

When is an Application Prepped for Success?

Pre-Award Grants Management Basics
Hub Infrastructure Summit 2026





Agenda

- I. Pre-Award Prep
- II. Organizational Readiness
- III. Project Readiness
- IV. Key Takeaways and Q&A

Why Pre-Award Prep Matters

Securing funding starts long before an application is submitted

- 01 Reviewers score what they can see**
Eligibility, completeness, and competitiveness are evaluated before anyone reads your narrative
- 02 Preparation gaps become compliance problems**
Missing systems, policies or staff capacity before the award has been made, can create findings post-award
- 03 Most failure points are avoidable**
Expired sam.gov, misread NOFOs, unconfirmed partners – can all be solved with enough lead time

Pre Award Prep: Know Your Funding Landscape

	Federal	State	Foundation/Private
Funding Amount	Largest pool \$1.5T annually	Varies – includes Federal pass-through	Varies but provides targeted grants
Compliance Requirements	High – 2 CFR 200 compliance, sam.gov registration, audit requirements	Medium (high if Federal pass- through)	Low Varies by Funder
Barriers to Entry	High Registration, forms, policies required	Medium State registration, vendor apps or portals	Low Relationships & mission alignment
Where to Find	Grants.gov	State agency portals Elected officials' offices	Funders portals Grant research platforms Press releases & socials

Pre-Award Prep: Know Your Opportunity

1 Read the NOFO

Once for eligibility. Once for all requirements. Once to write. Missed requirements can cause automatic disqualification.

2 Use prior year's NOFO to plan early

Last year's NOFO is your roadmap. Start drafting before the new one drops – and be prepared to amend when priorities change.

3 Research beyond the NOFO

Study the funder's goals, strategic plans, past funded projects, and constraints. Use similar language where relevant and always cite your resources.

4 Research your own organization

Strategic plans, capital improvement plans, community engagement records. Link your project explicitly to your documented priorities.

Organizational Readiness

Reviewers evaluate your organization, not just your project.



Administrative Systems

- Sam.gov active & current
- Policies and procedures in place



Financial Systems

- Separate fund tracking for Federal funds
- Segregation of duties
- Clean audit history or Corrective Action Plans addressed and completed



Staffing Capacity

- Named roles identified
- Training & credentials
- Plan for key staff

Organizational Readiness - Administrative



Sam.gov Registration

- Active Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) — check expiration dates
- Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) named and confirmed
- Registration must be renewed annually — lapses can disqualify an application



Policies & Procedures

- Grants Management Manual in place
- Procurement policy (federal standards apply — 2 CFR 200.318–.327)
- Conflict of Interest policy — must be written, not just known
- Records Retention policy (3-year minimum from final FFR)



Organizational Support

- Leadership buy-in is not optional — reviewers look for hierarchical support
- Authorized official identified before submission
- Department coordination in place (finance, legal, program, comms)

Organizational Readiness - Financial

01 Fund Tracking & Segregation of Duties

Federal funds must be tracked separately. No single person controls authorization, recording, AND custody — document who does what.

2 CFR 200.302

02 Source Documentation

Every expenditure needs documentation before it happens, not after. If you can't show a receipt, you can't keep the money.

2 CFR 200.302(b)(3)

03 Indirect Cost Rate

Know your rate before you apply: negotiated rate with your cognizant agency, or de minimis (15% MTDC) if you've never negotiated. Waiving it costs you real money.

2 CFR 200.414

04 Single Audit Threshold

\$1,000,000+ in federal expenditures in a year triggers a Single Audit requirement. Unresolved findings are a red flag to every future funder.

2 CFR 200 Subpart F

Organizational Readiness - Staffing

Named Roles

Project Director

Financial Manager

Grants Manager

Authorized Official

Name the role AND the person. Funders look for this in your application.

Training & Credentials

Grants.gov & SAM.gov training

2 CFR 200 / Uniform Guidance

Program-specific funder trainings

Relevant certifications

Credentials and completed trainings signal capacity — list them explicitly.

Succession Planning

Backup identified for each key role

Cross-training documented

Not dependent on one person

Staff turnover during an award is a compliance risk. Show you have a plan.

Project Readiness

Project readiness means your need, your solution, and your capacity are all known and proven before you apply

Define Your Project

Answer the 8 questions every fundable project must address.

Use Data

Back every claim with specific, local evidence — not general statements.

Funding Strategy

Build the budget from the work plan, not the other way around.




Partnerships & Community

Confirm partners and document community support before you submit.

Project Readiness: Define Your Project With Clarity

- What are you trying to do?
- How is it done today, and what are the limits of current practice?
- What is new in your approach and why do you think it will be successful?
- Who cares? If you are successful, what difference will it make?
- What are the risks?
- How much will it cost?
- How long will it take?
- What are the mid term and final 'exams' to check for success?

Project Readiness: Using Data

Need Statement	Our Community has a serious problem with our car accidents and people are dying		14 intersections have a statistically significant fatal accident rate. One had 20 serious accidents in 2025, including 2 fatalities.
Community Engagement	We held many public meetings with high participation. The public voiced their support.		We held 4 public meetings. 27 community members attended. 5 of 30 submitted suggestions were incorporated into project design.
Outcome Claims	This project will greatly improve safety and wellbeing for everyone in our community		Studies show roundabouts reduce fatalities at high-use intersections by up to 37%. This project targets our 3 highest-risk locations.

Simply saying it, doesn't make it true – cite sources, link documents, use local data

Project Readiness: Funding Strategy

01

Build from the work plan

Your budget should flow directly from project activities. Every line item needs a corresponding task in your narrative.

02

Know your funding sources

Map out the full picture: Federal award, required cost share, leveraged funds, and any other contributes (cash or in-kind).

03

Identify your gaps before you apply

Where is your cost share coming from? What activities or pieces of the project are unfunded? What happens if a funding source falls through? Funders value when you have thought these items through and identified plans ahead of the project start.

Project Readiness: Partnerships & Community Support

- **Confirm partners before you name them.**

Don't list partners who haven't agreed to participate. Reviewers notice — and it damages your credibility. Have MOUs or letters of support in hand before submission.

- **Document community support with specifics.**

Replace 'broad community support' with how many meetings? how many attendees? how many suggestions incorporated? Data shows you *actually* engaged.

- **Well-structured regional partnerships are a competitive advantage**

Before you apply, establish who is the lead, who is accountable for compliance, and how decisions get made across jurisdictions.

Key Takeaways

Start with the landscape, not the opportunity. Understanding where funding comes from helps you pursue the **right grants** at the **right time**.

A strong application reflects **preparation**, not just writing. Your organization readiness and project readiness are what make it **competitive**.

Don't let a NOFO drive your project. Strong projects are built through **ideation and collaboration** — the grant just funds them.