Grants.gov provides information and resources to help grant seekers understand the grant application process and prepare competitive applications. This includes applicant training, guidance on how to search for funding opportunities, and how to submit an application through the Grants.gov website.

Helpful resources are provided on the next page.

Resources

General

- Grants.gov is an interactive portal that allows federal grant-seekers to search, filter, and apply for specific federal funding opportunities.
- The Federal Register is the official record of documents released by the federal government, including grant notices, applicable rules, and regulations.
- System for Award Management (SAM) is a government-wide registry for vendors and grant-seekers. Applicants for federal grants must register on SAM to obtain a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI).
- WFF Federal Grant Scanning Tool is a custom-made tool that curates federal grant opportunities focused on advancing education and economic mobility.

Department of Education

- Grantmaking at ED explains Department of Education grants and the application process in detail.
- Common Instructions to Applicants of Department of Education Discretionary Grant Programs - includes the regulations pertaining to ED grants.

Department of Labor

- How to Apply provides an overview of helpful links providing information on how to apply for a DoL grant.
- Annotated FOA is a sample solicitation with explanatory notations.

Americorps

- Americorps Portal is the site for submission of grant applications and reports through the Americorps suite of funding opportunities.
- eGrants Online Help System is an online user guide for eGrants.
- AmeriCorps eGrants User Guide includes instructions for submitting Americorps applications through eGrants.

National Science Foundation

- NSF Grant Search is a beta site that provides information about grant competitions from the National Science Foundation. The grants listed on this site also appear on Grants.gov.
- NSF Grants.gov Application Guide explains how to prepare and submit NSF proposals using Grants.gov.
- Proposal & Award Policy & Procedures Guide includes instructions for proposing and administering NSF grants.
- Research.gov is an alternative to Grants.gov for submission of grant applications to the National Science Foundation.

Capacity Review & Application Strategy

Project Management for Grant Writing

Once you decide on a grant opportunity to pursue, you should begin planning for proposal development. Invite to the table any partners who will be collaborating with you on the grant application. Work with this team to develop a detailed workplan that outlines the tasks that will need to be completed to flesh out the application. This plan should include a timeline for each task as well as the person (or team) responsible.

It is also worthwhile to identify any potential risks or challenges that could affect the project and develop contingency plans to address these risks. This might include finding new partners or collaborators or revising the project plan to account for potential delays or challenges.

From the outset, establish clear lines of communication and coordination among all project stakeholders, including the project team and other partners. This can help to ensure that everyone is on the same page and working toward the same goals. Part of the communication plan includes clear instructions for document control and storage, including naming conventions. Many grantees store their work in the cloud so all team members may access the files at any time.

As you move through the proposal development process, monitor and track progress regularly, and make any necessary adjustments to the project plan to ensure that the project stays on track and results in a proposal that is complete, compliant, and submitted on time without errors. It is recommended that you allow a minimum of 6 weeks to craft a federal grant proposal. Schedule meetings as needed to facilitate the work. Two meetings per week is ideal.

When creating a project workplan, you may want to include the following tasks, designating a person responsible for each. Start and end dates are suggested for a seven-week (49-day) grant project workplan:

Component/Task	Days		Weeks						
	Start	End	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Review grant solicitation	1	1							
Secure evaluator and grant writer/consultant (as needed/available)	2	15							
Determine application strategy - absolute priority, competitive preference priority, invitational priority, consortium, or single applicant	3	7							
Confirm grants.gov working login, SAM registration, and UEI	3	5							
View pre-application webinar	Varies								
Submit intent to apply	Varies								
Brainstorm ideas for proposal; collect needed data and information	5	19							
Decide on partners; request letters of support/commitment	5	24							
Draft Theory of Change & timeline for project implementation	19	21							
First draft Project Narrative with Table of Contents	21	32							
Begin collecting information/data for the attachments/appendices	25	25							
Evaluator provides draft evaluation section (if applicable)	32	38							
Internal feedback on draft Project Narrative	32	36							
First draft Budget and Budget Narrative	32	37							
Internal feedback on Evaluation	38	42							
Internal feedback on Budget and Budget Narrative	37	43							
Second draft Project Narrative (send to Critical Friend and Technical Reviewer)	38	44							
First draft Supplemental Materials and Appendices - Abstract, List of Proprietary Information (optional), Letters or MOUs, References, Other	44	46							
Provide feedback on second draft Project Narrative	44	50							
Second draft of Budget Narrative	43	50							
Begin completing mandatory federal forms and assurances	43	43							
Assemble Appendix	43	45							
Upload final materials to portal	45	47							
Complete all mandatory forms and assurances	46	47							
Submit intergovernmental review (if applicable)	47	47							
Submit complete application and verify submission - Always submit prior to the deadline to mitigate for website issues	48	48							

Getting Ready to Write: Data & Resource Review

The specific data that will be required for a federal education grant proposal will depend on the funding opportunity and the goals of the project.

In general, however, grant proposals will typically require the following data:

- The need or problem being addressed
- The target population
- The proposed project or program
- The qualifications or past performance of the organization or individuals submitting the proposal

Common types of data requested include the following:

- Educational attainment
- Income levels
- Other socioeconomic demographics for the population served

Useful data sources which applicants can access to build up their needs statements include the U.S. Census Bureau (particularly American Community Survey), Data.gov, DataUSA.io, and PolicyMap.com. The Department of Education's What Works Clearinghouse page also provides a range of evidence-based resources for classrooms and schools. Please see the next page for links to helpful websites that provide data relevant to education proposals.

