

Applying for ETA Grants: A Guide to the Competitive Grant Process

United States Department of Labor
Employment and Training Administration

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- I. GENERAL INFORMATION
 - A. Formula Funded Grants
 - B. Competitively Funded Grants
- II. THE SOLICITATION FOR GRANT APPLICATION (SGA)
- III. PREPARING THE GRANT APPLICATION
 - A. Organization
 - B. Support
- IV. ETA REVIEW PROCESS FOR COMPETITIVE AWARDS
- V. WHERE TO GO FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
- VI. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
- VII. TIPS
- VIII. CONCLUSION

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) is charged with preparing the American workforce for new and better jobs, and ensuring the adequacy of America's workplaces. DOL's Employment and Training Administration's (ETA's) mission is to contribute to the more efficient and effective functioning of the U.S. labor market by providing employment, labor market information, high quality job training and income maintenance services primarily through state and local workforce development systems.

ETA created this document to provide seasoned and first time grant applicants with general information on programs. The guide intends to be an aid in developing the grant application package and to answer the many questions that applicants frequently ask. The guide consists of:

- An overview of programs offering grants
- An explanation of how to apply for competitive grants at ETA
- Tips on how to create a successful application
- The ETA review process of competitive grants
- Where to look for further information

There are primarily two types of grants offered by ETA: Formula and Competitive. The following definitions provide an explanation of each.

A. Formula Funded Grants: Formula funded grants are provided to specific grantees on the basis of a formula, prescribed in legislation or regulation, rather than on the basis of an individual project review. The formula is usually based on such factors as population, unemployment rate, per capita income, or a specific need.

B. Competitively Funded Grants: Competitively funded grants are awarded through the solicitation process in ETA. When competitive grants are open for competition, ETA will post a Solicitation for Grant Application (SGA). The SGA provides information on the type of project ETA intends to fund and that clearly states what types of organizations are eligible. To compete for a grant, organizations develop a proposal and budget that demonstrate how the organization will provide services to a targeted population.

In addition to formula funded and competitively funded grants, the Secretary of Labor, through ETA, provides National Emergency Grants to the states to fund employment and training opportunities for dislocated workers in such instances as disasters or when mass layoffs have occurred.

The following chart provides a list of the various types of grants funded by DOL.

<p>Formula Funded</p> <p>These grants are not open for competition.</p>	<p>Programs with annual allotments to states under WIA.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Adults• Youth• Dislocated Workers <p>Funding to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• State Workforce Agencies• Labor Market Information Activities• Work Opportunity Tax Credit Program• Alien Labor Certification Program <p>Funding to states for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unemployment Insurance (UI) System Administration• Trade Program Benefits• Trade Program Displacement (agreements with states for training and services for workers from affected companies)• Indian and Native American Designations (federally recognized tribes are given highest priority)• Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers Program (includes Migrant Youth and Housing)• Older Workers
--	--

<p>Competitively Funded</p> <p>The SGA will state specific eligibility requirements for each grant opportunity.</p>	<p>Serving Youth Populations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Youth Offenders• At-Risk Youth Populations• Youth Opportunities <p>Serving Adult Populations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Incumbent Workers• Dislocated Workers• Skills Shortage Initiatives• Minority Colleges and Universities Involvement• Consortium Building <p>Possible Youth and Adult Populations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• H-1B Technical Skills• Individual Training Accounts• Disability Groups/Populations• Apprenticeship• Consortium Building• Partnership Building
--	---

This guide focuses only on the competitive grant process and discusses the many types of competitive awards that are available through ETA. Please note, from time to time, new legislation is enacted creating a new competitive grant program. To seek the most current opportunities for your organization, please refer to ETA's website (www.doleta.gov) or the Federal Register for the most current listing of SGAs.

II. THE SOLICITATION FOR GRANT APPLICATION (SGA)

The ETA program offices initiate the SGA process. Detailed information on how to apply for federal grants is always found in the formal SGA published in the Federal Register and on ETA's home page at www.doleta.gov. Interested parties are generally given 45 to 60 days to apply.

