

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR NONPROFITS

Finding Grant Opportunities That Fit

How to find, evaluate, and prioritize the grants most worth your team's time, so you can build a steadier, more focused pipeline.

01 Find

02 Evaluate

03 Prioritize

Written for executive directors, development directors, and grant managers who want a repeatable way to decide which opportunities to pursue.

BROUGHT TO YOU BY
 **Velora Grant Management**

2026 Edition

Pursue fewer grants, and better-fit ones.

Grant research can start to feel like a numbers game: find every open opportunity, apply to as many as possible, hope some land. Most teams learn the hard way that this burns time and morale without improving results.

Every application has a real cost

Before a proposal goes out, someone reads the guidelines, builds a budget, gathers program data, chases letters of support, writes, revises, and gets approvals. If you win, reporting comes next. Pursuing everything spreads that effort thin and tends to lower your win rate.

Discipline beats volume

A clear, repeatable research process puts your hours where the fit and the payoff are strongest. You get fewer last-minute scrambles, a pipeline leadership can trust, and more time to make each application strong.

The framework in this guide

01 • FIND

Search widely

Look across government, private foundations, and community and corporate funders so you don't depend on one source.

Page 3

02 • EVALUATE

Make a go/no-go call

Screen every opportunity for eligibility, mission fit, funding type, funder history, and admin burden before you write a word.

Pages 4–5

03 • PRIORITIZE

Rank what's left

Score each opportunity on probability and impact, then sort it into Tier 1, 2, or 3 so staff time follows the strongest bets.

Page 6

How to use this guide

Read it once, end to end.

The three phases build on each other, and the whole guide takes about 15 minutes.

Bring the tools to your team.

The go/no-go checklist (p. 5) and scoring grid (p. 6) work well in a monthly pipeline review.

Turn it into a habit.

Pages 7–8 cover the calendar, funder outreach, and mission guardrails that keep it going.



The goal isn't more applications. It's a pipeline of opportunities that match your mission, fit your capacity, and are realistic to win.

Cast a wide net, on purpose.

Strong pipelines draw from several funder types. Each one has its own rhythm, requirements, and level of competition, so spreading out lowers your risk when one source slows down.

Government

Federal, state & local

- **Federal:** search **Grants.gov** for active opportunities.
- **Register early.** Federal applications require an active **SAM.gov** registration and a Unique Entity ID (UEI). Setup can take weeks, so don't wait for a deadline.
- **State:** check your state's grant portal (for example, the California Grants Portal or Texas eGrants).
- **Local:** look at county and city programs such as Community Development Block Grants (CDBG). Local funding often draws less competition than federal grants.

Private foundations

Institutional philanthropy

- **Grant databases** let you search open opportunities and funder profiles in one place instead of site by site.
- **Free 990 lookups:** use ProPublica Nonprofit Explorer or Candid (GuideStar) to see which organizations a foundation funds, and for how much.
- **Candid's Foundation Directory** is available free at Funding Information Network locations, often public libraries.
- Read **annual reports and grantee lists** on funder websites.

Community & corporate

Close to home

- **Community foundations** focus on a defined city, county, or region. They value long-term local partnerships and are often open to general operating and capacity-building support.
- **Corporate giving** usually follows a company's footprint (stores, plants, offices, employees) and business-related issues such as workforce development or financial literacy.
- Check regional banks, local utilities, and major local employers too.

Target a community foundation when...

You need general operating support, have deep local roots, or are launching a place-based project. A win can also raise your profile with local donors who hold donor-advised funds there.

Target a corporate funder when...

Your work connects to a local employer's industry, you can offer employee volunteer opportunities, or you'd welcome in-kind support. Applications are often shorter, too.



Searching in one place

The discovery database in **Velora Grant Management** now includes **300,000+ grant opportunities**, with more added all the time. You can search by keyword and eligibility, then save promising fits to a shared pipeline. More on page 9.