In addition, it is important to review the community members, stakeholders, and partners that you have engaged in the past and to consider who would be interested and available to participate in the project with you. Consider what processes, structures, and protocols you currently have established for involvement and what other structures would need to be put into place, both for engagement during the proposal writing process and for implementation of the proposed project.

Finally, it is important to audit your strengths and gaps in the context of the grant requirements. See the Gap Analysis chart on the next page for a helpful structure for this audit.

Gap Analysis

Item	Current State (From)	Gaps	Grant Requirement (To)
	Insert a description of your current state regarding this item.	*Describe the gaps between the current state and the grant requirements.*	*Insert the requirements of the grant related to this item.*
Stakeholder Engagement & Involvement *(Does the grant require stakeholder engagement or involvement? If so, how do you currently engage and involve stakeholders? How might you engage them in grant planning, governance, feedback, implementation and evaluation?)*			
Partners *(Does the grant require partners? If not, does it allow them? Do you have current partners or need to cultivate them? How might you engage partners in grant planning, governance, implementation, feedback, and evaluation?)*			
Matching Funds *(Does the grant require matching funds? If so, do you have non-federal sources of funding you could use as a match? What cash or in-kind supports from the lead applicant or partners could be included as a match? What additional funds must be secured?)*			
Data *(What data is required by the grant? What data would you like to include to justify your project? Is this data readily available, or, if not, how could you access or collect it?)*			
Resources *(What resources will you require to enact the proposed plan? Which of those resources are available? What partners may be able to provide needed resources? How else may you access needed resources?)*			
Programs *(What programs currently exist that might be leveraged in support of the proposed project? What programs must be modified or developed?)*			
Structures and Processes *(What structures and processes currently exist that might be leveraged in support of the proposed project? What structures and processes must be modified or developed?)*			
Personnel *(Who might be able to provide leadership and implementation support for the proposed grant? What personnel need to be hired with grant funding?)*			

Once you have conducted your audit, think about how your current resources might inform your grant strategy. Some solicitations include choices in grant focus or scope. These choices are called strands (NSF) or priorities (ED). If the opportunity allows you to select from strands or absolute priorities, competitive preference priorities, and invitational priorities, which strands or priorities are you best situated to pursue?

Note that when priorities are included, a grantee must select at least one absolute priority. Competitive preference priorities should be addressed when possible to earn maximum points on the proposal. Invitational priorities do not earn points but may be included at the applicant's discretion. See the solicitation for more information.

Resources

- Institute of Education Sciences / National Center for Education Statistics (IES/NCES)
- America's Health Rankings
- US Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) - Children's Bureau
- Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
- Center for Disease Control (CDC)
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
- Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS)

Stakeholder Engagement & Coalition Building

Community and Partner Engagement

Community and partner engagement is an important aspect of many federal education grant projects. Engaging with the community and partners can help ensure that the project is relevant and addresses the needs of the target population and can also provide valuable resources and support for implementing the project. Some common types of community stakeholders in the education sector may include K-12 students, teachers, administrators, state leaders, parent and teacher associations, higher education institutions, and potential future employers.

There are many different ways to engage with the community and partners, depending on the goals of the project, the needs and existing resources of the target population, and the applicant's role in the community. Some common examples of community and partner engagement include the following:

- **Conducting needs assessments and surveys.** These are typically the lightest lift, however, they also provide the smallest opportunity for community involvement.
- **Holding public meetings and forums, or a public comment period.** These allow for stakeholder voices to be heard, although the outcomes of these meetings are difficult to quantify.
- **Forming advisory boards/committees or partnering with other organizations to provide services, support, or comments on the grant application.** These strategies can be sustained throughout a grant period and beyond. However ensuring a wide representation of stakeholders is sometimes difficult given the small number of individuals involved at these levels.

Coalition members will need to decide whether one or more of these strategies is most beneficial to the project.

It should be noted that it is important to account for the expressed needs and/or opinions of your target population. Including members of your target population as partners makes a strong, inclusive case for the need of your project and provides a direct path to information that is key to assessing meaningful outcomes. Engaging with the community can also help ensure that the project is sustainable and has a lasting impact.

Outreach

When conducting outreach, it is important to clearly communicate information about the grant opportunity. A fillable template for a one-page overview is included in the appendix for your use. It is wise to approach partners (especially new partners) with a clear description of the proposed project.

It is also important to communicate with the partner the benefits they can expect to receive from their participation as well as what you would like from them. Are there particular eligibility criteria which require evidence from them? Are you looking for a letter of support? Would you like them to commit personnel or funding? Will you need to enter into a memorandum of understanding? What data will they need to provide, and what actions will they need to take?

Letters of Support/Commitment

Letters of support for a grant project are letters written by individuals or organizations that endorse the project. These letters are commonly included as part of an education grant application and are intended to demonstrate the potential value and impact of the project. Letters of support can come from a variety of sources, including community leaders, subject matter experts, and other organizations that may be impacted by or interested in the project. Letters of support typically highlight the strengths of the project and explain why the writer believes the project should be funded.

