



GRANT APPLICATIONS 101

First Nations is committed to being as transparent as possible when it comes to the organization's Grantmaking Program.

Recognizing that many First Nations applicants may be new to the field of grant writing, the organization has created this resource in an effort to assist applicants in developing successful proposals. You may also visit First Nations' Knowledge Center to view our previous [Grant Writing Webinar](#)

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Executive Summary/Project Summary/Program Summary

As requested, include an Executive Summary in your application. This section provides the reviewer with an overview of the proposed request as it relates to the stated funding priorities specific to the grant opportunity and/or the donor's stated mission and vision.

Information should include, but is not limited to:

- Requested budget amount
- Purpose of grant request
- Brief description of grant activities
- Connection to funder's stated priorities and/or mission and vision



Note: This section may not be required for all grant opportunities offered through First Nations.

Pro Tip: Incorporate language directly from the funder's interests and/or mission vision into your Executive Summary and demonstrate the connection to your organization's work. Let them know why your project should be their priority!

General Information

Applications often include a section for general information about the organization, including contact information, social media details, organization budgets, constituent demographics, geographical areas, tax-exempt status, and more.

Pro Tip: If possible, store demographic information in a database that is easily accessible to grant writers and can produce data according to a variety of guidelines. Donors request demographic data in a number of different ways. Examples include gender, race/ethnicity, age, income level, poverty level, total number served, veterans, LGBTQ population, and more.

Organizational Summary/Organizational History/Prior Experience/Accomplishments

Funders often ask for a summary of your organization, including but not limited to mission/vision, founding date, program/project descriptions, staffing capacity, executive leadership, accomplishments, and more.

This is your opportunity to demonstrate the value of investing in your organization. Think about what makes your organization stand out within your particular field of service and why you are uniquely qualified to implement this work.

Summarize your organizational story and describe the motivations and considerations that inspire you to engage in this work. Include a summary of organizational accomplishments, especially those that are relevant to the grant's purpose and those that demonstrate your organization's capacity to administer the grant. Be sure to list philanthropic, community, or leadership awards and charitable reviews (Charity Navigator, Better Business Bureau, etc.) related to your organization's work.

Pro Tip: Toot your own horn! Answer from a strengths-based perspective that highlights why your organization is deserving of consideration for funding.

Other Funding Sources

Funders want to know that your organization's work is sustainable and supported through a diversity of sources. This question is often asked in a different way by each funder. Be prepared to provide current funding sources, past funding sources, pending grant and donation requests, confirmed grant and donation requests, and denied grant and donation requests. Funding sources must often be identified according to revenue stream (i.e. foundation, corporate, individual, government, etc.)



When possible, try to include supporters who are relevant or familiar to the organization for which you are applying. (For example: When applying to a financial institution's foundation, including funding secured from a competitor or a partner corporation might be beneficial.)

Pro Tip: If your organization does not yet have support for the proposed project, be creative with your response to this question. Emphasize that, while funding is not secured, your organization has a comprehensive fundraising plan and has already submitted or will be submitting requests to a diversity of other funders. When possible and appropriate, include the names of donors to whom you have submitted applications or requests.

Previous Funding

Be prepared to provide the status of any previous funding received from the donor to whom you are submitting an application. Keep comprehensive and easily accessible records of donations and project outcomes to assist grant writers. Information requested often includes the date and amount of any previous grants from the funder, as well as summaries of project status and/or outcomes. Ensure that all required reports from previous funding have been submitted and/or are scheduled to be submitted on time.

Pro Tip: When space allows, consider offering a brief summary or profile of a specific individual who benefitted from the donor's previous funding. If possible, provide a direct quote from the featured individual that emphasizes how the donor's funding has made a positive impact.

Project/Program Sustainability

Donors are interested in understanding how you will sustain the project/program after the grant period and/or once funding ends. A diverse funding strategy is a vital aspect of these efforts and should be described in this section; but, it is not enough to just tell donors that you will write more grants and ask for more contributions.

