



City of Albuquerque  
Office of Neighborhood Coordination

Grant Writing Toolkit for  
Neighborhood Associations

March 2018

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The City of Albuquerque’s Office of Neighborhood Coordination (ONC) has a mission to help create vibrant and thriving neighborhoods through service, support, and celebration. ONC provides timely and relevant resources for neighborhood and homeowners associations at its website at <https://www.cabq.gov/neighborhoods>. Staff are also available for consultation and trainings.

ONC put together this guide because grants can be a useful tool to help your neighborhood association provide expanded programming. Grant funding can help you reach more people and do more good in your neighborhood. This resource guide was created to help your neighborhood association navigate the often-complex world of grant writing. Hopefully, you will find it a useful tool, and it can help your neighborhood association achieve its goals and grow to make a broader, and better quality, impact.

This guide was developed in collaboration with The Grant Plant, Inc., a local organization that researches, writes, and edits grants for nonprofits. For more information, helpful blog articles, and other resources you can check out their website at [www.thegrantplantnm.com](http://www.thegrantplantnm.com).

This Guide is designed to be a helpful tool for any neighborhood association or any interested party. It is free to use and disseminate.

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## I. Introduction

Grant funding can be an effective tool to bring a needed program or service to life in your community. There are many foundations, charities, corporations, and government entities that are working to make our local communities happier and healthier places to live and that may be interested in providing financial support to your organization to help promote joint goals and vision for the community. However, before you begin researching and applying for grants, it is important to know the answers to some key questions.

- Am I prepared to start writing grant proposals?
- How do I research grant opportunities?
- What is typically involved in the grant writing process?
- Are the programs I am applying for “grant-ready?”
- Is this program a good match for a particular funder?
- Can we deliver on the reporting and outcomes a particular funder is looking for?

This guide will help prepare you to navigate the world of grant seeking and help you learn how to submit strong grant applications.

## II. Overview of Grants and Grant Seeking

Neighborhood associations have the potential to benefit from grants as a source of funding. Broadly defined, grants are funds provided by a philanthropic entity or the government, which can be used to underwrite a program or organization without the expectation of being paid back. The Merriam-Webster definition is, “a sum of money given by an organization, or a government department, for a particular purpose.”

To compete for grants, a neighborhood association generally must complete some form of grant application process that the funder has established. Most often, funders issue a grant application request that will provide the guidelines that organizations need to follow in order to apply for funding. There are many names for a grant application request. Some common terms among private and corporate foundations include a Request for Proposal (RFP), a Request for Application (RFA), or a Call for Proposals (CFP), while federal agencies often use the term Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) or Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA). For the purposes of this document, this will be referred to as a Request for Proposal (RFP).

### Types of Grantmaking Organizations

There are several different types of organizations that may present funding opportunities for your neighborhood association. It is important to know the difference between these organizations so that you understand what they may be looking for, the type of language to use when applying, and how rigorous they may be in their reporting requirements. The below definitions provide a broad overview. It is important to read through all guidelines and documents provided within an RFP to ensure you fully understand what is required both in the proposal submission and once you receive the award.

#### *Foundation*

A private foundation is typically a nonprofit organization, but not a public charity, that was set up to tackle a specific area of need in the community. There are two types of private foundations, an operating foundation and a non-operating foundation. A private operating foundation has its own programs that exist for charitable purposes, and often won't distribute funds to other nonprofits unless they are working directly with their programs. A private non-operating foundation is one that is set up specifically to grant money to other charitable organizations. Non-operating foundations are typically ones that will have grant opportunities available for your organization.

Private foundations are often set up by families and look to make an impact on a community need that is important to that family. Many private foundations invest their principal funding (often from the family itself) and use the income from that initial investment to fund grants. The board of directors is often made up of members of the family who began the foundation.

Proposals are typically reviewed by the board of directors, other family members, and staff members of the foundation if they have any. While the scope of the foundation's work can vary,

the focus is generally narrower than other types of funders. It is important to understand the history of the foundation and the language they use to explain their purpose while you are crafting a proposal. One foundation may have been set up decades ago by a wealthy banker and is now run by that banker's descendants. Another foundation may have recently been set up by a successful artist who still has a hand in running the organization. Both of these foundations may use different language and have very different priorities. Being able to tap into their history and the language they use will be an important step to securing funding.

When crafting these proposals, it is important to match the language used by the foundation (formal vs. informal), understand that these causes are near-and-dear to the staff/family of the foundation, and to ensure your project truly fits within their stated purpose.

### *Public Charity*

Public charities may look similar to private foundations but can operate very differently. Public charities may have their own programs that they operate. Alternatively, they may be more of an umbrella organization that is looking to fund and link resources in the communities they serve. Like your organization, they are established to tackle a specific issue in the community and to fill a perceived gap in community resources. Public charities typically receive donations and may themselves receive grant funding that is then subgranted out. This means they are accountable to those funding sources. They may be required to report on outcomes for a grant they are administering. They also must be held accountable by their current board of directors. All of this means their reporting requirements will vary, not only from organization to organization, but even among different funding opportunities within the same organization.

Many public charities rely on the community to help with their proposal review process. Some public charities put together committees to review proposals they receive. These committees can be made up of donors to the charity, experts in the field, general community members, charity staff/board members, or a combination of all these groups. This means someone could be reviewing your proposal who has no background in the issue you are applying for. You want to be able to convey knowledge and authority on the subject without getting bogged down in jargon, technical terms, or acronyms.

An example of a well-known public charity with chapters in many communities is United Way.

### *Corporate*

Corporate giving can either come directly from a for-profit corporate entity or from a charitable organization that was started by that for-profit company. These entities will often only serve areas where their for-profit businesses are in operation, so it is important to note any geographic limitations right away to determine eligibility. Corporate funders will usually have a specific need they are trying to fill, and many times that need is directly related to the goods or services offered by the corporation.

Proposals to corporate funders are generally reviewed by staff within the corporation. This will give you a hint as to the type of language and information that will be useful in your proposal. If

the proposal is from a bank, then you know bankers are likely to be reviewing your application. They may be more interested in the statistics and hard numbers on the need and outcomes of your program. Banks are also required, by the Community Reinvestment Act, to target their giving to low- or moderate-income (LMI) individuals and, as a result, applicants must demonstrate how their proposals serve these target populations.

One thing that most corporate funders have in common is their desire to promote their business interests in the community. Many corporate funders have set up a foundation as part of their branding or outreach efforts. They want people to feel good about buying their product or service, and they point to the good causes they support to bolster their own image. If your program is visible in the community, or you can visibly recognize the corporation, it may be useful to include that information in your proposal.

### *Government*

Governments at all levels often provide funding opportunities for their constituent communities. Many government agencies require applicants to have registered with them as a vendor or have a pricing agreement in place before responding to an RFP. If you are interested in government funding at any level, it is helpful to review each agency's submittal requirements and make sure your organization has all required documents on hand and is set up in their system before applying for funding.

Government agencies tend to have larger awards than other funding agencies. Keep in mind that the larger the award, the more capacity an organization must have to apply for the grant, administer the program as promised, and fulfill reporting requirements. Preparing a government application is generally no easy task – it often requires a detailed and lengthy description of the proposed project and numerous attachments. Once a government grant is secured, reporting can be a time-consuming endeavor, and organizations usually need to dedicate time to meeting the reporting requirements. You should not be discouraged from applying for government funding, but it is important to weigh the costs and benefits and ensure you can manage the funding if it is awarded.