The SGAs provide:

- A description of the projects
- Proposed scope of work and performance periods
- Eligibility requirements and the dollar amount
- Estimated number of grants to be awarded

The SGAs also describe:

- What is required in the grant application
- The closing date for receipt of the applications
- The legislative authority for the projects
- Special reporting requirements
- The rating criteria that will be used in reviewing grant applications

The instructions in the SGA are the foundation of any successful grant application. Paying close attention to the specific requirements and the criteria used to evaluate the application will greatly improve the likelihood of a successful grant application.

The SGA provides all of the necessary information for applying for federal assistance. Please keep in mind that the organization is responsible for determining whether it is eligible to apply for the grant based on the requirements listed in the SGA. ETA staff cannot provide a yes or no answer regarding eligibility.

The SGA is divided into several sections. All are important. However, certain sections merit particular attention. The first is the Rating Criteria. This section provides a detailed explanation of the criteria used in the review process. Another essential section is Performance Responsibilities. This section provides information regarding any reports or data that a grantee will have to provide to ETA if a grant is awarded.

III. PREPARING THE GRANT APPLICATION

A. Organization

A strong organized application usually reflects an organized team who is prepared to implement the project. An organized team will assist in the development of a clear and concise application. In many cases, an outline will serve as a checklist for not only the writer but also the project team.

When preparing an outline, remember no detail is too small - include everything that you want to highlight in the application. Maybe the writer wants to include information about a previous program and chooses to place it in a section about support. If this information is in an outline that is shared with the project team, someone will be able to affirm that this is the appropriate location for this information or the team may conclude that the information would be more appropriate in a section about past successful programs. An outline is an excellent communication tool for the whole project team.

While some grant writers may choose to prepare the complete application before sharing it, it is often best to create an outline to share with the project team first. The entire team should be encouraged to review the outline and provide comments and suggestions for improvement. It is much easier to reorganize an outline three weeks before the application is due than to rewrite ten pages two days before the deadline. Grant writers need to manage the process of collecting input and making clear writing assignments in a manner that will avoid having to make last minute changes. Those last minute changes can lead to an oversight of the obvious - like forgetting to include a key resume or not signing the application page.

An application may seem to be complete but if there are gaps in the description of the project, reviewers may think that the project design has not been well thought out. The gap in information may also result in a lack of clarity. A writer who writes with passion and commitment can become exuberant about the application and may veer from an outline. When this happens, there can be good results and sometimes bad results too. One of the good results is that the language can be very compelling and engaging. A bad result can be that a key element in the application is overlooked and therefore not addressed. The best way to avoid this situation is to carefully follow a pre agreed upon detailed outline.

If the outline has been written in sufficient detail, it will easily translate into clear, crisp and concise sentences. When the entire proposal is written in this way, the reader will be as engaged and excited about the application as the applicant. Another way to ensure clarity is to involve other readers who are NOT familiar with the project but do have some familiarity with its goals. Make sure that the readers do not assume anything. The readers should be instructed to be critical and forthcoming regarding any concerns. They should also be instructed to review the application for accuracy. Most panel members reviewing the application at the federal level can detect exaggerated promises since they

are knowledgeable about the program and may have worked in local organizations as well.

Here is a suggested method of working with an outline:

- 1) Create a detailed outline in accordance with the SGA.
- 2) Share the outline with the project team and with potential supporters.
- 3) Consider feedback, additions and deletions.
- 4) Share the outline again.

B. Support

An important element of any application is collaboration and partnership with other organizations in the community. However, simply mentioning that organization "A" intends to partner with organization "B" is not enough. Support must be explained and, when possible, woven throughout the application.

Some ways to demonstrate support are to discuss exactly how the two organizations will work together. If there is a history of collaboration between the organizations, this should be included. The application should also mention EXACTLY how the organizations will be linked to communicate and work together. Reviewers want to make sure that the service providers adequately serve the intended population. The collaboration should be seamless to give the reviewers confidence that linkages between the organizations will work as flawlessly as portrayed in the application.