While a letter of support is a letter that shows endorsement for a grant project, a *letter of commitment* is a letter that reflects a promise to provide resources or assistance to the project. A letter of support is typically written by an individual or organization that is not directly involved in the project but wants to show their support for it. A letter of commitment, on the other hand, is typically written by an individual or organization that is directly involved in the project and is pledging to provide specific resources or assistance to help the project succeed.

NSF also requires letters of collaboration. *Letters of collaboration* should be limited to stating the intent to work together and should not contain endorsements or evaluations of the proposed project.

A *Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)* is more formal than a letter of support. It is used to ensure that all parties involved have a clear understanding of the role, responsibilities, and commitments that come with the partnership. An MOU will establish a framework for how partners will work together, including how decisions will be made, how resources will be shared, and how conflicts can be resolved. While an MOU is a useful tool for implementation and organizing a team within the proposal process, it is not necessarily a required attachment for many grants.

Remember to check the grant application instructions for details on what supporting documents are allowed or required for your funding opportunity.

Resources

- Letters of Commitment, Collaboration, and Support - This resource provides a description of the difference between them and examples of each.
- Memorandum of Understanding - This resource offers a template for a Memorandum of Understanding, with suggested sections and language.

Crafting a Winning Narrative

Federal grant applications are reviewed by subject matter experts and professionals who have experience in the education field or field specific to the grant program itself. These are typically busy people, so it is essential to write with clarity to enable an efficient review. This means including headers and subheaders to help the reviewer navigate the text, using bold or italic text to draw attention to particular language, and providing charts and tables to summarize key points. If there is a required page limit, be sure to adhere to it, as well as all font, sizing, and spacing requirements. If there is a recommended page limit, stay close to it. (Note: A few pages over the limit is usually fine.)

Cross-referencing is also helpful. The easiest proposals to read are those that have an anchor such as a list of main strategies or a list of objectives. This anchor is used throughout the proposal to tie everything together. For example, a grant proposal could use a chart format such as the following to show alignment among goals, objectives, research questions (RQ), strategies (S), and data collection.

RQ	S	Data Collection	Analysis	Timeline
GOAL 1: Insert goal here.				
		OBJECTIVE 1: Insert objective here		
		1.1 Surveys for students, teachers, and mentors	Descriptive statistics and content analysis of open responses	September, annually
RQ 1	**S1**	1.2 Applications	Document review and content analysis	Summer, Y2-5
		1.3 Assessment results	Descriptive statistics (inferential statistics when possible)	Starting Year 4, May

One of the biggest mistakes new applicants make is to think of their grant application as an idea for a new project when in fact, the proposal should be a well-designed plan that is ready to implement. If your grant is awarded, you should be able to use the application as a guide for implementation, at least for the first half-year of the project, before adjustments are made.

Maximizing Points

You can use the weight of points across Selection Criteria to determine how much space to dedicate to each section. A section that is worth 25% of the total points should account for roughly 25% of the narrative.

Reviewers are tasked with using Selection Criteria to score your application. Selection criteria are always provided in the solicitation for the applicant's use. It is important to utilize the Selection Criteria as the organizational structure for your narrative. Make it very easy for reviewers to find the sections that they are tasked with scoring. Even if the order does not seem logical to you, it is still best to follow the Selection Criteria as presented in the solicitation.

Due to repetition which sometimes exists within the Selection Criteria, it may be necessary to repeat information in your proposal. If you have room in the narrative, it is acceptable to repeat information and may even simplify the job of the reviewer. If you are short on space, refer the reviewer to the section where the information has already been provided.

Another tip is to use the language of the funder. If the funder asks for you to make a statement of need, it is wise to use the word "need" in your response; if they ask for a description of the problem, be sure to define a "problem".

By searching online for the grant competition for which you are applying, you can often find sample grant abstracts and narratives from winning proposals in previous cycles. Provide 2-3 sample applications to the team working on the proposal to use as models.