Government, and particularly federal, agencies often use experts in the particular field to review grants. These reviewers can be from anywhere within the agency's geographical constituency. Sometimes they are paid, but many times they are volunteering. While you may have more leeway to use industry-specific terms, it is still important to keep your proposal clear and streamlined, and make it stick out from a large stack of applications.

### *Beware*

Many times, people will begin their grant writing journey thinking that grants are easy and free money. This is not the case. Grants can take a significant amount of resources to write, submit, manage, and report.

While the payoff can be worth it, it is important to go into the process with realistic expectations. All grants take time, even if you are not awarded funding. Preparing grants can

take anywhere from several hours to more than 100 hours for large proposals. Sometimes the reporting requirements extend beyond the funded period. Even a one-year grant can take two to three years of research, application, program delivery, and final reporting. If it is a multi-year grant, it will take even more time. There is never a guarantee of funding even from funders who have awarded you a grant previously. Also, keep in mind that many funders tend to prioritize organizations that have been established for a few years, have proof of strong and stable funding, and/or have leaders with proven experience and expertise as part of their staff or on their board of directors.

It is also important to note the catch in the Merriam Webster definition above: generally, grants must be used for a purpose that is usually outlined and agreed upon beforehand by the grant seeker and funder. A grant is a contract, for which you will sign an award agreement. Grants are not “free money” to be used as you wish.

This should not discourage your neighborhood association from looking at grants as a source of funding. They can help your programs expand and transform the impact your organization has in the community. However, it is important for everyone in your organization, especially your board of directors, to manage expectations on what grants really are and the amount of investment they may require.

### **Grant Application Processes**

You have read all the above information, decided that seeking grant funding is best for you and your organization, and found a few grants that might work for you. What next? Before you start writing, you want to assess your eligibility, prioritize which grants to write, and assess your capacity and time for writing and managing each potential funding source.

#### *Assess eligibility*

First, you will need to read through the eligibility guidelines presented by the funder. If there is anything that disqualifies your organization, you can stop and move on to the next funding opportunity. Make sure to read the RFP thoroughly as eligibility requirements may be spread throughout the entire document. Take a look at this article (<http://bit.ly/ReadingRFP>) for helpful tips on how to efficiently read through an RFP to determine eligibility.

An often-overlooked eligibility criterion is the geographic consideration. Make sure the funder will invest in your type of community (i.e., urban vs. rural) and your city, state, or region. Also, double check to make sure the funder accepts open submissions. Some funders only invite select organizations to apply. In these cases, if you have not been invited, your application will not be eligible. Finally, make sure the funder will provide the type of support your organization is seeking (e.g., if seeking capital/building support, then be sure that the funder is open to awarding this type of support).

#### *Prioritize funders*

Once eligibility has been confirmed, it is good practice to prioritize which funding opportunities to pursue. Make sure you understand each of the identified funder’s goals. Review the language

the funder uses and the types of programs they have funded in the past. Review the funder's website to see if a listing of past awards is available and, if needed, look through their 990 form (the form they submit to the IRS each year). This form is publicly available, and you can usually find it on the online platform, Guidestar ([www.guidestar.org](http://www.guidestar.org)). Sometimes a funder will say they support a variety of programs but may have an unstated affinity toward a certain type of program. Also look through the website or 990 to confirm that the funder is a good geographic match. If they tend to fund in certain areas outside your geographic region, even if you are eligible, that may give you a hint that you are less likely to receive funding.

Next, analyze the funder's capacity. Is it a local funder that gives out a large number of awards? Is it a national funder that only gives out one award? Prioritize funders who give more awards and who tend to fund different organizations annually (rather than the same organizations year after year) as it greatly increases the chances of being funded. Sometimes funders will also state the size of their applicant pools, and/or the percent of proposals funded in the past year. This will also provide insight as to whether your organization is more or less likely to be funded.

Read more about researching funders in [Section IV: Grant Research Guide](#).

#### *Assess capacity and time commitment*

Hopefully, you have a good handle on the capacity of your neighborhood association to provide programming. If you do not, now is a good time to have that conversation, before you begin writing grants. Consider the following key questions:

- Will the proposed program require more staff or volunteer capacity than you currently have?
- Can you reasonably track expenditures to the granting source without putting an undue burden on your financial management staff or volunteers?
- What is your capacity to create data collection tools, administer those tools, analyze the data, and report back to the funder?

Each grant will create different requirements that your organization must be able to manage. Make sure you know the answers to each of those questions as they relate to any grant you are applying for. It is better to not apply for a grant than receive a grant you do not have the capacity to manage. Failing to meet grant requirements may have a long-term detrimental impact on your organization's ability to apply for funding in the future.

It is important to weigh the time you will spend writing the grant with the amount of the award. Some grants have small awards but require significant time to write and report. Others may have simpler application processes and be more attractive from a time commitment standpoint.

#### *Begin the grant writing process*

After you have determined that you are eligible, you are a good fit, and you have the capacity to write the grant and to conduct the project, then you want to start working on your highest priority grants. Here are some tips to get you started on the right foot:



- Make a work plan. Include all needed documents, deadlines (make sure to note times in your time zone and not the funder's time zone), and submission details (online form, e-mailed packet, mailed hard copy, etc.). Delegate sections as needed by noting who is responsible for which component on the work plan. You may want to read the RFP several times to ensure you do not miss any important instructions or components.
- Create a template to work from, particularly if the grant is submitted via an online form. In the template, include all instructions, exact question wording, and character/word counts for each question if applicable. This will allow you to work on the grant proposal over several days or weeks, without fear of losing work in an online form.
- Draft a budget as one of the first orders of business in the grant writing process. Knowing where you want to direct the funding will guide the development of your written narrative.
- Start working on gathering all needed documents and obtaining letters of support or other required material from third parties.
- Follow directions and make sure to submit your application within the deadline window and in the proper format.

For a discussion of each component of the grant application process, see [Section V, Application Components](#).

### Recipient Responsibilities

You have done your research, written a solid application, and have now been awarded. Congratulations! Now it is time to understand what your responsibilities are as an award recipient.

Your organization is now legally obligated to spend the award as detailed in the grant proposal and instructed by the funder. Make sure to set yourself up for success before launching the funded program. Some suggested action steps include:

- 1) Develop a plan to track expenditures that both your program staff and financial staff understand. Track every cent and be able to tie it back to the funded program.
- 2) Ensure the program staff, partners, or volunteers understand the funder's requirements. They will be the ones to ensure the program is delivered as planned and, most likely, collect (and maybe even compile) the data.
- 3) Set internal deadlines for any required reports to be submitted, and note deadlines of any other responsibilities you have to the funder. This will be in your grant award agreement.
- 4) Once your plans are in place to track finances, deliver the program as planned, and collect any required data, ensure someone is ultimately responsible for managing the grant and seeing the plans through.

Sometimes you may find that the program needs to change significantly from the promises you made in the grant. If that is the case, contact your funder to explain the circumstances and work with them to modify the terms. Many funders understand that things sometimes happen and, as long as the spirit of the grant is not violated, will work with you to develop a new plan.

### III. Nonprofit Structures

Most grant opportunities are only available to nonprofit organizations or government entities. While some are open to entities that are not classified as a nonprofit by the IRS, the vast majority are not. There are other benefits for organizations being recognized as a nonprofit. Mission-related income is not taxable, there is an inherent public trust that the organization is “doing good” in the community, and there are tax incentives for people to donate to the organization. However, there are also limitations to being organized as a nonprofit and several unique rules that must be followed.

This section will help you understand the basics of nonprofit structures. Please note that this information is meant to be an overview. Please consult your attorney when making business decisions.