Once an applicant has developed a strong outline and has established collaborative relationships, there are a few more things that increase an organization's likelihood of being funded. Applications that are likely to get funded usually do the following:

- **Establish the "Need":** Use statistics to show how the community needs the proposed services. Reviewers want to make sure that the community receiving additional funds and services is a well-deserving community. Information such as unemployment rates, poverty rates and high-school dropout rates are standard statistics that can demonstrate the needs of the community. There may be other statistics that can tell a convincing story for a particular community. Use of this information can enhance an application's chances of being funded.
- **Recognize the Individual:** The project narrative should recognize that not all people have the same needs even if they qualify for the same program. Most narratives should discuss how the project will work with various customers to ensure that their needs are met.
- **Use Partnerships:** Show how the whole community is interested in working together by demonstrating that other organizations are a part of the team effort. Schools, local government, businesses, religious and community organizations may be eager to be a part of the team effort. Discuss in the grant application how

these organizations will contribute to the project. The application should address the following questions: What is the organization's role in the project? How will their staff function in collaboration with staff from other organizations? How will the organizations communicate with each other? How will problems between organizations be solved? What will be done to make sure that participants are welcomed by all organizations providing services?

- **Illustrate Sustainability:** The application should demonstrate the organization's ability to be self-sustaining after the grant funds expire. The application could discuss future funding options to show that the applicant understands that federal funding for the project will eventually end. Sometimes organizations can partner with local businesses to obtain future funding. Some applications may discuss plans to acquire office space in future years that will minimize costs. A key element of this discussion may be that the applicant is simply demonstrating its ability to be creative and "survive" once the federal grant funds end. Most application panel reviewers will want to see that the applicant is making a good faith effort to continue services and that the grant will have a lasting impact on the community.
- **Build and Expand upon ETA Resources:** Discuss how the application will dovetail with other ETA goals and initiatives that are already addressed in the community. There may be other programs that ETA has sponsored in the past that are still providing services. If the application discusses how the proposed project will work with the previously funded program, this would show an effective use of funding. In some communities the only ETA program may be at the One-Stop Career Center. The project narrative should ensure linkages with existing activities at the One-Stop Career Center. If the applicant is the One-Stop Career Center, a discussion of how the future funding will complement existing programs is imperative.
- **Create Innovative Uses of ETA Funding:** Organizations that create new ways of using grant funds will catch the attention of the federal reviewers. Applications that create non-monetary incentives to encourage participant retention can also be interesting to reviewers. Other interesting ideas include developing a matching program with community businesses or working with scholarship programs at community colleges. In most cases, reviewers would look favorably on a project that leverages local funds as a result of ETA funding. Again, innovative uses of funds shows that the team leaders are creative and can handle any challenges that come their way.

IV. ETA REVIEW PROCESS FOR COMPETITIVE AWARDS

A technical review panel evaluates eligible applications submitted to ETA. Composed of staff from ETA program offices, as well as peer reviewers, the panel serves as an advisory committee to the Grant Officer in the review and rating process. Accordingly, panel members have knowledge that helps them effectively evaluate each application. Each member performs an independent evaluation of the application based solely upon the criteria established in the SGA. The panel prepares a report identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the application and the cumulative rating. The report also includes recommendations of issues to be addressed in negotiations.

Negotiations may occur if deemed necessary by the Grant Officer. During negotiations the Grant Officer may ask the applicant to provide supplemental information such as IRS status or other information that may be necessary to clarify issues within the application. Negotiations are by no means a guarantee of funding.

Once selections are made, an Award Notification is sent through the appropriate congressional channels for notification. After awardees are notified, the list of awardees is posted on the ETA website at www.doleta.gov. ETA recommends that all applicants frequently refer to the website for award notification information. Any applicant can request a debriefing from ETA. If the applicant accepts the terms and conditions outlined in the award package, the Grant Officer will execute the grant award and funds will be allocated.

V. WHERE TO GO FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

If you are looking for funding opportunities but your organization is not eligible for any of the SGAs posted at the ETA website (www.doleta.gov), do not be discouraged. ETA publishes SGAs throughout the year and the types of projects solicited vary each year. The following agencies also offer grants that may be helpful to your organization.

The Department of Education: www.ed.gov

The Department of Health and Human Services: www.hhs.gov

The Department of Housing and Urban Development: www.hud.gov

The Department of Justice: www.usdoj.gov

The Department of Commerce: www.commerce.gov/

VI. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The SGA explains how to contact the ETA Grants Office regarding any questions. Here is a list of frequently asked questions.