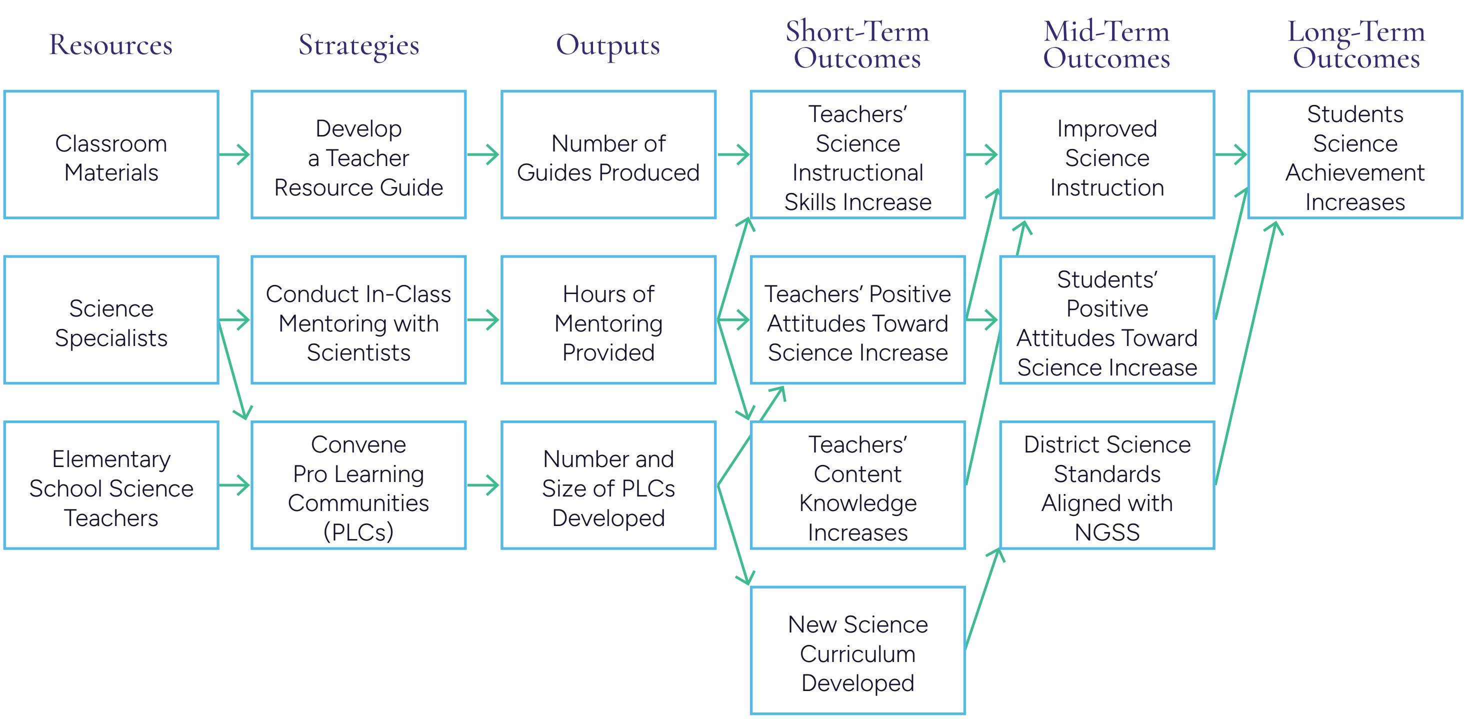
Goals & Objectives

Every proposal should have a *Theory of Change*, a visual representation of the rationale behind your proposed project that describes why your idea makes sense and how the strategies you have selected will impact the performance measures you have designed. This is sometimes called a *Theory of Action* or *Logic Model*. You will include a Theory of Change either in your proposal narrative or in the appendix, depending on the requirements of the funding opportunity.

The Theory of Change is the glue that holds a grant proposal together. A good Theory of Change will increase your chances of winning a grant competition because it will make your entire proposal more coherent, with through-lines from problem/need to strategies to outputs/outcomes. We recommend that you craft your Theory of Change soon after finalizing your proposal strategy, and before you begin writing the main sections of your proposal because you will be referring back to your Theory of Change throughout your proposal.

Below is a sample format for a Theory of Change. Adjust the number of boxes, size of boxes, and arrows as needed. Build this in a separate file and then insert a snip of it into the narrative. Grantees have been successful crafting the Theory of Change image in PowerPoint or Word, and even through the use of more advanced graphic design software.

Sample Theory of Change[1]



[1] *Lawton, B., Brandon, P.R., Cicchinelli, L., & Kekahio, W. (2014). Logic models: A tool for designing and monitoring program evaluations. Institute for Education Sciences. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/pacific/pdf/REL_2014007.pdf*

Note that this format for the Theory of Change is recommended, but not required. Feel free to customize to meet your needs. It is important to show the through-lines (i.e., arrows) from input to strategy to outcome within your Theory of Change, regardless of the format used.

Theory of Change Sections

The sections of the Theory of Change are as follows (you may customize the titles based on the specific requirements of the funding opportunity):

- **Needs/Problems:** This is an optional column. Plan to use either the Needs/Problems column or the Inputs/Resources column as the first column in your Theory of Change. Identify the major problems/issues that you are trying to solve with the proposed project.

- **Inputs/Resources:** Identify anything that already exists that you can leverage in support of the project. This can be personnel, curriculum, technology systems, regulations/ guidance, legal flexibility, community support, etc.

- **Strategies/Activities:** Strategies are one step higher than activities (i.e., several activities fall under a strategy). If you had to describe what you are proposing to do in just a few overarching sentences, what would they be? For example, you may have a strategy to "Build and cultivate community support" that would include your communications efforts and feedback loop (e.g., surveys). Note that while high-level strategies are included in the Theory of Change, specific activities or tasks should be included in the Management Plan.

- **Outputs:** This is an optional column. Outputs differ from outcomes in that outputs are typically "counts" that describe the scope of the project, while outcomes are desired ends. Outputs can include things like number of participants served, number of trainings held, or number of survey responses collected. If you do not have an output column in your Theory of Change, you may include these metrics under Short-Term Outcomes.

- **Short-Term Outcomes:** These should be quantitative outcomes that will be met within the grant period.

- **Mid-Term Outcomes:** This is an optional column that is used with longer grant periods. These should be quantitative outcomes that will be met within the grant period.

- **Long-Term Outcomes:** These should be quantitative outcomes that are larger in scale (e.g., increasing student achievement or graduation rates) and may take longer to achieve (e.g., 5 years).