#### What is a Nonprofit Organization?

The most common type of nonprofit organizations are those designated as a 501(c)3 organization by the IRS. These are organizations that have completed a comprehensive application process and been approved by the IRS as serving a charitable purpose for the public good. Any organization that exists for general welfare, instead of making a profit for owners or shareholders, can organize as a nonprofit. Legally, this status means organizations are exempt from income tax for income related to their charitable purpose, and donations to the organization are tax deductible. Most funders require applicants to be organized as a 501(c)3 (or another type of nonprofit) in order to apply. Currently, there are 29 nonprofit designations from the IRS. For a full listing, you can go to Charity Navigator (<http://bit.ly/NonprofitTypes>), which gives a brief overview of each. To find out more and access comprehensive information, visit the IRS’ website ([www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov)).

A common classification that a neighborhood association might fall under is a 501(c)4, which encompasses local associations of employees and social welfare organizations. Neighborhood associations would fall in the latter category. The main difference between the two designations is that a 501(c)4 has a little more leeway to engage in lobbying activities, as long as those activities are not the primary purpose and they directly relate to the purpose of an organization. For example, if you were to feel a proposed city ordinance had the potential to positively impact your neighborhood, or those living in it, you would be allowed to engage in activity to promote that ordinance. You would, however, not be able to engage in political activity that was in support or opposition to any political candidate. There are other more nuanced differences and, as with any legal matter, you should consult a lawyer before making any legal decisions about your organization.

A common misconception is that nonprofits cannot sell goods or services, or even make a profit. This is untrue. The main distinction is that nonprofits are not set up to make a profit. Instead, they are set up for a charitable purpose. Nonprofits can, and should, strive to make a profit each year as this makes their work sustainable. They can even make money from goods or services,

called “earned income,” tax-free as long as those goods or services are related to their charitable purpose. For example, your neighborhood association may operate an event for your neighborhood at a local community center and charge a small entrance fee. Because this income is related to your charitable purpose, not only would it be tax-free, it would not jeopardize your nonprofit status. This money can then be used to buy supplies, pay staff/contractors, and generally operate programs.

If you need to set up your organization as a nonprofit, there are several steps you must take to form a legal entity and submit to the IRS for tax-exempt status. Take a look at the Center for Nonprofit Excellence’s Eight Important Steps to Forming a Nonprofit (<http://bit.ly/CNPE8Steps>).

### Requirements for Nonprofit Organizations

While nonprofits enjoy tax-exempt privilege, can accept tax-deductible donations, and are eligible for a wide array of grant opportunities, there are requirements that a nonprofit must fulfill to maintain their tax-deductible status.

- **Board of Directors** – Nonprofits need to have an established body of leaders who can help guide the organization’s mission, purpose, and financial decisions. Funders will want to see a list of those governing your organization. Often people start with family members, friends, and mentors as the basis for their board of directors, but as the organization grows it will be important to seek out community leaders, representatives of your target population, subject experts, and others with interest in the mission of your organization. These individuals will bring depth, knowledge, and important points of view to your board. It is also a good idea to include individuals with professional backgrounds that can offer advice and guide decisions for your nonprofit in areas such as finance and law.
- **Articles of Incorporation** – Articles of Incorporation are formal documents filed with the state of New Mexico that legally document the creation of a corporation. The Secretary of State website (<http://bit.ly/SOSNonprofit>) lists the forms necessary to file for incorporation in New Mexico.
- **By-laws** – These are the formal policies and procedures that the board of directors has approved and the organization will follow. You will need to draft and finalize the by-laws before filing your Articles of Incorporation.
- **Maintain good standing** – You will need to ensure your organization maintains good standing with all regulatory and government agencies. In New Mexico, that includes registering with the Secretary of State (<http://bit.ly/SOSNonprofit>) and Attorney General (<https://www.nmag.gov/charities.aspx>). You must also file a tax return each year with the IRS. The IRS determines what, if any, of your income is taxable, ensures you are not making an inordinate amount of income from goods or services not related to your tax exempt status, and ensures that your nonprofit is enriching the community and not individuals who are associated with the nonprofit.

## Basic Information on Obtaining Nonprofit Status

To obtain nonprofit status, you must first have a federal Employer Identification Number (EIN) and be registered as a business in New Mexico (with Articles of Incorporation). Once this is complete, you must apply for tax-exempt status from the IRS using the IRS Form 1023 ([www.irs.gov/forms-pubs/about-form-1023](http://www.irs.gov/forms-pubs/about-form-1023)).

Some basic minimum requirements for attaining a nonprofit ruling from the IRS include having the following components:

- Board of directors. In New Mexico, you must have at least three directors, but your board can be larger if you determine that is helpful.
- Legal name.
- Charitable purpose.
- Bylaws.
- Articles of Incorporation.

You will need to complete the Form 1023, including the above information about your organization, as well as your finances and compensation. There is a fee to file your application. Once filed, it usually takes between 8-24 weeks to receive a decision from the IRS.

Be aware, applying for nonprofit status with the IRS does not guarantee you will receive that status. While the information in this document provides general background, you should consult with a lawyer before setting up your organization. Because each organization is unique, a lawyer will help you navigate the process, ensure it goes smoothly, and decrease the likelihood of being rejected or running into issues later in the process.

## What is Fiscal Sponsorship?

What if your organization is not ready to become a nonprofit, but you still want to provide services to the community and apply for funding? You may also have a time-limited project for which applying for separate nonprofit status does not make sense in the long-term. If this is the case, you may consider working under a fiscal sponsor. A fiscal sponsor is an existing charity that will serve as a fiscal manager of funds and allow the use of its tax-exempt status. Usually, they will charge an administrative fee, which is generally a percentage of revenue flowing through the sponsor. The sponsor is assuming some risk as well as administrative burden and may also have restrictions limiting the type, location, or activities of organizations they sponsor.

Any nonprofit organization can act as a fiscal sponsor for another organization. However, it is advisable to ensure that you find the right fit before entering into an agreement. You will want to vet your potential fiscal sponsor as much as they will want to vet you. Do they keep good financial records? Does it seem likely that they will be able to separate your income from their income and generate financial reports accordingly? If they apply for grants, you may not be able to apply for the same ones. Will they be responsive to your needs as an organization?

There are a few entities that are set up specifically to act as fiscal sponsors. SINC (<http://www.sincnm.org/>) is primarily a nonprofit incubator and work with organizations that are not yet ready to become a nonprofit. They typically look for organizations whose goal is to eventually incorporate as a separate nonprofit. The New Mexico Community Foundation also acts as a fiscal sponsor. While it is not their only program, they do have specific protocols and policies in place to act as a fiscal sponsor. You can find more information on their fiscal sponsor page: <http://bit.ly/NMCFspon>.

Requirements for fiscal sponsorship vary by the sponsoring agency but typically include things such as having a board or advisory committee in place, having and using an annual budget, and submitting various general and funding related reports to the sponsor. It is important that you have an agreement in writing with your fiscal sponsor outlining roles, responsibilities, and asset allocation. This ensures everyone is on the same page as you begin to work together.

If you are applying for grants using a fiscal sponsor, it is important to research the funder's guidelines to ensure that it will accept an application through a fiscal sponsor. Some funders will not accept fiscal sponsorship arrangements.

## IV. Grant Research Guide

Identifying funders that align with your mission and goals is key to successful grant seeking. Funder research is often the first step toward developing a grant seeking strategy. It will help you delineate a roadmap and timeline to pursue potential funders. You must be committed to devoting time, effort, and deliberation toward this research. With time and practice, you will get to know your local funders and even national funders who will fund in your area.

### Researching Grants

Much of an organization's success in grant seeking is tied to identifying and applying to the right funders. It is important to put the work into finding funders that have both an affinity for your work and the capacity to support your organization or project.

