Finding Federal Grants to Advance Your Work in CTE

Division of Academic and Technical Education
What is a discretionary grant? It is federal funding based on:

- A competitive process
- An applicant’s eligibility
- The proposed project’s merits
  - Scored by peer reviewers
A discretionary grant is a grant in which a federal agency selects the awardee, i.e., grant recipient, based on merit(s) and eligibility. The awarding Federal Agency must review, assess, and evaluate the quality of each grant application to inform its funding decision; it is a competitive process. Each eligible application undergoes an impartial review based on published selection criteria, but the review process can vary for each program and Federal Agency. For example:

- An application for a specialized type of research is likely to go through rigorous peer review by a panel of subject matter experts.
- Personnel in the Federal Agency also review each application and make funding recommendations using the peer review results as well as their own assessments.
- After multiple layers of review, a final funding decision is made based on the quality of each application and how well the proposed project will fulfill the program’s mission.
Things to Consider

When considering how federal discretionary grants may be applicable to your work, the following questions may be helpful:

• What could I be doing now to prepare for future grant opportunities?
• Where could I look for grant opportunities from the federal government?
• How could I construct a strong application?
Know Your Organization

What could I be doing?

• Know your organization.
  • Conduct a needs assessment.
  • Know the strengths of your organization.
  • Understand your organization’s priorities and goals.
  • Align needs and strengths to your goals.
Know Your Organization (continued)

Conduct a needs assessment of your institution, school district, community, or region:

- What needs have you identified?
- What data do you have to demonstrate or understand the need(s)?
- What are your strengths? What do you do well?
- What priorities or initiatives are you working on? Do they connect to other local, regional, or state efforts?
- Who are your strong partners?
- What resources do you have?
- What more do you need to achieve your goals?
Grant-Making Process

What could I be doing?

• Get an inside view of the grant-making process.
  o Explore the Grants Learning Center on www.grants.gov.
    ▪ Familiarize yourself with the Grants Learning Center on www.grants.gov and how to become a peer reviewer.

• Become a peer reviewer.
The more you know, the better you can direct your search for federal grant opportunities.

- **Directing your search** is important because:
  - There are no wide-open grant opportunities, no “Wouldn’t it be great if we could [fill in the blank]” opportunities.
  - At the federal level, grant opportunities are designed to address a federal priority or an observed, pervasive concern/need at the state or local level.
  - It is important to identify funding opportunities that align to your priorities and goals.

- **Preparation** is important because:
  - The duration of opportunities varies; federal grant opportunities can be ongoing programs with continuous, sometimes annual grant competitions, or they can be one-time initiatives.
  - For some federal initiatives, you may only get one opportunity to apply, so it is to your advantage to be prepared.

- **Identify** the right grant opportunity to help you meet your program need(s) and begin drafting your grant application.
  - Writing a strong grant application takes time.
The Grants Learning Center is your gateway to the federal grants world. Bookmark this page and participate in our growing communities on Blog.Grants.gov and Twitter (@grantsdotgov).

https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/learn-grants.html
A broad range of grant topics

- There is a wealth of resources about the federal grant-making process under the LEARN GRANTS tab at https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/learn-grants.html
- You are not required to be registered in Grants.gov to access the GRANTS LEARNING CENTER, so peruse these resources at any time.
  - However, you must be registered in www.grants.gov to apply for a grant.
  - Register now!
Becoming a Peer Reviewer

- Log in to g5.gov
- Go to My Profile and follow the instructions provided in
  Step 3. Selecting Reviewer Access
Becoming a Peer Reviewer (continued)

• Participating in a grant review is an excellent professional development opportunity; it is also a chance to serve the education community. Program Offices provide training for peer reviewers as well as individual support during the review process. Serving as a peer reviewer fosters opportunities to learn about new and innovative ideas in the field and meet subject-matter experts. Peer reviewing provides an in-depth look at the grant-making process, which can add value to other professional endeavors. Many people have found the experience valuable and rewarding.

• Federal programs are always looking for new peer reviewers with subject-matter expertise. A prospective peer reviewer must register with the Department’s G5 system, submit a current resume, and select their specialization(s).
  o To create a G5 account, go to the G5 Home page at www.g5.gov, click on the Not Registered? Sign up. link and follow the steps.

• The PCRN Funding Opportunity webpage also provides Peer Reviewer G5 Registration Directions at https://cte.ed.gov/grants/funding-opportunities.
As peer reviewers, our role and contribution are valuable and significant because our subject-matter expertise and field experience help us assess the degree to which each applicant demonstrates their capacity to address identified needs and achieve their proposed goals and objectives.
Funding Opportunities

PCRN PERKINS COLLABORATIVE RESOURCE NETWORK

c.te.ed.gov

ed.gov

youth.GOV

GRANTS.GOV

Office of Career, Technical, & Adult Education
You have done your homework. You know your organization and have educated yourself about the federal grant-making process.

