FREE GUIDE

Grants for Faith-Based Organizations: Free Guide (PDF)

An honest guide for congregations and faith-based nonprofits on which funders consider them, how to present community programs, and worksheets to check fit and log a search.

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> This guide helps congregations and faith-based nonprofits work out which funders may consider them, how to read eligibility language, and how to describe a community program clearly. It is general education, not legal advice. Each funder's own rules come first, so read them and ask a qualified advisor when a rule is unclear.

Checked November 2026. Programs and rules change, so confirm on the official site.

The honest picture

- Few funders pay for worship, religious instruction or the general running costs of a congregation. Most of that support comes from members and from religious bodies
- Many funders will consider a community service that a faith-based organization runs, such as a food pantry, a shelter, tutoring or a health program, when it is open to the people the funder wants to reach
- Some funders exclude religious organizations, or religious activities, in their guidelines. Believe what they write and move on
- No guide or list can promise an award. Fit with the funder decides most of the outcome

Which kinds of funder consider faith-based applicants

Kind of funder	What to expect	What to check
Faith-aligned foundations and denominational bodies	Often fund within a tradition, a region or a mission area	Whether you must belong to the tradition, and whether an invitation is needed
Community foundations	Many fund community services whoever runs them	The wording on religious organizations and religious activities
Private and family foundations	Varies widely from one foundation to the next	Stated exclusions and the list of past grants
Corporate giving programs	Some exclude religious organizations, and some fund their community programs	The exclusions list on the company's giving page
Government agencies	Rules differ by agency and by program	The funding notice and the agency's guidance on faith-based organizations

What one federal agency says

This is an example from one agency. It is not a summary of all federal rules.

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The Office of Justice Programs at the U.S. Department of Justice has a page on OJP.gov called "Partnerships with Faith-Based and Other Neighborhood Organizations". For Department of Justice funding, that page says:

- Faith-based or religious organizations are eligible, on the same basis as any other organization, to participate in any Department of Justice program for which they are otherwise eligible
- An organization that receives the department's financial assistance keeps its independence and may continue to carry out its mission, as long as it does not use that assistance to support explicitly religious activities, such as worship, religious instruction or proselytization
- Privately funded explicitly religious activities must be offered separately, in time or location, from the programs or services funded with direct department assistance, and taking part in them must be voluntary for the people served
- An organization providing social services with the department's assistance must not discriminate against a program beneficiary on the basis of religion, a religious belief, a refusal to hold a religious belief, or a refusal to attend or take part in a religious practice

Other agencies publish their own rules, and rules change. For any government grant, check the funding notice and that agency's current guidance, and ask a qualified advisor how the rules apply to you.

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How to read eligibility language

Copy the funder's exact words into the fit check below. Do not rely on memory or on a summary from someone else.

If the guidelines say	It usually means	What to do
A list of eligible organization types	You must match one of the types and be able to prove it	Find out which document proves your status
"We do not fund religious organizations"	Faith-based applicants are excluded	Do not apply
"We do not fund religious activities" or "sectarian purposes"	The organization may be eligible, but the activity must be a community service and not worship or instruction	Read the full wording, then ask the funder if it is unclear
"Programs must be open to all"	People must be able to take part whatever their beliefs	Be ready to describe how the program is open to all
Nothing about religion	It is not settled either way	Look at past grants, then ask the funder if contact is allowed

Separating community service from worship

Funders that consider faith-based applicants usually want to see that their money pays for the community program only. Show the separation in the description and in the budget.

In the program description:

- Describe the service, who it is for, and the need it meets in plain community terms
- Say plainly who may take part and whether any religious activity is part of the program
- If religious activities are offered, say how they are kept separate and voluntary, if the funder's rules allow them at all

In the budget:

- Give the program its own budget, apart from the congregation's general budget
- Charge shared costs, such as a building or a staff member who also has religious duties, by a method you can explain, such as hours worked or space used
- Leave out any cost the funder will not pay for
- Track program income and spending separately so you can report on it

Program cost	Used only by the program	Shared with worship or other activities	How the shared part is calculated

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Governance and financial documents funders ask for

Requirements differ by funder. Tick what you have and note what is missing.

- [ ] Proof of legal and tax status in the form this funder asks for
- [ ] A list of the governing board or leadership body, with roles
- [ ] A current organization budget and a separate program budget
- [ ] Recent financial statements, and an audit or review if the funder asks for one
- [ ] A bank account in the organization's name and a named person who manages the funds
- [ ] Written policies the funder asks for, such as conflict of interest and nondiscrimination
- [ ] Records for the program: who is served, how many and what results
- [ ] Letters of support from community partners outside the congregation

If the program is run by a congregation that has no separate nonprofit, ask the funder which documents it accepts, and ask a qualified advisor whether a separate organization or a fiscal sponsor would suit you.

Documents we still need, and who will get them:

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Fit-check worksheet

Complete one for each funder before you write anything.

Funder:

Program we would ask them to fund:

Eligibility wording, copied from the guidelines:

Wording about religious organizations or religious activities, copied from the guidelines:

Past grants to organizations like ours:

- [ ] Our type of organization is listed as eligible, or is not excluded
- [ ] The program is a community service that fits the funder's stated priorities
- [ ] The program is open to the people the funder wants to reach
- [ ] We can show a program budget that is separate from worship and general congregation costs
- [ ] We can supply every document the funder asks for
- [ ] We can meet the funder's conditions without changing who we are
- [ ] We have asked the funder about anything unclear, if contact is allowed
- [ ] A qualified advisor has looked at any rule we are unsure about

Decision (apply, ask the funder first, or do not apply):

Reason:

Search log

Date	Funder or source checked	Kind of funder	What it says about faith-based applicants	Fit (high, medium, low)	Next step

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Want help with this? The Complete Grant Architect is a free 16-week grant writing course, and you can hire a grant writer for your next proposal. Both are at subthesis.com.

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