A fillable Theory of Change template is provided in the appendix for your convenience.

Integrating the Theory of Change into the Proposal

Reference your Theory of Change often in your proposal. This will increase the coherence of your proposed project. Using the required sections of your proposal, introduce the "Inputs" from your Theory of Change. These should be programs, personnel, processes, or policies that will support your proposed project and serve as a first step toward making a desired impact.

Discuss each "Need" that is included in your Theory of Change and explain the extent to which specific gaps or weaknesses in services, infrastructure, or opportunities (barriers) will be addressed by the proposed project. Utilize data to justify each need, as appropriate.

Then introduce the "Strategies" from your Theory of Change and explain each one. Demonstrate how each strategy is aligned to a funding priority (e.g., Absolute Priority, Competitive Preference Priority, Application Requirement). Include research from the literature base to support the strategies included in your Theory of Change. How do these strategies reflect up-to-date knowledge from research and effective practice?

Common Sources to Establish Evidence-Basis of Strategies

- Department of Education's What Works Clearinghouse
- The Campbell Collaboration
- Results for America's Economic Mobility Catalog
- J-PAL North America

Throughout your proposal, whenever referring to strategies, they should align to the strategies in your Theory of Change. In addition, your identified performance targets should be identical to the outputs, and short- and long-term outcomes in your Theory of Change. Do not be concerned if you need to call them objectives in the application and outcomes in the Theory of Change. Your performance metrics will reflect the same concept regardless of the terminology.

Resources

- A helpful video on the creation of a Theory of Change (starts at 2:35)
- Explanation of the sample Theory of Change provided above

Evaluation, Metrics & Data

In your Theory of Change, you created the outputs, short-term outcomes, and long-term outcomes that can be utilized to measure the success of your project strategies. Within the grant proposal, you will be asked to transform these into measurable performance metrics (sometimes called objectives).

You can use the following questions to guide your decision on how to prioritize the most suitable performance metrics:

Meaningful

Will moving the numbers on this indicator deliver the outcome and make a difference in the lives of students that they can feel?

Moveable

Can we realistically move the numbers on this indicator, given our role and what we are planning to do?

Measurable

Do we already collect well-defined data on this indicator OR are we willing to make an immediate investment to get that data within the next 3 months or less?

This means that your metrics should be aligned with your theory of change, be numeric, and be able to reflect the change that your project is seeking to make. In most cases, you will be asked to set targets for each year of the grant period. The best way to do this is to collect baseline data and predict the amount of change that can be achieved each year. (Remember that in a planning year, the outcomes are not likely to move.)

If you do not have baseline data, it is acceptable to obtain a baseline in Year 1 of the grant and set your metrics with regard to that baseline. For example, stakeholder involvement could be set as Baseline (B) in Year 1, B+50 in Year 2, and B+100 in Year 3.

You can use different types of benchmarking to set realistic, but ambitious, targets:

- Against history: review historical data for your school district or state.
- Against other similar systems: compare performance to other districts or states.
- Within your system: review performance across different schools within your district or state.
- Against the world: review global trends in education standards (e.g., OECD, PISA, TIMSS)
- Against organizations with similar processes: review data for private schools or informal educational programs.

Think through what data you will need to collect to report on each of your metrics. You may need to establish data sharing agreements with local education agencies or other organizations in order to do so. Ask the organization if they would be open to a data-sharing agreement and have them mention their willingness in their letter of commitment. You do not need to finalize the agreement prior to grant submission.

Typical data sources for the evaluation include the following:

- Qualitative: interviews, focus groups, observations, open-ended survey responses, meeting agendas, lesson plans, student work, etc.
- Quantitative: survey results, assessment scores, participation rates and demographics, grade point averages, attendance rates, rate of discipline referrals, etc.
- Data collection can be done through automated systems like SurveyMonkey or by leveraging the data collected in student information systems, learning management systems, and district assessment systems. Data can also be collected by hand during observations and focus groups.
- Data can include video, audio, handwritten notes, and electronic files such as documents, spreadsheets, and slides.

GPRA Measures

GPRA measures are standardized performance measures used by the U.S. federal government to assess the effectiveness of federal programs and initiatives across all grantees. GPRA stands for the Government Performance and Results Act, which was passed in 1993 and requires federal agencies to develop performance goals and measures for their programs and to report regularly on their progress in achieving these goals. Be sure to include any GPRA measures outlined in the solicitation with your performance metrics.

Working with an Evaluator

Many grant competitions award points for the evaluation section of a proposal or require a third-party evaluation. In both cases, it is important to select an evaluator or evaluation team to conduct the evaluation of the project. If a third-party evaluator is not required, the grantee can select an individual or a team within the applicant's own organization to conduct the evaluation.

Third-party evaluations are often required because they are conducted by external organizations who are expected to have an objective and unbiased view. Third-party evaluations are highly valued but are usually more expensive than internal evaluations.

Qualities to look for in an evaluator include demonstrating expertise in the education field and in the subject area of the proposed project, experience conducting federal grant evaluations, and having the resources to conduct the evaluation completely and on time. In addition, it is important to fully understand the expected cost of the evaluation as well as the evaluator's availability and willingness to contribute to the development of an evaluation plan for the grant proposal.