**Affinity** means that a funder has similar goals and interests to your organization and that it has potential to entertain a funder-grantee relationship with your organization. It is important to find aligned funders so that you can apply for funding to support the mission and programs of your organization. Do not make the mistake of “chasing” grant dollars, as you will find the tail is wagging the dog.

To assess each funder's affinity, conduct diligent research into the funder's website and collateral materials (e.g., annual report, IRS Form 990) and review examples of past grants. Key considerations:

- Does the funder provide grants in New Mexico? If you cannot find examples of past awards here, be sure to pause and determine whether New Mexico is ineligible. Or, if eligible via the guidelines, determine if past awards show that New Mexico might be a competitive geographic location. Do they fund in neighboring states, for example? Or, is it a long-shot for a New Mexico organization to receive funding?
- What are the funder's stated giving areas and priorities? Look for additional guidelines that may be associated with each specific giving area (e.g., one program area might award grants nationally, while another is focused locally). Review the guidelines for each focus area; there may be different deadline dates or application processes.
- Is the funder willing to review proposals and/or accept unsolicited requests? While some funders have an open application cycle or make grants after issuing an RFP, others might not accept any unsolicited requests for funding. If unsolicited requests are accepted, are there any preliminary application steps such as a mandatory meeting to attend or a required letter of interest? Is there a deadline to adhere to? If a funder does not accept unsolicited requests, you may want to look elsewhere, unless you can determine a logical introduction point to that funder. For example, explore your board's affiliations or relationships. The more aligned a funder is with your work, the more you will want to look for a way to connect.
- What is the grant award turn-around time, and does the timing make sense for your organization? It can take funders anywhere from a few days to many months to make

funding decisions. Look for award timing information in the guidelines to make sure the timing fits with your funding needs.

The term **capacity** is indicative of the typical grant award ranges and the total amount of money a funder is able to distribute. You can find this information on the funder’s website, or by researching its giving history using the IRS tax form 990 (accessible via Guidestar at [www.guidestar.org](http://www.guidestar.org)). The first page of the 990 gives a total amount of contributions and grants for the prior year and the current year. Toward the middle or end of the document there is often a listing of individual grant awards. It is helpful to do a keyword search for “grants” to locate the grant award listing. Assess total giving capacity and award distribution. Also, review the awarded organizations – are they diverse or does the funder tend to award the same organizations annually? If you have not applied before, it is optimal to find a potential funder who has a large capacity to give and makes awards to numerous, diverse organizations.

And remember that the funding landscape changes with time. Funders alter their giving priorities or geographic focus. As you research potential funding sources, be sure to always review the most recent website or other available guidelines.

### Research Tools

There are many grant search engines/databases available. The typical approach to using a search engine is to enter grant seeking criteria that are specific to your organization or program (e.g., focus area, geography, type of funding needed, etc.) into fields and the search engine will generate a list of potentially compatible funders. Often times search results yield long lists. These lists are just the starting points for research. Funders still need to be reviewed thoroughly for affinity and capacity, and this takes time. Remember to do your due diligence and check each funder’s website and/or Form 990 and other important materials.

Before subscribing to a search engine platform, it is important to assess your organization’s grant seeking needs and capacity to pay for a tool. Have you tried free tools first? Will you have time to use a paid search engine to make it worth the cost? Will you use the search engine throughout the entire subscription timeframe? Once you start exploring these questions and embark on your research, you will find a search engine that will meet your needs. Below is a listing of reputable search engines.

Free Grant Research Engines		
Resource	What they provide	Where to look
Center for Nonprofit Excellence	Houses the New Mexico Grantmaker Database, a searchable database.	<a href="https://www.centerforprofitexcellence.org/">https://www.centerforprofitexcellence.org/</a>
Grants.gov	Website to search and apply for Federal grants.	<a href="https://www.grants.gov/">https://www.grants.gov/</a>
Guidestar	List of nonprofits and pertinent information. A good place to look up a funder’s Form 990.	<a href="http://www.guidestar.org">www.guidestar.org</a>

Share NM	Works with several local New Mexico funders to post grant guidelines and acts as an application portal.	<a href="https://www.sharenm.org/">https://www.sharenm.org/</a>
The Grant Plant	A searchable listing of grants available for New Mexico nonprofits arranged by focus area and deadline.	<a href="https://www.thegrantplantnm.com/upcoming-grants/">https://www.thegrantplantnm.com/upcoming-grants/</a>
Paid Grant Research Engines		
Resource	What they provide	Where to look (Cost as of March 2018)
Foundation Center	A comprehensive database of foundations and donors worldwide. You can search foundations, grants, and companies. You can narrow your search through a number of search criteria.	<a href="http://www.foundationcenter.org">www.foundationcenter.org</a>  \$124.92/month for an annual plan, also available free at the ABQ Library Main Branch with a library card.
Foundation Search	Users work with FoundationSearch staff to generate listings of grantmakers. Also offers a “Best Prospects” tool that ranks prospects and gives suggestions on who is best to approach. It provides an integrated contact management tool to help users approach funders.	<a href="http://www.foundationsearch.com/">http://www.foundationsearch.com/</a>  Cost not published; contact for a walkthrough of their services and pricing.
GrantSelect	A database of grantmakers and grant opportunities, including foundations, research institutes, and Federal government listings.	<a href="https://www.grantselect.com/">https://www.grantselect.com/</a>  Standard plan - \$150/quarter; Professional Plan - \$495/year.
GrantStation	Searchable grant database that can be narrowed through various criteria. Also offers projects and resources to mentor organizations through the grant-seeking process.	<a href="https://grantstation.com/">https://grantstation.com/</a>  \$159/year and \$279 for two-year subscription.
Instrumentl	A database of grantmakers that provides automated, continuous grant search results based on project descriptions that the user has submitted. Also includes grant tracking tools to help manage funding matches.	<a href="https://www.instrumentl.com/">https://www.instrumentl.com/</a>  \$75 per month, billed annually, or \$82 month-to-month.
NOZA	A searchable database of charitable donations. Users are able to enter a grantmaker and find grantees and awarded grant amounts.	<a href="https://www.nozasearch.com/">https://www.nozasearch.com/</a>  Foundation grants searches are free. Access to additional searches (e.g., corporate, individual, or by recipient or cause) are \$99 a month or \$900 a year.



The Grants Collective	The nonprofit arm of The Grant Plant. Includes a grant calendar, non-deadline driven opportunities, training, a social platform to connect with other local grant seekers and funders, and resources to make grant seeking more efficient. The tool is customized to New Mexico nonprofits.	<a href="http://www.thegrantscollective.org/">http://www.thegrantscollective.org/</a> \$50/month or \$500/year.
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### Other Search Tools

In addition to conducting research through searchable databases, there are a number of other approaches neighborhood associations can take to help identify potential funders. These may include:

- Contacting the NM Congressional Delegation: The Delegation will help you identify possible sources of grant support for your organization or project. This service is provided at no cost to your organization. To take advantage of this service, contact your local representative or senator’s office with a well-defined project scope. This research usually takes several weeks to turn around. Once you receive a packet of information, you will want to read through it carefully with grant affinity and capacity in mind.
- Reviewing other local or national neighborhood association-related organizations to see which funders have funded them in the past. Review websites to see if news releases detail recent grant awards or if there is a listing of corporate and foundation funders online (e.g., the National Association of Neighborhoods provides a sidebar listing corporate funders: <http://bit.ly/NAFunders>). For larger organizations, check to see if any potential funding resource lists are provided on their websites (e.g., the National Neighborhood Watch provides a listing of potential funders: <http://bit.ly/NNWList>).
- Signing up for related listservs, registering for email notices from funders, or subscribing to newsletters from funders or organizations that may provide leads on potential funding.