If the intent of the project/program is to last beyond a specific funding request, describe your vision. Indicate how the project/program supports your organization's overall strategic plan. Describe the partnerships and collaborations that will sustain your work, along with the leadership and staff that are key to project/program success. If available, include examples of prior program success and reasons this success will be expanded upon through increased investment.

Pro Tip: Utilize your organization's sustainability plan to help with crafting an answer. If your organization does not have a sustainability plan, consider working to create one.

Target Recipients/Statement of Need

Describe the problem your organization is working to address. Describe your project or program's targeted population, including demographics and other identifying information. Include both qualitative and quantitative data, statistics, and anecdotes that engage the



reviewer both rationally and emotionally in the story of your organization's work. Contrast your description of the problem with what your organization is doing to address it.

Detail the steps you have taken as an organization to understand your targeted recipient's needs or your connection to the community being served. Cite relevant research, reports, or other information sources. Be sure any data, statistics, or anecdotes you provide are properly attributed. Information should be as recent as possible.

Pro Tip: Utilize a strengths-based perspective to describe the problem your organization is working to address. Be sensitive to the community you are serving, as well as confidentiality concerns for the targeted project audience. Balance the gravity of your community's problem with the positive impact your organization is making.

Project Description/Program Description/Activities

Provide a clear and comprehensive description of your proposed project and/or programs. Connect the description of your project to the problem you have described in the Statement of Need and the funder's priorities. Discuss how this particular project will make a positive impact in your community.

Give an overview of the proposed project activities and include an implementation timeline when possible. Provide as much detail and description as space allows. Create a comprehensive and logical story of how your project will unfold. Proposed activities and the implementation timeline should be feasible and directly associated to the costs proposed in your budget. Ensure that any activity proposed in the summary description is covered in the budget or costs for the activity are otherwise explained clearly for application reviewers.

Pro Tip: Look at your Project Description/Program Description/Activities statement from the viewpoint of someone who has no familiarity with your organization or the proposed work. Think about any questions that might arise for a reviewer and try to answer them in your statement.

Budget

Be sure to always include a clear and comprehensive accounting of how grant funding will be spent for your proposed program or project. Follow all budgetary guidelines, including minimum and maximum ask amounts, allowable and non-allowable costs, and more.

Base costs on the most accurate estimates available. Ensure the amount you request in your budget is sufficient to complete the project successfully, but is not unnecessarily excessive. It is always best to ask for the amount you need, which may or may not be the maximum funding level allowed.

Be sure to adequately explain costs and why they are necessary to a successful project. Check, check, and double-check your numbers to ensure all math is correct. When possible, place the budget section immediately after your description of the Targeted Recipients/Statement of Need for a high-impact ask.



Pro Tip: Similar to the Project Description/Program Description/Activities, put yourself in the application reviewer's shoes. Think about what questions they may ask about your budget, proposed financials, and how it relates to your program(s)/project. Make sure these questions are answered in the budget you provide.

Community Engagement Strategies

Be prepared to describe why and how your organization engages targeted community members in the planning, development, and implementation of your program(s)/projects. This is a great place to showcase important partnerships, volunteer service, and other involvement in your organization's work by the surrounding and/or targeted communities.

Pro Tip: Provide highlights of direct feedback from program(s)/project beneficiaries, staff leadership, board members, or outside organizations that describe the impact of the organization's relationship with the targeted community(ies).

Goals & Objectives

This is one of the most difficult, yet most critical, sections of grant applications. It is not enough to propose impactful and successful projects. Applicants must also demonstrate to the funder how the impact and success will be measured.

Benchmarks should be realistic and accomplishable within the designated grant period. When possible, goals and objectives should be quantified. Qualitative goals and objectives are also appropriate, but donors increasingly prefer easily identifiable markers of success and impact.

This section is so important that First Nations has created a free resource guide [Evaluation Tips – SMART Goals & Objectives](#) to guide applicants in developing appropriate goals and objectives for purposes of evaluation and reporting.

Pro Tip: Include program/project implementation staff and/or consultants responsible for project implementation and evaluation in the development of proposed goals and objectives to ensure you utilize realistic measurements that not only correlate to the donor's priorities, but are also meaningful to your organization and the targeted community(ies).