Applicants should expect to set aside approximately 15% of the full grant budget to fund the evaluation. Costs may, of course, vary depending on the scale of the project and the complexity of the evaluation.

An Evaluator's Contributions to the Grant Proposal

Many evaluators will agree to assist the applicant in developing content for the Evaluation section of the grant proposal. The Evaluation section typically includes research questions, metrics, data to be collected to inform the research questions, and the evaluator's methodology for data analysis. Evaluators will typically want to see the project's theory of change prior to working on the evaluation section. They may also agree to provide feedback on the overall proposal, if requested.

Types of Evaluation

Plans for both a process evaluation and an impact evaluation should be included in the Evaluation section of a grant proposal. The process evaluation (also known as a formative or implementation evaluation) assesses how a program is being implemented, as it is being implemented, including the extent to which it is being carried out with fidelity and progressing on time and within budget. The process evaluation provides real-time feedback to the project leads that can be used to improve the project design and implementation.

The second type of evaluation is an impact evaluation (also known as a summative evaluation). This evaluation examines the effects of a program on the planned objectives, outputs, and outcomes. The impact evaluation will typically be carried out in the last years of the grant since it is focused on the project's overall effectiveness and outcomes. The randomized controlled trial (RCT) and the quasi-experimental design (QED) are considered to be the strongest of the various types of impact evaluation designs.

Evaluations should be directly aligned with the proposed project's theory of change and should include the same outputs, short-term outcomes, and long-term outcomes. This facilitates a tight alignment between what is designed and what is measured.

Budgeting

Federal grants require budgets to be submitted for each year of the proposed project. Unless otherwise specified, you should begin each year on October 1 and conclude it on September 30 (following the federal fiscal year). When applying for Federal grants, applicants must generally follow Uniform Guidance under the Code of Federal Regulations (2 C.F.R Part 200) that establishes uniform administrative requirements, cost principles, and audit requirements for Federal awards to non-Federal entities.

As part of the application, you will need to provide a budget for both federal and non-federal funds. This means that you will create a budget for the requested federal dollars, as well as a separate budget for any additional monies that will be utilized to implement the grant project. Do not include any other federal funds within your budget. (You may, however, mention in your project narrative that funding from other federal sources will be leveraged in support of the project.)

Federal grant budgets are typically organized by categories such as Personnel, Fringe Benefits, Travel, Equipment, Supplies, Contractual, Construction, Other, Total Direct Costs, Indirect Costs, Training Stipends, and Total Costs. Be sure to use the categories provided by the funding organization, even if your own organization utilizes different budget line items. The Department of Education provides a budget form (Form 524) that applicants can use. You can also use the editable budget form provided in the Appendix, which contains detailed line-item descriptions, sample budget, and additional resources.

It's important to note that "Equipment" is defined as durable equipment that costs $5,000 or more per item. If equipment costs less than $5,000, it should be listed in the Supplies line item. Also note that the Construction line item is rarely allowed in education-related grants.

Allowable expenses are outlined within the solicitation or other federal regulations which are cited within the solicitation. Sometimes you will see constraints on tuition, entertainment, or food. In addition, cost caps are sometimes provided. For example, you may be given an administrative cap, meaning that no more than a certain percent of your total project cost may go toward administrative expenses.

Most proposals allow you to specify a federally approved indirect cost rate. Indirect cost rates build on modified total direct costs (MTDC). MTDC means all direct salaries and wages, applicable fringe benefits, materials and supplies, services, travel, and sub-awards and subcontracts up to the first $25,000 of each sub-award or subcontract. MTDC excludes equipment, capital expenditures, charges for rental costs, tuition remission, scholarships and fellowships, participant support costs and the portion of each sub-award and subcontract in excess of $25,000.

If your organization does not have a federally approved rate, you may usually utilize the de minimis rate of 10%, unless otherwise specified. If you are not sure, you can follow this decision tree to better understand your position. You will typically not apply for a federally-approved indirect cost rate until you are awarded a federal grant. There are also competitions that require the applicant to use a "training indirect cost rate." This limits indirect cost reimbursement to an entity's actual indirect costs, as determined in its negotiated indirect cost rate agreement, or eight percent of a modified total direct cost base, whichever amount is less.

Matching Requirements

Matching requirements are often used to leverage the federal funds provided by the grant and to ensure that the grantee has a vested interest in the success of the project. They may also be used to demonstrate the support of other stakeholders for the project, or to ensure that the project is sustainable in the long term.

Matching requirements can take many different forms, including cash contributions, in-kind contributions (such as donated goods or services), and third-party contributions (such as funds from private foundations or other organizations). Matching funds are also an example of partnership and strategy building. The specific requirements and the amount of the matching funds required will vary depending on the grant program and the specific project being funded.

Budget Narrative

Applicants are expected to submit a budget narrative that provides a detailed explanation of each of the expenses included within the budget. This document allows you to provide a justification of the proposed expenses and an explanation of how the funds will be used to achieve the proposed goals and objectives.

For each expense category, provide a detailed explanation of how the funds will be used to support the project. Be as specific as possible and provide a rationale for each expense.