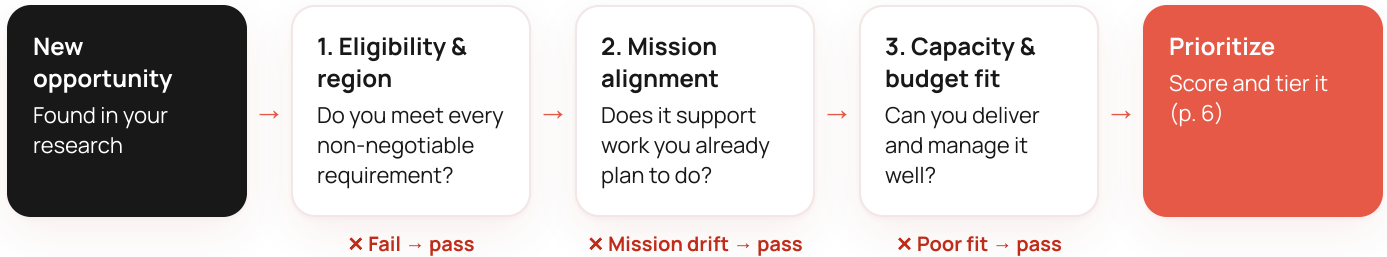


Tip Learn from your peers. Pick 3–5 organizations similar to yours in size, region, and focus. Then search foundation 990-PF grant lists for their names to see which funders already support work like yours.

Make a go/no-go call before you write a word.

Screen every new opportunity the same way. A consistent filter keeps the decision objective and saves your team from investing hours in grants that were never a real fit.

The three gates



Five criteria to check

CRITERION	THE CORE QUESTION	WALK AWAY IF...
Eligibility	Do you meet 100% of the non-negotiables: tax status (such as 501©(3)), geography, budget size, population served?	The grant is restricted to a state, region, or population you don't serve.
Mission alignment	Does it support an existing, board-approved program, or would you be creating something new just for the money?	You'd have to rewrite core deliverables or change your service model to fit the funder.
Funding type	Does it cover general operations, program costs, or capital? Does it allow indirect costs?	It caps overhead at 0% and your organization depends on indirect cost recovery.
Funder history	Does this funder give to <i>new</i> organizations, or mostly renew past grantees?	Its 990 shows nearly all grants go to recurring, pre-selected recipients, with no open application or LOI process.
Admin burden	Do the reporting, compliance, and audit requirements match the award size?	A \$5,000 grant requires quarterly audited financials or custom tracking systems.

The rule of thumb

Eligibility is a hard stop. If you don't qualify, move on. For the other criteria, if an opportunity raises **two or more red flags**, pass on it and spend that time on a stronger fit.

Write down the "why"

Record a one-line reason for every pass. Over a few months, those notes show patterns, like funders you keep re-checking or criteria you weigh too lightly.

Read the funder's track record.

What a funder *says* it funds and what it *actually* funds can differ. Public IRS filings show you the real pattern, for free.

SIGNAL 1

Renewals vs. new grantees

Over ~85% repeat grantees means cold applications face long odds. A mix of roughly 60/40 suggests real openness to new partners.

SIGNAL 2

Median vs. average award

One \$1M grant plus nine \$10K grants averages \$109K, but the median is \$10K. Base your request on the median for *new* grantees.

SIGNAL 3

Grantee budget size

If a funder mostly supports \$20M+ institutions, a \$500K community organization may struggle, even with strong alignment.

SIGNAL 4

Giving trajectory

Total giving that is growing or stable is a good sign. A sharp multi-year decline often means a retreat to existing partners.

IF YOU SEE...

THEN...

30–50% of grantees each year are first-time recipients in your area

Green light

Fast-track it.

Advertised \$50K awards, but first-time grantees get \$2.5K–\$5K

Yellow flag

Right-size your ask or lower its priority.

Total payout has dropped three years in a row

Red flag

Pass or deprioritize.

All grants go to pre-selected organizations, with no unsolicited applications

Red flag

Pass, unless a board member can make a warm introduction.

Where to look

- **IRS Form 990-PF**, in the section listing “Grants and Contributions Paid During the Year”: recipients, cities, purposes, and amounts. Free on ProPublica Nonprofit Explorer, Candid (GuideStar), or IRS.gov.
- **Candid’s Foundation Directory**, with grant maps and year-over-year trends, free at Funding Information Network sites.
- **Funder websites**: annual reports, grantee lists, and strategy updates.

Foundations typically publish 990s 9–12 months after their fiscal year ends, so the data lags slightly.

Go/no-go checklist

Copy this into your pipeline review

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ We meet every eligibility requirement (status, geography, budget, population). | ☐ It funds an existing or already-planned program, not one built for this grant. |
| ☐ The funder’s definition of success matches how we measure impact. | ☐ The funding type and indirect-cost policy work for our budget. |
| ☐ The funder has a track record of supporting new grantees like us. | ☐ Our request is in line with the funder’s typical (median) award. |
| ☐ Reporting and compliance requirements are proportional to the award. | ☐ We have the staff and time to deliver a strong application by the deadline. |

Any “no” on eligibility means stop. Two or more other “no” answers usually mean pass.