### Local Funding Sources

One of the best places to begin researching potential funders is in your home community. Many local funders are deeply committed to bettering their communities and direct their financial resources to causes that are tied to specific local needs. Local funders are more likely to give to small organizations with a local focus than are national funders who often seek to fund projects with a larger geographic reach. Local foundations are often open to developing longer-term relationships. You may also have the opportunity to participate in a more hands-on approach to grantmaking, with face-to-face meetings and occasional site visits.

### In-Kind and Sponsorship Opportunities

Another potential funding option for your neighborhood association is to consider exploring partnerships with local corporations for your project. Local corporations may be open to providing in-kind donations (e.g., food for your event) or sponsorship funding (e.g., funding in exchange for recognition on program materials, usually through tiered sponsorship levels or for specific events). Unlike grants, sponsorships often do not require the applicant to have a tax-exempt, nonprofit status to apply. The best place to start looking for sponsorship support is in

your own backyard; approach businesses that may have ties to your neighborhood or that are located nearby. Also consider the type of support you are requesting and align the need to the corporation that you will approach (e.g., if seeking support for food at an event, check with your local grocery store).

### Existing Local Funding Sources

Below is a list of potential funders that may support your neighborhood organization either through grants or sponsorships. While not exhaustive, this list may give you a good idea about the types of programs that are available. Remember when reviewing this list that grants generally require the applicant to have a tax-exempt, nonprofit status or apply through a fiscal sponsor, while sponsorships often do not require tax-exempt status. Inclusion in this list does not mean that a potential funder will be willing to provide funds for your program.

Funder	Website	Description
Bank of Albuquerque	<a href="https://www.bankofalbuquerque.com/About-Us/About-Us#communityCommitment">https://www.bankofalbuquerque.com/About-Us/About-Us#communityCommitment</a>	Bank of Albuquerque, through the BOKF Foundation, provides a variety of financial and in-kind contributions to organizations. Charitable giving has a focus on economic development, supporting actions that promote the standard of living and economic health of the community, making it a better place to live and setting the foundation for businesses to thrive.
Bank of America Charitable Foundation	<a href="https://about.bankofamerica.com/en-us/global-impact/charitable-foundation-funding.html#fbid=xtNj4CbBFvn">https://about.bankofamerica.com/en-us/global-impact/charitable-foundation-funding.html#fbid=xtNj4CbBFvn</a>	Bank of America has a focus on Building Vibrant Communities with grants targeting revitalization efforts that take a holistic approach to building thriving communities, creating economic opportunity, and creating livable neighborhoods.
Bank of the West	<a href="https://www.bankofthewest.com/about-us/community-support/sponsorships.html">https://www.bankofthewest.com/about-us/community-support/sponsorships.html</a>	Bank of the West's corporate sponsorships focus on building strategic partnerships that have a broad reach across the communities it serves.
Bernalillo County: Neighborhood Outreach Grant Program	<a href="https://www.bernco.gov/grants-neighborhood/">https://www.bernco.gov/grants-neighborhood/</a>	The Neighborhood Outreach Grant Program was created to assist neighborhood groups to continue their participation and outreach to residents of Bernalillo County. Larger projects (over \$3,000) require that neighborhood organizations apply through a fiscal sponsor.
Century Bank Community Donations	<a href="https://www.mycenturybank.com/community-sponsorships.htm">https://www.mycenturybank.com/community-sponsorships.htm</a>	Century Bank provides donations or sponsorships to promote community development.
Lowe's Charitable and Educational Foundation	<a href="https://newsroom.lowes.com/apply-for-a-grant/">https://newsroom.lowes.com/apply-for-a-grant/</a>	Lowe's Community Partner grants build better communities by providing monetary assistance to nonprofit organizations and municipalities looking for support of high-

		need projects such as building renovations/upgrades, grounds improvements, technology upgrades, and safety improvements.
McCune Charitable Foundation	<a href="http://nmmccune.org/foundation_priorities">http://nmmccune.org/foundation_priorities</a>	The McCune Foundation has a focus on influencing urban planning and built environments. Built environment refers to the human-made surroundings that provide the setting for human activity, ranging in scale from buildings and parks or green space to neighborhoods and cities that can often include their supporting infrastructure, such as water supply or energy networks.
New Mexico Resiliency Alliance	<a href="http://nmresiliencyalliance.org/resilient-communities-fund">http://nmresiliencyalliance.org/resilient-communities-fund</a>	The Resilient Communities Fund will support community development projects. One focus is on resilient community initiatives, which will support projects that enhance resilience and economic prosperity for residents in underserved communities.
Nusenda Foundation	<a href="https://www.nusendafoundation.org/">https://www.nusendafoundation.org/</a>	Nusenda Foundation’s mission is to create stronger communities where Nusenda Credit Union members live and work through collaborative partnerships and by investing in innovative solutions to improve education, health, social, and economic outcomes. It also has a focus on supporting organizations that provide for community services and support. Nusenda provides grants and sponsorships.
PNM Resources Foundation	<a href="https://www.pnm.com/apply-for-grant">https://www.pnm.com/apply-for-grant</a>	PNM’s New Century of Service Grants support organizations that: 1) innovate or sustain programs and services to grow and develop businesses; 2) create or sustain collaborative community spaces for public use; and 3) provide educational opportunities supporting economic development.
Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence	<a href="http://www.rudybruneraward.org/">http://www.rudybruneraward.org/</a>	The Rudy Bruner Award is a national urban design award that seeks to promote innovative thinking about the built environment and advance conversation about making cities better. The award discovers and celebrates urban places that are distinguished by quality design along with their social and economic contributions to the nation’s cities. Urban environment is broadly defined to include cities, towns, villages, neighborhoods,

		counties and/or regions.
Southwest Capital Bank	<a href="https://www.southwestcapital.com/Giving-Back.aspx">https://www.southwestcapital.com/Giving-Back.aspx</a>	Southwest Capital Bank seeks to positively impact low-and-moderate income populations through initiatives focused on alleviating symptoms of poverty in central and northern New Mexico. The Bank provides grants and sponsorships and includes focus areas on economic development and revitalization.
State Farm Insurance: Good Neighbor Citizenship Company Grants	<a href="https://www.statefarm.com/about-us/community-involvement/community-grants/good-neighbor-citizenship-grants">https://www.statefarm.com/about-us/community-involvement/community-grants/good-neighbor-citizenship-grants</a>	State Farm's community development grants strive to maintain vibrant communities by assisting nonprofits that support affordable housing, first-time homeowners, neighborhood revitalization, financial literacy, job training, and small business development.
State Farm Insurance: Neighborhood Assist	<a href="https://www.neighborhoodassist.com/landingpages/show/neighborhoodassist2017">https://www.neighborhoodassist.com/landingpages/show/neighborhoodassist2017</a>	State Farm Neighborhood Assist awards grants to causes that will help improve their neighborhoods in one of three areas: education, safety, or community development.
Washington Federal	<a href="https://www.washingtonfederal.com/about-us/community-relations">https://www.washingtonfederal.com/about-us/community-relations</a>	Washington Federal Foundation has a housing and community development focus that supports projects designed to build stronger communities that provide affordable housing, access to quality healthcare, and a vibrant environment for job growth. It also assists with event sponsorships.
Wells Fargo	Foundation: <a href="https://www.wellsfargo.com/about/charitable/nm_guidelines">https://www.wellsfargo.com/about/charitable/nm_guidelines</a>  Sponsorship: <a href="https://www.wellsfargo.com/about/corporate/sponsorship/">https://www.wellsfargo.com/about/corporate/sponsorship/</a>	Wells Fargo Foundation will support programs improving low- and moderate-income communities through programs that create and sustain affordable housing, promote economic development by financing small businesses or farms, provide job training and workforce development, revitalize and stabilize communities, and teach financial literacy. It also will accept sponsorship requests.