Resources

- NSF Sample Budget Justification
- ED Sample Budget Narrative
- ED Grant Application and Other Forms
- ED Indirect Cost Training Course
- ED Sample Commitment Letter for Matching Contributions

Delivery Planning

Within a grant proposal, delivery planning is showcased in the management plan section. The *management plan section* provides a detailed description of how the project will be managed and implemented. This section should include information on the project team and their roles and responsibilities, as well as a description of the project's organizational structure and any partnerships or collaborations that will be involved.

When determining who should serve on the project leadership team, think about the main strategies of the proposal and who within the partner organizations would best lead each strategy. Establish redundancies so that if personnel leave the organization, there is a co-lead or assistant to carry on the work. Ensure that each lead has a sufficient team to carry out the assigned tasks. In the case that additional personnel are needed, funding for their positions may be requested in the grant budget.

If the project makes use of advisory boards or steering committees, these should be described in the management plan section as well. Be certain to describe which bodies will review project data and reports and how these will be used to make adjustments to the implementation plan.

The Management Plan section should also include a detailed project plan that outlines the specific steps and activities that will be undertaken to achieve the project's goals and objectives, as well as any potential risks or challenges that could affect the project and how they will be addressed.

To ensure your project stays on track, you can establish a set of *routines* - regularly scheduled and structured conversations between a leader and the people responsible for project delivery. The conversation at these routine meetings should focus on assessing progress so far and problem-solving specific issues. Routines can help establish structure and discipline, and drive project delivery forward. They are an opportunity to monitor performance, celebrate successes, and identify and address issues. Routines should take place regularly, focus on tracking outcomes, hold people accountable, surface issues, and focus on problem-solving.

Gantt Chart

One visual representation of a project plan that is useful to include in a proposal is a Gantt chart. A *Gantt chart* is a visual tool used to plan and schedule projects. It is a type of bar chart that shows the start and end dates of each task in a project, as well as the dependencies between tasks and the overall project timeline. Gantt charts are typically used to help project managers and teams plan and coordinate their work and to communicate the project's schedule and progress.

Gantt charts provide a clear visual representation of the project schedule and allow project managers and teams to track their progress and identify any potential issues or delays. They can also be used to help reviewers understand the project's scope and timeline.

Below is a sample Gantt chart for a three-year grant, synthesizing proposal strategies, activities, person responsible, and timeline. Each checkmark indicates a milestone.

You may include reporting requirements and other compliance activities within your Gantt chart as needed. A fillable Gantt Chart template is provided in the appendix for your convenience.

Project Name

Organization

Lead

					Year 1												Year 1												Year 1											
					Q1			Q2			Q3			Q4			Q1			Q2			Q3			Q4			Q1			Q2			Q3			Q4		
Component / task	Lead	Progress	Start	End	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
STRATEGY 1																																								
Sample Activities: Develop recruitment & marketing plan	Name	50%	1/1/23	1/30/23																																				
Develop & pilot admissions & selection process	Name	25%																																						
Implement & refine marketing, recruitment, admissions & selection policies & processes	Name	0%																																						
STRATEGY 2																																								
Host Seminars	Name	0%																																						
Partners with IHE to develop & assess	Name	0%																																						

Finalizing the Application

Each solicitation will have particular attachments or appendices that are required or allowed. Common appendices include letters of support or commitment, resumes of key personnel, a list of proprietary information included in the proposal, an optional waiver request (to waive the requirement for matching funds), and a list of references. Other appendices could include eligibility data, the results of needs assessments or surveys, a literature review presenting the evidence behind the proposed strategies, or required checklists.

In some cases, appendices are limited to only those that are required or limited to a certain number of pages. Refer to the solicitation for specific guidance.

Every federal grant will have required forms and assurances. Some of these will be integrated within the portal where you submit your application. Others may need to be completed in a separate file and attached within the portal. It is important to follow all instructions provided when completing the forms and assurances. Below are links to common forms from the ED, NSF, and DoL.

Resources

- Education Department Forms
- NSF Forms are included in the NSF Grants.gov Application Guide
- Department of Labor Forms

A few education grant competitions will be subject to intergovernmental review. *Intergovernmental review* is a process that allows states and local governments to review and comment on federal programs and activities that may have an impact on their communities. The intergovernmental review process is intended to promote communication and collaboration between different levels of government and to ensure that federal programs and activities are consistent with state and local priorities and objectives. To determine if your state participates in intergovernmental review, see the State Point of Contact (SPOC) list linked below. If it does, you will need to contact your SPOC to determine the procedure for review. Typically, this requires submitting application materials at the same time that you submit your proposal to the funding agency (or shortly thereafter).

You can access the Intergovernmental Review SPOC List here.

Submitting the Application

You will submit through grants.gov or another portal specified within the solicitation. Plan to submit your application at least one day before the official deadline. Submitting on the deadline is sometimes difficult due to traffic on the site, portal outages, or other technical issues. If an application is received even a few seconds after the deadline, it will be rejected. (Note that *received* is the key word here. It may take some time after clicking Submit for your application to be received.)

Glossary of Acronyms

ED	U.S. Department of Education
FOA	Funding Opportunity Announcement
GPRA	Government Performance and Results Act
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MTDC	Modified Total Direct Costs
NIA	Notice Inviting Applications
NOFO	Notice of Funding Activity
NSF	National Science Foundation
QED	Quasi-Experimental Design
RCT	Randomized Controlled Trial
SAM	System for Award Management
SPOC	State Point of Contact
UEI	Unique Entity Identifier

Appendix

One-Page Overview Template

Use the one-page overview to quickly communicate the basics of the project to potential grant partners and potential providers of matching funds. Delete or revise categories and number of years to match your proposed project. You can download an editable version of the template here.