Where might you look for federal grant opportunities?

- **PCRN** (Perkins Collaborative Resource Network) [https://cte.ed.gov/grants/funding-opportunities](https://cte.ed.gov/grants/funding-opportunities)
- **Ed.gov's** Grants Forecast for other education grant opportunities that may align to your priorities and goals. Look for the link under Grants & Programs [https://www2.ed.gov/fund/grants-apply.html?src=pn](https://www2.ed.gov/fund/grants-apply.html?src=pn)
- **Grants.gov** for information on more than 1,000 grant opportunities for 26 federal grant-making agencies [https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/search-grants.html](https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/search-grants.html)
- **Youth.gov** for open grant announcements from Grants.gov for programs that serve youth and their families [https://youth.gov/map-my-community](https://youth.gov/map-my-community)
Searching for Grant Opportunities

Office of Career, Technical, & Adult Education
The **Search Grants** tab on Grants.gov allows you to search through all federal funding opportunities posted on the site.

You can customize your search using keywords in the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number (CFDA). You can also search by eligibility, category, or Agency.

As with the Grants Learning Center tab, you are not required to be registered in Grants.gov to access the Search Grants tab, but **you must be registered in Grants.gov to apply for grants.**
Applicant Training and Resources

APPLICANT TRAINING

TRAINING RESOURCES AND VIDEOS FOR GRANTS.GOV

Whether you need a high-level introduction to the Grants.gov application process, or you are looking for a step-by-step explanation of a particular Applicant task, we encourage you to consult the resources on this page.

For more context and general information about the federal grants lifecycle, visit the Grants 101 section under the Learn Grants tab.
To register in Grants.gov, go to the **APPLICANTS** tab and follow the instructions under **Get Registered**.

- In addition to outlining the steps for getting registered, the Applicants tab, like all the other tabs in Grants.gov, has a wealth of resources to help applicants navigate Grants.gov successfully and complete the application submission process.
  - Look for the **APPLICANT RESOURCES** and **Applicant Training** tabs.

Navigating Grants.gov requires familiarity with many multi-step processes. If you are serious about applying for federal grants; you need to register in Grants.gov and assign at least 2 key people on staff to become very familiar with Grants.gov and its application submission process.

- This is important because more and more federal programs now require applicants to submit applications via Grants.gov; mailed or hand delivered applications are becoming obsolete.
Strong Applications

How can you write a strong application?
• Align to program purpose.
• Solve your need.
• Deliver what you promise.
• Build upon efforts.
• Leverage other funding sources.
• Avoid:
  o Square peg-round hole
  o Parroting
  o Leap of faith without evidence
  o Conditional speech
You are ready! You have done your homework. You know your organization and you have educated yourself about the federal grant-making process. You have found a federal grant opportunity that aligns to your priorities and goals. How can you write a strong application?

• **Alignment**
  o Your application needs to clearly demonstrate your proposed project aligns with the purpose and goals of the program or initiative under which you are applying for funding. This will help you avoid submitting a *Square Peg-Round Hole* application.

• **Need alone is not enough**
  o Your application must demonstrate need, but it must also demonstrate the likelihood your proposed project will address and satisfy the need(s).
  o The more substance in your application, e.g., in terms of needs, alignment, and solutions, the less likely your application will fill space by *parroting* back the language of the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO).
• **Promises – Do not promise what you cannot deliver with confidence.**
  o Is your proposed project design reasonable? Is your management plan solid? Can you achieve your objectives during the project period? Does the project timeline make sense?
  o If you can answer **Yes** to these questions, you will avoid submitting a *Leap of Faith* application.

• **Build upon past or ongoing efforts**
  o Your application must demonstrate how your proposed project will build from ongoing work in the priority area.
  o It is always good to be able to describe what you have done. Doing so can demonstrate initiative and commitment, show you have done your homework, and help you avoid submitting an application full of conditional speech.

• **Leverage other dollars**, e.g., local, state, and/or federal, foundations Sometimes, the dollar amount is not as important as showing initiative in searching for other funding sources and demonstrating additional funding source(s) find your efforts merit support.
Next Steps

It is difficult to write a strong application if you have not done your homework. The sooner you begin and the more you prepare, the better positioned you will be to act on federal grant opportunities, as they present themselves.

Your next steps begin with your response to:

• What will I do now?
• Where will I look for federal grant opportunities?
• How will I construct a strong application?
Questions?

Please contact Robin Utz at robin.utz@ed.gov

College and Career Transitions Branch
Division of Academic and Technical Education