

Federal Grant Applications: Be Ready Before the Funding Opportunity Opens

Federal grants can provide significant funding for infrastructure, transportation, economic development, public safety, environmental, and community improvement projects. However, many municipalities miss application opportunities because they are not fully prepared when a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) is released. Successful federal grant applicants often begin preparing months before a grant program opens.

Register Early with SAM.gov

One of the most important steps in preparing for federal grant opportunities is ensuring that your organization has an active registration in the federal System for Award Management (SAM.gov). Organizations must have an active SAM.gov registration and a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) to apply for most federal grants. Registration and renewals can take several business days or longer if information must be verified, so applicants should confirm their registration status well before a grant deadline. SAM.gov registrations must also be renewed annually.

Municipal officials should be aware that a municipality's SAM.gov registration does not automatically cover other entities within the community. Independent organizations, such as fire departments, emergency medical service providers, or nonprofit organizations, may need their own SAM.gov registration and UEI if they apply directly for federal funding. For example, a volunteer or independent fire department applying for an Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) or Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant would generally need its own SAM.gov registration if it is the applicant of record. Municipal fire departments that operate as a department of the town or city may be able to apply under the municipality's registration, depending on the grant program requirements. Applicants should determine early which organization will serve as the grant applicant and ensure the appropriate entity is registered and eligible to receive federal funds.

Create and Maintain a Grants.gov Account

Most federal grant opportunities are submitted through Grants.gov. Municipal staff responsible for grant applications should establish user accounts and verify that organizational permissions are current. Grants.gov relies on information from SAM.gov, so

both systems should be kept up to date. Applicants cannot submit many federal grant applications until the municipality's SAM.gov registration is active.

Register and Become Familiar with FEMA GO

Municipalities, fire departments, and other eligible organizations seeking funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) should become familiar with the FEMA Grants Outcomes (FEMA GO) system. FEMA GO is FEMA's online grants management portal used to apply for and manage many preparedness and emergency management grant programs, including the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) and Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) programs.

Before applying, applicants should ensure that their organization has an active SAM.gov registration and UEI, as FEMA GO validates applicant information through federal systems. Organizations should create FEMA GO accounts, establish user roles, and verify permissions well in advance of application deadlines. Because multiple users may be involved in grant preparation, review, and submission, municipalities and departments should identify primary and backup staff responsible for maintaining access to the system.

Applicants are encouraged to log into FEMA GO periodically to update organizational information, review grant guidance, and become familiar with application requirements before a funding opportunity is announced. Establishing accounts and understanding the system in advance can help avoid technical issues and ensure that grant applications are submitted accurately and on time.

Build a Grant Readiness File

Municipalities should maintain a centralized grant readiness file containing frequently requested information such as:

- SAM.gov registration and UEI documentation
- Federal Employer Identification Number (EIN)
- Municipal budgets and financial statements
- Audit reports
- Procurement policies
- ADA and nondiscrimination policies
- Maps, demographic data, and community profiles
- Letters of support templates
- Resolutions authorizing grant applications

- Previous grant performance information

Having these materials readily available can significantly reduce application preparation time.

Develop Projects Before Funds Become Available

Federal funding programs often favor projects that are "shovel ready" or have completed planning, engineering, environmental review, or preliminary design work. Municipalities should maintain a list of priority projects with clearly defined scopes, cost estimates, schedules, and anticipated community benefits. Projects that align with local Plans of Conservation and Development, transportation plans, hazard mitigation plans, economic development strategies, or other adopted planning documents are often more competitive because they demonstrate a clear community need and long-term commitment.

In addition to local and regional priorities, municipalities should understand that federal grants are typically designed to advance specific national objectives established by Congress or federal agencies. For example, grants administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) often require projects to meet national objectives such as benefiting low- and moderate-income persons, preventing or eliminating slums and blight, or addressing urgent community development needs. Similarly, transportation, environmental, public safety, and economic development grants are often evaluated based on how well they support federal priorities. When developing projects, municipalities should identify both the local need and the federal objectives the project will address, as this can significantly strengthen a future grant application.

Track Match Requirements

Many federal grants require local matching funds. Municipal leaders should identify potential match sources early, including municipal capital funds, state grants, in-kind services, or regional partnerships. Understanding match requirements before applying helps avoid project delays after an award is received.

Establish Grant Management Procedures

Winning a grant is only the beginning. Federal awards often require detailed reporting, procurement compliance, financial tracking, and performance measurement. Municipalities should identify who will manage grant administration, financial reporting, procurement documentation, and project implementation before submitting an application.

Stay Informed

Municipal officials should regularly monitor federal funding opportunities and subscribe to agency notifications. Grants.gov serves as the central portal for federal grant opportunities, while SAM.gov provides registration and entity management services required for most federal funding programs. Early preparation can make the difference between submitting a strong, competitive application and missing an opportunity altogether.

Key Resources

- [SAM.gov](#): Entity registration, UEI management, and federal award eligibility.
- [Grants.gov](#): Search and apply for federal grant opportunities.
- [FEMA GO](#): Apply for FEMA Grants.
- [FEMA GO Startup Guide](#)
- [NECCOG Grant Toolkit](#): Resources and guidance to help municipalities prepare for grant opportunities.

If you need assistance during any step of the grant preparation process, please reach out to NECCOG staff.