Project Working Title

Solicitation Name:

Absolute Priority / Strand:

Competitive Preference Priorities *(if applicable)*:

Invitational Priority *(if applicable)***:**

Scope and Duration: [$XX request, X-month/year project]

Project Overview:

[Insert an overview of your project here]

Project Director / Key Personnel:

Prospective Partners:

Implementation: [Summarize what you expect to achieve each year of the grant]

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
• Achievement • Achievement • Achievement	• Achievement • Achievement • Achievement	• Achievement • Achievement • Achievement	• Achievement • Achievement • Achievement	• Achievement • Achievement • Achievement

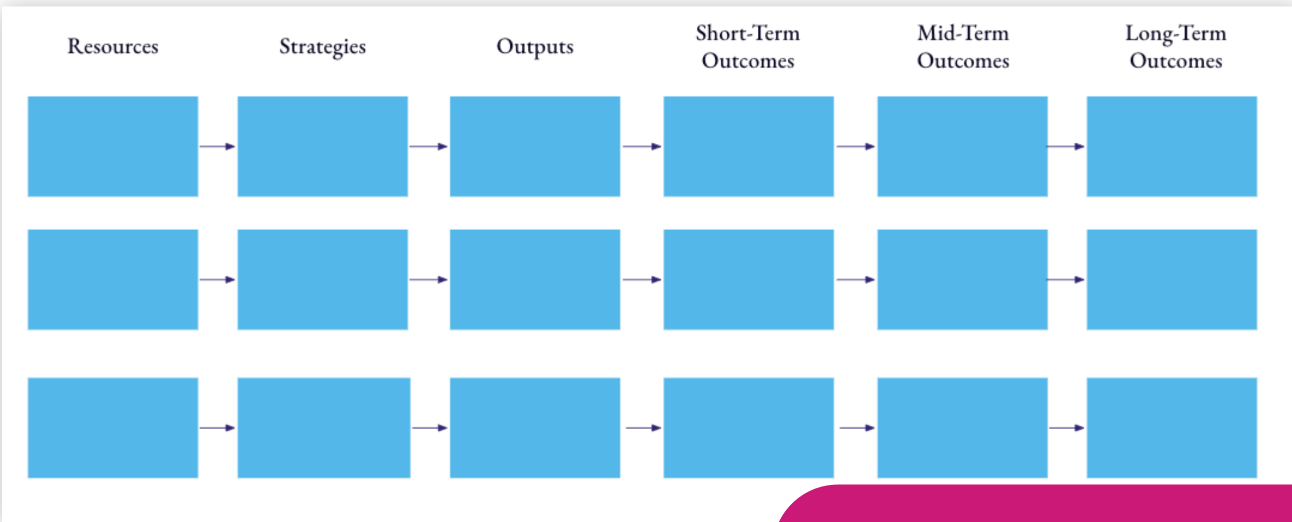
Goals: What overall impact do you hope to achieve?

Download Template

Appendix

Theory of Change Template

Customize the Theory of Change template to graphically represent the logic behind your proposed project. Adjust the through-lines as needed and add or remove boxes or columns to fit your design. You can download an editable version of the template here.



Download Template

Appendix

Gantt Chart Template

Utilize the Gantt Chart template below to develop a workplan for your project. List activities under each project strategy, identify the lead who is responsible for each activity, and indicate the timeframe for each item. If your grant period extends beyond three years, add columns as needed. You can download an editable version of the template here.

Project name

Organization

Lead

					2023											
					Q1			Q2			Q3			Q4		
Component / task	**Lead**	**Progress**	**Start**	**End**	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Strategy 1 [list strategy here]																
Example	Example	50%	1/1/2023	1/30/2023												
Task 2	Name	0%														
Task 3	Name	0%														
Strategy 2 [list strategy here]																
Task 1	Name	0%														
Task 2	Name	0%														
Task 3	Name	0%														
Strategy 3 [list strategy here]																
Task 1	Name	0%														
Task 2	Name	0%														
Task 3	Name	0%														
Strategy 4 [list strategy here]																
Task 1	Name	0%														
Task 2	Name	0%														
Task 3	Name	0%														

Download Template

Appendix

Budget Template

Use a budget template to plan your expenses and demonstrate how you will use resources to achieve desired goals. In this document you will find a budget template, sample budget and line items descriptions with additional resources. You can download an editable version of the template here.

Budget summary U.S. Department of Education Funds (non-construction programs)

NAME OF APPLICANT ORGANIZATION

Budget Categories	Project Year 1	Project Year 2	Project Year 3	Total
1. Personnel	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -
2. Fringe Benefits	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -
3. Travel	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -
4. Equipment	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -
5. Supplies	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -
6. Contractual	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -
7. Construction	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -
8. Other	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -
9. Total Direct Costs (lines 1-	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -
Modified Total Direct Co:	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -
10. Indirect Costs*	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -
12. Total Costs	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -

*Indirect cost rate

Download Template