Q. I would like to conduct computer training one-on-one with students in my home. Can I apply for a grant to do this?

A. Individuals are not eligible for grants; only eligible organizations, as defined in the SGA, can apply.

Q. Whom should I contact regarding my questions about the SGA?

A. Questions may be faxed to the specified grant specialist listed in the SGA.

Q. What needs to be included in the budget narrative?

A. The budget narrative should explain each budget item in clear, concise detail. Each calculation should be clearly stated and you should use addition and multiplication signs to demonstrate the calculations. For example, a salary request might look like "John Doe's Salary request = \$10 per hour for 20 hours per week for 40 weeks = 10 X 20 X 40 = \$8,000. Mr. Doe will provide technical services in the training facility's computer network. He has three years experience providing services for the agency."

Q. If an item is listed on the budget and I explain it in the budget narrative, must I discuss it elsewhere?

A. Ensure that your budget relates to the technical proposal. For example, if three computers appear in the budget, these items should be mentioned in the text of the application.

Q. I am not sure of the correct answers on the forms. Should I just leave it blank?

A. Fill out the application form completely and make sure it is signed with original signatures. The copy with the original signature should be part of the package submitted to ETA. Fax any questions to the specialist named in the SGA.

Q. Are there other resources I need to consult pertaining to the contents of my application?

A. All of the information regarding your application is in the SGA.

- The SGA states if a bidders' conference will occur. If there is no mention in the SGA, then there will be no bidders' conference.
- Be aware of the budget limitations in the SGA. For example, the budget cannot exceed the maximum number of pages indicated in the SGA.

VII. TIPS

While there are many books available discussing how to obtain grant funding, the following tips may be helpful.

GENERAL TIPS TO ENHANCE A GRANT APPLICATION

This information was reprinted with the permission of the Center for Technology Transfer and Pollution Prevention at Purdue University in cooperation with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

- Read the SGA carefully.
- Organize your application according to the SGA.
- Pay attention to the rating criteria before you begin writing.
- Explain things - don't DECLARE them.
- Don't make assumptions of your reviewers.
- Avoid jargon and A.C.R.O.N.Y.M.S.
- Don't simply reiterate buzzwords.
- Be innovative...new audiences, new techniques, etc.
- Be passionate.
- Be realistic.
- Be specificâ€¦I would like this much in order to do this.
- Show the funding organization the return on its investment.
- Check grammar, spelling, and typos.
- Ask someone else to review it.
- Solicit partners.
- If the funding organization says "no," ask why.
- Volunteer to be an evaluator.

Please note: The original document provided by Purdue University was altered slightly to make it more SGA specific.

DO's and DON'Ts

Cover Letter	Do...	Don't...
Proof to the funding source that the application is appropriately endorsed.	Describe the content of the application. Commit to following up on the application with visit or phone call, if appropriate. Address it to a specific person -the right person (spelled correctly).	Let just anybody sign it. Get the person with signature authority. Use it to substitute for an abstract or summary. Show off your knowledge of the funding organization's interest areas/reputation.

Abstract/Summary

A clear, interesting, succinct and polished one-page summary of grant request; it's the reviewer's first impression of your application.

Do...

Identify target group.
Describe need/problem/issue.
Describe proposed solution.
Discuss importance of project.
Describe projects and anticipated results.
Include total cost, funds committed and amount requested.

Don't...

Put it at the end.
Forget to describe applicant:
One sentence on capability.
One sentence on objectives.
One sentence on methods.
Write this until the end.

Introduction

A description of the agency's qualifications or "capability."

Do...

Establish who is applying for the grant.
Describe applicant agency purpose and goals.
Describe agency programs.
Describe clients or constituents.
Provide evidence of accomplishment.
Offer statistics to support capability.
Include references to support and endorsement of others.
Lead into problem statement.

Don't...

Include jargon.
Bore the reader.
Go on endlessly.
Lose the logic of your argument.

Need

A description and documentation of needs to be met or problem to be resolved by proposed project.

Do...

Show involvement of beneficiaries.
State needs in terms of project participants/beneficiaries.
Describe how needs were identified.
Support needs statements with statistical data and statements from authoritative sources.

Don't...

Plagiarize or use others' words.
Try to resolve needs of unreasonable dimensions.
Make unsupported claims.
Argue for an unsubstantiated need.
Make assumptions.
Be vague.