Rank by probability × impact.

Once you have a vetted list, decide where staff time goes first. Two quick 1–5 scores give you a shared, defensible way to rank opportunities.

Probability score (1–5)

How strong are your alignment, relationship, and track record with this funder or focus area?

Impact value (1–5)

How meaningful is the net award relative to the effort to apply for it and manage it?

PRIORITY SCORE

Probability × Impact = 1–25

Scoring grid (a starting point, not a formula to follow blindly)

5	5	10	15	20	25
4	4	8	12	16	20
3	3	6	9	12	15
2	2	4	6	8	10
1	1	2	3	4	5
	1	2	3	4	5

↑ Probability · Impact →

Tier 1

Tier 2

Tier 3

TIER 1 · SUBMIT FIRST

High probability, moderate-to-high value

Renewals, local family foundations where you have board connections, and local government grants that match existing programs.

TIER 2 · PIPELINE BUILDERS

Moderate probability, high value

Regional or national foundations with open application cycles that closely match your focus area.

TIER 3 · BACKBURNER

Low probability or low value for the effort

Highly competitive national awards with very low win rates, or small grants that require a fully custom proposal.

Example: a quick pipeline review

OPPORTUNITY (ILLUSTRATIVE)	PROB.	IMPACT	SCORE	TIER
Regional family foundation, board connection	4	4	16	Tier 1
County youth-services grant (renewal)	5	3	15	Tier 1
National foundation, open cycle in your focus area	3	5	15	Tier 2
Highly competitive national award	1	5	5	Tier 3

Same score, different tier: the county renewal goes ahead of the national grant because its odds are more dependable. Use the score to rank and the tier profile to make the final call.

Build a 12-month grant calendar.

A shared calendar turns reactive grant-seeking into a year-round plan, balancing research, cultivation, drafting, submission, and reporting across all four quarters.

Q1 · JAN-MAR
Set up & scan

- Renew SAM.gov; confirm your UEI
- Spring foundation deadlines
- Review federal and state funding forecasts
- Refresh boilerplate with last year's data

Q2 · APR-JUN
Submission push

- Foundation and corporate deadlines
- Mid-year progress reports
- Check grant spending against budgets with finance

Q3 · JUL-SEP
Research & cultivate

- Dig into newly published 990s
- Check in with program officers
- Draft complex fall proposals

Q4 · OCT-DEC
Year-end & plan

- Fall and year-end deadlines
- Final reports for grants ending
- Review wins and losses; set next year's targets

What every entry should capture

- **Funder basics:** name, type, program officer contact
- **Grant mechanics:** request amount, grant type (operating, program, capital, capacity)
- **Milestones:** outreach date, LOI due, proposal due, expected decision, grant period
- **Reporting:** interim and final reports, audit and re-certification dates
- **Owners:** grant lead, finance lead, program lead
- **Stage:** Research → Cultivation → LOI → Application → Submitted → Awarded/Declined → Reporting

Lead-time rules that prevent scrambles

2-WEEK RULE

Set an internal draft deadline **10–14 business days** before the funder's. That leaves room for leadership review, budget reconciliation, and portal hiccups.

DEPENDENCIES

Put board resolutions, partner letters of support (allow 2–3 weeks), and special financial statements on the calendar too.

ROLLING CYCLES

Give no-deadline opportunities a fixed target month so they don't keep slipping behind hard deadlines.

MONTHLY REVIEW

Hold 30 minutes with leadership, finance, and development to review the next 60 days and update scores.



Keep a boilerplate repository

Store your statement of need, organizational history, staff bios, board list, budgets, and evaluation approach in one place, and refresh them every year. Recurring applications get much faster when you start from current, approved language.

Build relationships and protect your mission.

When funders allow it, a short conversation before you apply can confirm fit and save hours of writing. Just as important is knowing when to walk away.

Tip

Reach out to program officers, when permitted

- **Timing:** 4–8 weeks before a deadline, or during quiet months between cycles. Avoid the last 1–2 weeks before a major deadline.
- **Start warm:** check whether a board member, advisor, or current funder knows someone there.
- **Keep it short:** an email under 250 words that references their priorities, says who you serve and how, names the alignment, and asks for a 15-minute call.
- **On the call, listen more than you talk.** Ask: *“Is this a competitive fit for your current portfolio?”* and *“Why do proposals in this area usually get declined?”*
- **Follow up within 24 hours** with a thank-you and your key takeaways.