## V. Application Components

A grant proposal is your opportunity to talk about all the ways your neighborhood association makes a difference in your community. This is where you live, work, and play. You know your neighborhood has the potential to do some amazing things and you know the barriers to reaching that potential. No one is better positioned to write about where you live than you. This is your chance to let others know about the place you call home.

A strong proposal will tell a compelling story of your neighborhood association and your community, and will grab the reviewer's attention from the start and keep it throughout. It will prove the need in your community, establish the credibility of your organization and the people in it, paint a picture of the proposed program, and convince the reviewer that your program will make a real difference in the lives of those it impacts. You know your neighbors, you know the problems your neighborhood faces every day, and you have a great idea for tackling it. This gives you an inherent advantage when writing because you are not just writing about clients you serve, you are writing about the people you share your life with.

Grant proposals have several components. This section will guide you through the typical sections of a grant proposal. While these are common sections, they are not necessarily the only pieces that may be present in an RFP. Certain funders may also use different names or terminology. However, being familiar with the components below will give you a good foundation for almost any proposal. As always, read the RFP thoroughly and make a plan to ensure you complete every part of the grant proposal.

### Need Statement

A need statement establishes the problem that the proposed program or project will tackle. This section will describe, quantify, and analyze the problem or problems that will be addressed through the proposed project. A problem to be addressed by a grant proposal may be something relatively simple, such as a lack of access to after-school arts programs, or it may be more complex, such as a high crime rate in a certain neighborhood. In all cases, remember that the need section is about the need of your *community* not the need of your *organization*. For example, your organization may need a van to address the need, but you should not detail why your organization needs a van. Instead, talk about the fact that there is no after-school program at the partner school and the nearest one is at a community center that is several miles away. It is always good to remember that the funder is not interested in serving your organization, they are interested in serving your community.

This section will often be one of the first components that a grant reviewer reads and should contextualize the proposed program and organization. While you know your neighborhood very well, the reviewer will likely have limited knowledge of what your community looks like. That means you must take a step back and view your neighborhood from an outside perspective and ensure you adequately describe the need(s) it faces.

When describing the problem, demonstrate that it is:

- Important – it is serious in nature, it is a real problem with real implications for the populations involved.
- Significant – it is large in scope in terms of those affected, or large in terms of resulting negative outcomes, or large in actual consequences and costs to the greater community.
- Urgent – it needs action now before it gets worse, before more are affected, because of recent events, etc.

This section may also require research. It is usually necessary to use data and statistics to back up your assertions as proof of the need. Otherwise, the need will come off as an opinion rather than one based on fact, especially to those who have never been to your neighborhood. Use recent data/statistics, use reputable sources, and cite the information presented. Also, make sure the statistics used are relevant to the request. For example, if you are serving students at an elementary school in your community, try to find data that relates to that population in your neighborhood, or at least in Albuquerque, rather than nationally. Although it may be a good idea to compare your community's data to national data to show that the problem is more urgent and significant where you live compared to elsewhere.

If there is room, it is helpful to talk about what will continue to happen if the problem is not addressed. Will the problem get worse? Will it lead to broader issues in the community? What will happen to the population you are serving?

The need statement may also be called a Problem Statement, Problem to be Addressed, Need to be Addressed, Situation Description, or another term. However, know that they all mean the funder is asking you to describe the need that your program or project will address.

### Program Design

The Program Design section is where you will describe all components of the proposed program, the service delivery method, and any established best practices that are being used. You can also describe your experience in implementing this program. Detail past success, but don't shy away from also talking about lessons learned. Funders want to know that you are constantly working to provide a high-quality program and showing how you use past experiences to improve is a powerful way to discuss this.

It is important that you make it clear that the program will address the need you expressed in the need section of the proposal. Going with the example above, if the need was lack of access to after-school programs due to transportation issues, your program should solve that problem in a meaningful way. Be as specific as possible in this section. Your goal is to allow the reviewer to picture the program in their head easily without confusion. If you are providing transportation, discuss how the vehicles will be obtained, how you will ensure the drivers are qualified, what safety measures you have put in place, and any other pertinent details. The reviewer is likely to know nothing of your program, so make sure there are not any holes when describing it.

This section should also relate to your budget. Ensure that budget items listed in the budget worksheet are discussed. If requesting funding for transportation, make sure to describe how that transportation will be used in this section.

The bottom line is that in order to make your case and propose a fundable project, it must potentially solve a problem that both your organization and the funder are interested in, must generate results that can be effectively measured in some way, and must be feasible to implement.

### Goals, Objectives, Outputs, and Outcomes

This section can vary from funder to funder. Sometimes they will simply have a “goals” or “outcomes” section. Sometimes they may have each term as a separate section. While you will want to match the funder’s definitions, it will be important to understand the difference between goals, objectives, outputs, and outcomes. In the grants world, these are generally defined as:

- **Goals:** Overarching aims, generally not specific enough to measure.
- **Objectives:** Specific achievements that contribute towards reaching the goal(s). When writing objectives remember to make them S.M.A.R.T.: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound.
- **Outcomes:** Changes in behavior, attitudes, perceptions, knowledge, skills, and/or behaviors as a result of your project.
- **Outputs:** Tangible deliverables from the project.

To better understand these terms, let’s imagine you are growing a strawberry patch in your backyard and you want to make a better one than the ones you have grown in previous years.<sup>1</sup> Your **goal** would be to “grow your best-ever strawberry patch.” It is not measurable, but it is your aim to have a better strawberry patch than you have ever had before. You may have several **objectives** that will contribute towards your goal. For example:

- 1) Increased survival rates of 20% compared to 2017’s strawberry patch.
- 2) By September 2018 attain .75 pounds or greater average plant yield of fruit.
- 3) Plant growth is 20% larger than prior year.
- 4) Better taste than 2018 store-bought strawberries as determined by neighbors.

While each objective follows the S.M.A.R.T. model, not every goal may be obviously achievable. You may want to explain why you think you will achieve 20% larger plant growth here or in another section. Maybe you researched more efficient ways to grow strawberries. Alternatively, maybe a neighbor is using best practices, and tracked their objectives, so you can reasonably

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<sup>1</sup> Credit: Aly Sanchez, Director of Projects, The Grant Plant.

expect the results are duplicable. Information like this helps your reviewer know that the goal is ambitious but reasonably achievable.

Your **outcomes** for the best-ever strawberry patch might be:

- 1) Learn which strawberry varieties work best in my yard.
- 2) Develop practices for plant tracking to increase success.
- 3) Learn more about plant resiliency in order to improve care for the future. Note that each outcome relates to a change, naturally leading the reviewer to understand that the program will not only have an impact now but one that will last into the future.

Your **outputs** for the project might be:

- 1) Summary report and growth charts of test and baseline strawberry plots.
- 2) Summary rating data from taste tests.
- 3) Fruit production summary report.
- 4) After season assessments of project and methods with recommendations for 2019.

When you put all of these together, it is easy to see the impact the strawberry patch will have. Whether you are writing a proposal for playground equipment at a park, installing speed bumps to slow traffic, or establishing a neighborhood watch, you will want to make the impact very clear and meaningful to the reviewer.