Link needs and proposed solutions to the goals of your agency.

Plan of Operation

A description of proposed project, implementation and management plans.

Do...

Define challenging but achievable outcomes.
Collaborate with other agencies when possible.
Show how objectives and methods meet needs.
Demonstrate community involvement in planning.
Include timelines.

Don't...

Ignore the private sector.
Propose unreasonable scope of activities.
Propose unrealistic timelines.

Include:

Project Design - A broad picture of your project and what you expect to accomplish.

Goals - Broad statements that should come out of the needs assessment; long-range benefits you hope to attain. Goals lead to objectives and methods.

Objectives - Specific and measurable statements which tell who, what and when.

Activities/Methods - How you expect to accomplish the objectives (include sequence, staff, customers).

Management Plan - How the project will come together.

Key Personnel

A justification for, and a description of, qualifications and responsibilities of project director and other staff.

Do...

Describe the experience, education and training of project staff as they relate to proposed responsibilities.
Match personnel to project

Don't...

Propose full-time staff for responsibilities that appear less than full-time.
Propose to use grant funds for salaries, without

design content -justify staff. Specify staff time allocated to jobs. Summarize resumes in narrative; full resumes in appendix; if biosketch forms are provided, include only relevant information.

considering the recurring expenses that occur after the grant ends. Appear to be relying on only new staff for program.

Evaluation

A plan for determining the degree to which project implementation and desired results are achieved.

Do...

Identify evaluator/selection process. Include an evaluation procedure to address each objective. Describe data gathering methods and timelines. Describe instruments/tools. Describe data analysis. Explain how findings will be used to modify the project during the grant period and afterwards. Describe planned evaluation reports.

Don't...

Omit criteria for success. Say the evaluation plan will be developed after the grant is awarded. Propose an evaluation plan that doesn't relate to your objectives. Merely state that an evaluator will be hired to take care of the evaluation. Assume you must do the evaluation yourself - independent evaluators are often preferred.

Applicant's Commitment and Capacity

A description of success with similar projects, available facilities and equipment.

Do...

Indicate intention to continue at least some aspect of the project after grant funding ends. Discuss plans to institutionalize the project. Describe special expertise or equipment available.

Don't...

Assume reviewers know about your agency. Be vague about previous experiences with similar projects. Minimize in-kind contributions.

Budget and Cost Effectiveness

A description of projected costs, in-kind and cash contributions, and benefits in terms of costs.

Do...

Let the budget reflect exactly what you propose in the narrative. Provide all information: salary rate, percent of time for salary, fringe benefits, mileage rates for travel, per

Don't...

Introduce any unexplained or unexpected items. Request unexplained amounts, such as "contingency funds." Inflate the budget by requesting more than you

diem rates, honorarium rates, etc.	need.
Include all items for which funding is requested.	Request major equipment purchases that are not justified by the project.
Include items paid by other sources.	
Describe benefits to target groups in terms of estimated costs.	

"DO's and DON'Ts" are provided through courtesy of The Grantsmanship Center (Program Planning and Proposal Writing, Karen Denard Goldman and Kathleen Jahn Schmalz (Rutgers University) and Genesee Intermediate School District - Grants and Development Department.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The mission of ETA is to contribute to the more efficient functioning of the U.S. labor market by providing high quality job training, employment, labor market information, and income maintenance services primarily through state and local workforce development systems. ETA's vision is to responsibly administer taxpayer dollars for programs that are results-oriented and outcome-focused. The agency recognizes that states, local communities and local organizations including faith-based organizations are the most capable of administering workforce programs to present and future workers. Grant opportunities are a main vehicle for such organizations to fulfill this mission.

There are a variety of grant opportunities available through ETA. Potential applicants should review the SGAs that are posted on the ETA website www.doleta.gov to determine if an SGA is appropriate for their organizations. The SGA contains information regarding the eligibility requirements and rating criteria - everything you need to know is in the SGA.

By carefully following the SGA and creating a competitive application, eligible organizations can obtain the funds necessary to enhance workforce development services in their communities. Successful applications can enhance the quality of life for not only the participants but also the local economy and the community at large. A successful application and project can change life's course for an individual and generations to follow.