When not to cold-email

- **“No contact” policies.** If a funder says program officers don’t take unsolicited calls or emails, respect it. Ignoring it can hurt your application.
- **Federal and state grants.** Government rules tightly limit pre-application contact. During an open solicitation, send only technical clarification questions, and only to the designated contact.
- **Corporate programs.** Start with local store, branch, or regional giving contacts rather than headquarters.
- **Unstaffed family foundations.** Reach trustees only through a warm, mutual connection, and keep it brief.

Mission-drift red flags

Chasing dollars can quietly reshape your organization

- The project was designed only after reading the funder’s guidelines.
- It requires serving a new population or region outside your expertise.
- You’d need to hire a whole new team or build skills you don’t have.
- The program would shut down the day the grant ends.
- The funder measures success differently than you do (e.g., workshop headcounts vs. long-term outcomes).
- The funder mandates a service model you don’t believe in.
- The funder’s reputation could cost you trust with the community you serve.
- Cash-match or no-overhead rules would drain your unrestricted reserves.

Ask your team: *“If this grant didn’t exist, would we still build this project in the next 12–24 months?”* If the answer is no, you’re likely chasing the money rather than your strategy.

Spend less time searching and more time on grants that fit.

Velora Grant Management is an AI-powered grants workspace for the full funding lifecycle: discover, apply, track, and report, all in one shared place for your team.



300,000+

grant opportunities in our expanded discovery database

And we keep adding more. Search by keyword and eligibility filters, review opportunity details and fit context, then bookmark or add promising grants to your pipeline.

How it supports the approach in this guide

FIND

Search opportunities in one place instead of jumping between funder websites and spreadsheets.

EVALUATE

Review requirements, eligibility, amount, deadline, and complexity side by side, so go/no-go calls are quicker. Your team still makes the call.

PRIORITIZE

Move opportunities through a shared pipeline with stages, owners, deadlines, and potential funding that everyone can see.

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Shared calendar views, tasks, and a document library for boilerplate keep the work organized from application through post-award reporting.

Practical AI

Less blank-page time, with people in charge. AI can help turn a funder's guidelines into a clear list of requirements and tasks, and draft first-pass responses from your organization's own context. Your team reviews, edits, approves, and submits every application.



Try Velora Grant Management free for 14 days

Self-serve setup. Run a real search and build your first pipeline using your own grant process.

joinvelora.com/grant-management

[Start your free trial →](#)

Velora Grant Management is a standalone Velora product focused primarily on U.S.-based grant opportunities, with some international opportunities included. Database size reflects opportunities currently included and changes over time; no database contains every available grant. AI-extracted details and AI-generated drafts may be incomplete or inaccurate and should always be checked against the original funder materials. Velora Grant Management does not submit applications or guarantee eligibility or funding, and it does not provide legal, accounting, tax, or compliance advice. After the trial, standard pricing is \$89/month or \$890/year.

NEXT STEPS

Your first 30 days.

You don't need to overhaul everything at once. Use this four-week plan to put the Find → Evaluate → Prioritize process to work this month.

WEEK 1

Get ready

Confirm your registrations are current (SAM.gov and UEI if you'll pursue federal funding). Gather your boilerplate (mission, history, bios, budgets, outcomes) in one shared place.

WEEK 2

Find

Build a prospect list drawing from at least three source types: government, private foundations, and community or corporate funders. Look up the funders behind 3–5 peer organizations.

WEEK 3

Evaluate & prioritize

Run every prospect through the go/no-go checklist. Score the survivors on probability and impact and assign tiers. Note why you passed on the rest.

WEEK 4

Plan the year

Add Tier 1 deadlines to a shared 12-month calendar with internal due dates set two weeks early. Schedule program officer outreach where it's allowed, and book a recurring monthly pipeline review.

Quick reference

01 · FIND

Diversify across government, private foundations, and community and corporate funders. Register for SAM.gov early.

02 · EVALUATE

Eligibility is a hard stop. Two or more red flags on mission, funding type, history, or burden means pass.

03 · PRIORITIZE

Probability × impact. Put Tier 1 first, keep Tier 2 building, and move Tier 3 to the backburner.



Ready to put your pipeline in one place?

Search 300,000+ grant opportunities and build a shared pipeline with a 14-day free trial of Velora Grant Management.

[Start your free trial →](#)

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