Evaluation & Reporting

Describe your plans for evaluation and reporting. Include a detailed plan for completing internal progress updates related to project implementation, external reporting to donors, and (as applicable) dissemination of project findings, successes, and challenges to appropriate outlets. If allowable and financially feasible, organizations without staff members dedicated to evaluation may want to consider hiring an evaluation consultant. Emphasize how your project/program contributes to the development of its related field and/or for Native communities in particular.

Pro Tip: Be sure to review donor guidelines for any requirements related to evaluation and reporting. Incorporate donor requirements into your detailed plans.



Collaboration

More and more, donors are interested in what your organization is doing to collaborate with others in your field(s) of service. Include brief descriptions of your organization's most important partnerships, including those that are relevant to the proposed program(s)/project. Consider providing highlights of donor relationships, such as the total number of foundations, corporations, and individual donors or names of influential philanthropist partners. (Do not identify funders in this list who have requested to remain anonymous.)

Pro Tip: Describe what makes your organization stand out from partners and collaborators. Balance your commitment to collaboration with your unique impact.

Publicity & Promotion

Many large foundations, corporations, and some individual donors are interested in promotion and publicity of their charitable contributions. It is important to have a plan in place for your organization to fulfill these requests and requirements.

Be ready to describe how you will promote and publicize your partnership with the donor. Examples include media press releases to relevant Native, philanthropic, business, and other outlets; promotion through social media outlets like Facebook and Twitter; inclusion in annual reports and/or newsletters; highlights on your organization's website, and other unique ideas that are relevant to your organization and fit within your staff's capacity for implementation.

Note: Information regarding publicity and promotion may not be required for all grant opportunities offered through First Nations, but First Nations desires and appreciates efforts that publicly acknowledge or highlight support of your projects or programs.

Pro Tip: If your organization's newsletters, annual reports, website, and/or social media outlets have a large reach, include the circulation numbers, daily website visits, and/or number of likes and followers.

Attachments

Donors require a number of different attachments related to financial and organizational capacity, including some that are optional and others that are mandatory. Be prepared to provide requested attachments or offer an answer for why the requested attachment is not available.

Attachments that are regularly requested by First Nations include:

- Project Budget
- Project Timeline
- Tax Status Documentation
- List of Board of Directors with Tribal Affiliation, or List of Tribal Council

Additional examples of commonly required attachments are included in the free resource guide related to [Grant Readiness](#).



Pro Tip: It is time-consuming to gather and update required attachments. Establish a commonly accessible database of relevant grant attachments and create a plan to ensure documents are updated on an ongoing basis so they'll be ready when needed.

Grant Readiness

One of the most successful ways to expand your organization's resource development capacity is to engage in grant readiness. Grant opportunities are offered in cycles throughout the year. Begin preparing information for your application now to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of your response when opportunities arise.

To help organizations engage in the important process of grant readiness, please see First Nations [Grant Readiness](#) document in [Grantseeker Resources](#).

Grant Submission

Allow yourself adequate time to meet grant deadlines and be sure to follow all submission requirements. Utilize grant guidelines as a checklist for application completion.

Below are some tips for successful grant submission:

- For online applications, prepare your answers in a Word document that can be easily edited. When you are ready to submit, copy and paste answers into their respective locations within the online portal.
- Save login credentials for online applications in a central location that is easily trackable and accessible for grant writers.
- Be sure to follow donor guidelines regarding attachment formats. Submit attachments using Portable Document Format (PDF) when possible and as allowed.
- Use your organization's branding, logos, taglines, and photos to enhance application documents as appropriate and allowed. Consider creating an application cover page that features photographs representing your proposed work, donor name, and organization contact information.
- Organize a system for saving application documents. These documents help to preserve institutional knowledge and serve as a reference point for renewal applications.
- Utilize a grants-management process for recording basic information to track grant submissions, including donor name, requested amount, proposed project, anticipated award date, and other details that are important to your organization.
- Upon notification of award, create reminders within your grants-management system regarding report deadlines and renewal applications.