### Organizational Capacity

Now that you have illuminated the need, described how your program addresses the need, and described how you will measure your impact, you need to prove that your organization is capable of delivering on the proposed program. New organizations should highlight the skills and experience of volunteers and members of the neighborhood association. Are any of your people uniquely qualified to administer the program through training and education? Have they administered programs like this before? Are they recognized in a related field? Anything you can point to in order to showcase personnel expertise and experience is useful here. If you are applying for an established program that you would like to expand, you can highlight successful past experiences to make a strong case. If the proposed program has received funding from other sources in the past, it is good practice to discuss your ability to manage funding and execute programs as promised successfully.

This is also a good place to showcase the dedication to the cause of the people in your organization. Most neighborhood associations rely heavily on volunteers, and a reviewer may be of the opinion that volunteers are not as reliable as paid staff. Not only can you help the reviewer understand that your volunteers are dedicated, but turn that dedication into an asset in the proposal. What other programs have your volunteers or members diligently participated in? Have members and neighbors tried to address the need in other ways? Do you have regular meetings that are well attended? Any proof you have that there will be dedication to the



program will help the reviewer understand you have the workforce and passion to get the job done.

The organizational capacity section is also a good place to highlight community support for your association or program. Do you have a large number of volunteers and members in your neighborhood association? Do you have any unique assets that will help deliver a high-quality program? Do you have other sources of funding to help with sustainability? That last question is particularly of interest to most funders. You are more likely to receive funding if you have already secured other sources. Funders want to know that your program is sustainable and most do not want to be the only source of funding. Some funders will even require that you provide a match in cash or other resources. The good news is, even if you do not have a lot of cash to contribute, you probably have in-kind resources to match. In-kind resources are volunteers, existing assets like equipment or buildings, and donated professional services. Not only are these great items to think about for matching, but they highlight community support and demonstrate sustainability.

You may have the instinct to point out that you are in great need of funding and downplay any other assets to help with the “need” of the program. But remember, the funder is not interested in helping your organization overcome their needs, they are interested in helping overcome the community’s needs. The more likely it seems that you have the resources to make a meaningful impact, the more likely you are to receive funding.

The bottom line here is not to be afraid to brag. Your neighborhood association has unique assets that no other organization does. Find the ones that relate to your proposal and describe them in detail here.

## Evaluation

The evaluation section is where you will describe how you will measure your progress and results. These are not the results themselves, but rather the tools you use to gather data and evaluate your program or project. There are two types of data that can be used in evaluations:

- **Qualitative data:** This data generally comes in the form of interview responses. For example, to gather this data you might ask the people your program serves to “tell us one thing we can do to improve the program.” The responses are difficult to quantify but will give you a lot of good information and allow participants to expand on their responses. You cannot report numbers to a granting organization, but you can tell the funder what your organization learned, or will learn, from the information.
- **Quantitative data:** This data can be measured. For example, let’s say you want to start a neighborhood farmer’s market to increase access to fresh food in your neighborhood. Once it is up and running you may distribute a survey to your neighbors asking “on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being less likely and 5 being much more likely, how much more likely are you to purchase locally produced vegetables now that there is a farmer’s market in our neighborhood?” With this data, you can report that “75% of neighborhood residents are much more likely to purchase locally produced vegetables.” Other examples of quantitative

data include test scores or reports on how many people achieved measurable milestones (certifications, degrees, program completion, etc.).

Using the strawberry patch example, your evaluation methods may be:

- 1) Track watering and weeding frequency on gardening calendar.
- 2) At months 1, 3, and 5, measure crown width (diameter at widest point) for 10 randomly selected plants and count runners for select plants - compare to baseline data from prior season.
- 3) Track and compare to baseline data the number and weight of fruit produced averaged per live plant.
- 4) Count plant mortality rates at months 3 and 5.
- 5) Conduct taste test against store-bought berries with 3 participants using rating sheets and comment sections.
- 6) Take notes on hardiness factors like frost survival, pest infestation, and heat damage.

This example includes both qualitative and quantitative data. There are limitations to both types, and it is useful to combine the two, if possible. A funder may also tell you, or give you clues through the language they use, which type of data they prefer. Make sure the evaluation method proposed will help you determine whether or not you achieved the desired outcomes and provided the outputs promised, and help you improve the program in the future.

### Conclusion

Some RFPs include a conclusion section. This is where you can restate the purpose of your grant proposal and the outcomes that can be expected if you receive funding. You may also want to thank the funder for the opportunity to submit and include your contact information if there was not an opportunity to do so earlier.

### Tips for Writing a Winning Proposal

One of the most important things to remember is to make sure your entire proposal is telling the same story. When reviewing a draft of your proposal, make sure your need statement directly leads to the program design which leads to the goals/objectives/outcomes/outputs and all necessary program components are reflected in the budget. Make sure you have demonstrated the organizational capacity and expertise to deliver the program as promised and it is obvious that the presented evaluation methods will accurately measure the proposed outcomes. It is easy to discuss components of your organization/program that are not directly applicable to the proposed program. Try to avoid this and ensure that every word in your proposal counts.

It is also advisable to create a budget before writing the proposal narrative to make sure the narrative is directly linked to the budget, and you do not plan a program that is too large for the grant.

Try and leave enough time for the review process to take a few days away from your draft and come back later. Not only will you come up with better ideas, you will be able to see it with

fresh eyes and catch mistakes you would not have otherwise. It is also a good idea to have someone else read your proposal, particularly if they are not associated with the project. Ask them if they understand the urgency and importance of the need, what the program is, and if it makes sense as an entire document.

It cannot be stressed enough to make sure you thoroughly read the RFP, follow all directions, and adhere to the deadlines. Always read all the guidelines and keep them on hand as you work in order to make sure that your proposal is compliant with the RFP. Crafting a well-written proposal (and all the work that entails) only to be disqualified because you used the wrong margins or turned in the proposal an hour too late is a waste of resources and one of the most disheartening things that can happen to you as a grant writer.

## VI. Tips and Recommendations for Grant Readiness

Before you begin looking for grants, you will want to make sure your neighborhood association is ready to apply. Give your organization a grant-checkup before you begin to make sure it is healthy enough to start the process of researching, writing, and submitting proposals. You can find a great checklist in this blog post (<http://bit.ly/TGPGrantReady>) from The Grant Plant.

### Organizational Structure and Documents

Below is a helpful list of registrations and documents to prepare your organization to tackle most grants. While not all attachments may apply to your organization, every funder, or a specific program, this is a good list to be sure you are ready to start applying for grants.

- Articles of Incorporation
- Bylaws
- Board of Directors list
- Proof of IRS federal-tax exempt status
- Organization and program budget
- Current (year-to-date) financials
- Year-end financials (including audit if applicable) for the most recently completed fiscal year
- List of major donors and grants received
- Value of in-kind goods or services received
- Key staff names, job descriptions, resumes, and responsibilities
- Proof of local, county, and state business registration forms (business licenses, Secretary of State registration, up-to-date Attorney General reporting)
- Annual report, if available
- Evaluation results, if available
- Collaboration documents if applying as part of a partnership (e.g., letters of commitment or memoranda of understanding)
- List of staff, board, or volunteer affiliations to the corporation/foundation you are applying to (if applicable)
- Anti-discrimination statement adopted by the board of directors
- Proof of community support
- News stories or coverage and other articles

### Internal Capacity

If you have all your documents and needed registrations in place, it will then be useful to assess your organization's capacity to write and manage grants. This can give you a good idea of some weak spots in your organization as well as what types of grants you are ready to apply for. Here are some questions for you and your staff, volunteers, or board to ask to determine internal capacity:

- Do you have volunteers in place who can deliver on the program you would like to fund? If not, do you have a plan to recruit volunteers in time to begin the program if funded?

