FREE CHEAT SHEET

Foundation vs Federal Grants Comparison Sheet (Free PDF)

A side-by-side comparison of foundation, federal, state and local, and corporate funding, with a short worksheet to decide which type fits your organization now.

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> This sheet compares the four main sources of grant funding side by side. Everything here describes general tendencies, not rules. Each funder sets its own process, so read the funder's current instructions before you plan an application.

The four types at a glance

Dimension	Foundation	Federal	State and local government	Corporate
Who the funder is	Private, family and community foundations	Federal agencies	State agencies, counties, cities and special districts	Companies, through a giving program or a company foundation
Where the money comes from	An endowment or donors	Public funds set aside by law	State and local public funds, and federal funds passed through	Company profits or a company foundation's assets
Who decides	Often staff and a board. Varies by funder	Often agency staff, with outside reviewers scoring against published criteria. Varies by program	Often agency staff or a review panel, sometimes with a board or council vote. Varies by agency	Often community relations or marketing staff, a local manager or a committee. Varies by company

How applying compares

Dimension	Foundation	Federal	State and local government	Corporate
How you apply	Often a letter of inquiry or a short proposal, by online form or email. Some fund by invitation only	A full application in response to a published funding notice, through a government system. Registration is required first	An application in response to a published notice, often through an agency portal or form	Often a short online form. Some companies accept requests only from groups their staff are involved with
Typical length	Tends to be shorter. Varies by funder	Tends to be the longest, with required forms and attachments. Varies by program	Tends to fall between foundation and federal. Varies by agency	Tends to be the shortest. Varies by company
Instructions	Guidelines on the funder's website, of varying detail	A detailed notice with scoring criteria	A notice or guidelines, of varying detail	A web page or form, often brief

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Dimension	Foundation	Federal	State and local government	Corporate
Budget detail	Often a simple project budget. Varies by funder	Usually detailed, on required forms, with a written justification	Often detailed, on the agency's forms	Often a total and a short breakdown
Timeline to a decision	Varies widely. Many follow board meeting dates	Varies by program. Often the longest wait	Varies by agency and by its budget year	Varies. Often tied to the company's budget year

What comes with the money

Dimension	Foundation	Federal	State and local government	Corporate
Role of relationships	Often important. Many funders welcome contact before you apply. Check their guidelines	Decisions follow published criteria. Agency contacts can answer questions about the notice	Local knowledge and agency contact can help you understand priorities. Awards usually follow a formal process	Often important. Local presence and staff involvement can matter
Reporting burden	Tends to be lighter. Varies by funder	Tends to be the heaviest, with financial and progress reports and detailed rules on spending	Tends to be substantial. Federal rules can apply to funds passed through	Tends to be light. A short report and recognition are common
How funds are paid	Often paid up front or in installments. Varies by funder	Often paid as costs are incurred. Varies by program	Often paid as reimbursement. Varies by agency	Often paid up front. Varies by company
Flexibility	Some offer general operating support	Funds are tied to the approved project and budget	Funds are usually tied to the approved project and budget	Often tied to an event, program or local need
Often suits	New and small organizations, and new ideas	Organizations with strong financial systems and staff time for compliance	Organizations delivering public services locally	Local events and programs with visible community benefit

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Which fits us

Answer for your organization as it is today, not as you hope it will be.

Project or need we want funded:

Amount needed and when we need it:

Question	Yes or no	Notes
Do we have staff time to write a long application with many attachments?		
Can our accounting system track spending separately for each grant?		
Could we cover costs up front and wait to be reimbursed?		
Can we meet detailed reporting and record-keeping rules?		
Have we completed the registrations a government funder requires?		
Do we have relationships with local foundations or businesses?		
Does the project deliver a service a public agency already funds?		
Is there a visible local benefit a business would want to be linked with?		

Reading your answers

- [ ] Mostly "no" on the first five: start with foundation and corporate funding, and build systems before seeking government grants
- [ ] "Yes" on the first five: government funding may be within reach. Read one full funding notice before you commit
- [ ] "Yes" on local relationships: begin with community foundations and local businesses
- [ ] "Yes" on public services: check your state and local agencies' funding pages

Funding type we will pursue first, and why:

Funding type to prepare for later, and what must be in place first:

Next step, owner and date:

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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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