- If a grant pays out based on reimbursements, rather than scheduled lump sums, do you have the resources in place to keep the program running while you wait for reimbursement?
- Are there members or volunteers in place who can successfully manage a grant, including delivering on the program or project, documenting the work, and writing reports to the funder? Do you have a person well-versed in accounting or bookkeeping to help monitor expenditures? If so, do these individuals have the time to manage the grant?
- Do you know what you want to measure for the program you would like to fund through grants? Do you have a system in place for evaluation and data collection?
- Is there buy-in to pursue grant funding? Does everyone understand the risks and work involved in applying for grant funding?

### Collaboration and Partnerships

Many organizations create programs in collaboration with other organizations. As a neighborhood association, you may want to start an after-school program for neighborhood kids but lack the space to provide it. Or, maybe you have the space, but lack experienced educators. You may want, or need, to partner with a local community center, school, neighborhood nonprofit, or other organization to help improve the quality of programming, increase your reach, or coordinate services. Many funders also view collaborations as a worthwhile investment, and some may even actively encourage you to apply as a collaboration. While there are many benefits to collaborating, you want to start any partnership off on the right foot and be able to demonstrate a solid plan to potential funders. Collaborations are only as strong as the agreements and understandings that exist between the partner organizations. Make sure you know who you are working with, that everyone is on the same page, and to document all agreements.

It is also important to have agreements in place before beginning the program or submitting any grant applications. The most common type of agreement is a memorandum of understanding (MOU). This lays out who is responsible for components of program delivery, compensation, and evaluation. Be as detailed as possible to avoid headaches further down the road. You may also want to include an agreed upon plan to resolve any disputes or misunderstandings along the way. This not only includes steps to solve disputes but who is authorized to make decisions for each organization. This will help prevent issues later on, and you can also use it as proof to funders that your partners are committed and fully invested in the program

### Financials and a Healthy Budget

While grant seeking is a wonderful way to diversify your funding streams, it is not always the best first step when you are just starting to develop and build the capacity of your neighborhood association. While some are lucky enough to receive start-up funding through grant seeking, the reality is that few grantmakers will invest in new organizations. It is best to be prepared and have a diverse funding plan that includes seeking capital from multiple avenues (i.e., fundraising events, individual donors, and earned income).

If possible, it is ideal to have a certified accountant audit your financials. This is a great tool to help you figure out where your weak spots are when it comes to financial management. If any issues are identified in your audit, you want to make sure and take care of them immediately. Once you have a clean audit, it can become a tool to help funders trust that you are properly managing money and to feel confident that you will handle their funding with best financial practices. Also, keep in mind that many funders will not even allow you to apply without an audit of your most recent financials.

One thing to keep in mind is that audits can be expensive. New Mexico law requires nonprofit organizations with an annual budget of \$500,000 or more to conduct an audit. However, even if you are a smaller organization, audits provide valuable insight and open up new funding opportunities. If you can afford it (or, better yet, have an accountant donate the services), it is highly recommended to do a yearly audit regardless of your organization size.

## VII. Resources

This section includes helpful resources for researching and writing grants, as well as resources for obtaining and maintaining your organization’s nonprofit status. While this information is useful, it is not exhaustive. There are many articles, books, websites, and in-person trainings available to help you in the process of applying for grants. It may be useful to research additional resources that you can use to help you obtain the most funding possible.

### Registration and Compliance

Maintaining required registration and compliance is an important component for any organization, but especially those that seek grant funding.

Charities that solicit contributions in New Mexico are required to annually file documents such as tax returns through the NM Attorney General’s (NMAG) Charitable Organization Registration Online System (<http://bit.ly/NMcoros>). Funders expect organizations to be up-to-date with required filings (or have on-time approved extensions for filing on record). Status on this filing is publicly available. Visit the NMAG website to make sure that your organization or fiscal sponsor is in good standing. Funders are not likely to give you money if you are not diligent in other business reporting and filing areas.

Nonprofits also need to register with the NM Secretary of State before beginning activities. They are required to submit articles of incorporation, a statement by the registered agent (that might be you or someone else on the board of directors), and the filing fee (\$25 as of 2018). You can find information on nonprofit filing at the Secretary of State’s website (<http://bit.ly/SOSFiling>).

### Helpful Resources for Nonprofit Organizations

Below is a list of some resources you might find useful for your nonprofit. There are many resources available to help you grow and run a nonprofit in the best possible way.

Resource	What they provide	Where to look
Albuquerque Community Foundation	Grantmaker, resource hub	<a href="http://www.albuquerquefoundation.org/about.aspx">http://www.albuquerquefoundation.org/about.aspx</a>
Association of Fundraising Professionals	Membership organization that provides training and resources around ethical and effective fundraising	<a href="http://afpnewmexico.afpnet.org/">http://afpnewmexico.afpnet.org/</a>
Attorney General	Compliance	<a href="https://www.nmag.gov/">https://www.nmag.gov/</a>
Bernalillo County Neighborhood Grants	A listing of grants available for neighborhood associations and groups in Bernalillo County	<a href="https://www.bernco.gov/grants-neighborhood/">https://www.bernco.gov/grants-neighborhood/</a>

Board Source	Live and virtual trainings, membership programs, and a library of governance resources and publications	<a href="https://boardsource.org/">https://boardsource.org/</a>
Center for Nonprofit Excellence	General nonprofit tools, job listings, trainings, and New Mexico grantmaker database	<a href="https://www.centerfornonprofitexcellence.org/">https://www.centerfornonprofitexcellence.org/</a>
Foundation Center	Grant database, nonprofit resource center	<a href="http://foundationcenter.org/">http://foundationcenter.org/</a>
Grants.gov	Website to search and apply for Federal grants	<a href="https://www.grants.gov/">https://www.grants.gov/</a>
NM Community Foundation	Fiscal sponsor, grantmaker, resource hub	<a href="http://nmcf.org/">http://nmcf.org/</a>
NM Thrives	Nonprofit advocacy, nonprofit associations, and resource hub	<a href="http://nmthrives.org/">http://nmthrives.org/</a>
Secretary of State	Compliance and dispute resolution	<a href="http://www.sos.state.nm.us/">http://www.sos.state.nm.us/</a>
Share NM	Common grant application, funding opportunities, resource directory, state initiatives	<a href="https://www.sharenm.org/">https://www.sharenm.org/</a>
SINC	Fiscal sponsor, nonprofit incubator, and resource hub	<a href="http://www.sincnm.org/">http://www.sincnm.org/</a>
Strengthening Nonprofits	An e-learning series about acquiring public grants, identifying and developing donors, managing public grants, and sustainability	<a href="http://strengtheningnonprofits.org/">http://strengtheningnonprofits.org/</a>
Taxation & Revenue Department	Information on tax exempt status for New Mexico nonprofits	<a href="http://www.tax.newmexico.gov/Businesses/information-for-non-profits.aspx">http://www.tax.newmexico.gov/Businesses/information-for-non-profits.aspx</a>
TechSoup	Provides access to donations and discounted rates on technology hardware, software, and services	<a href="https://www.techsoup.org/">https://www.techsoup.org/</a>
The Grant Plant Calendar	A listing of grants available for New Mexico nonprofits	<a href="https://www.thegrantplantnm.com/upcoming-grants/">https://www.thegrantplantnm.com/upcoming-grants/</a>
The Grants Collective	Grant listings, resource hub, trainings	<a href="http://www.thegrantscollective.org/">http://www.thegrantscollective.org/</a>