



Grant Application First Aid Kit with Linda Gilbertson Used with permission from Police One

FAQs every grant manager needs to consider

If you are the fortunate person selected to find and apply for grants for your law enforcement agency, it's important that you have a good grasp on the basics, since you will be the go-to expert on all things grant-related.

So, for your consideration, here are a few Frequently Asked Questions — and the answers.

Should we apply for every grant available that has to do with law enforcement? Wouldn't that increase our chances of getting something?

Grants can be good opportunities to bring needed funds into the agency, but be very aware that they come with strict requirements, obligations and specifications that may limit your ability to meet any other existing priorities and needs.

In other words, implementation of a grant project may deplete your existing resources beyond the benefit obtained with the grant funds. Projects may require use of manpower or technology support that you may not be able to provide without a strain on your agency's current workload. This is one main reason why it's imperative that the entire agency be involved in the decision to apply for a grant. These obligations may not be spelled out specifically in the solicitation since it is actually based on how you plan to implement your grant-funded project, but you will be able to determine what these issues are going to be and if you can meet them before you even apply.

Other obligations are directly financial. Some grants require a cash match, which may not be available in your current — or future -- budget. Even for those that allow in-kind match (no cash, but a commitment directly to the project of time and/or other resources), you may not be able to meet that requirement. For example, you may count overtime or use of officer time to work on the project, but, if your OT budget and how that time is spent is already set, where will the additional time come from?

Aren't grants really just "free money?"

Although grants can be an excellent source of funding for projects that are not included in your agency's budget, there is never anything "free" about them. This doesn't have to be bad news if you plan for it.

You will be obligated to perform the functions and purchase the items you specified in your grant application. All of that is based on the project narrative you submitted, so you must make sure these can be done before signing the contract for the grant project. Unfortunately, things change between the time a decision is made to apply for a grant and the start date for an awarded project, which can often be a year or more. Don't just assume it's still a good idea or that your agency is capable of completing the project. Bring everyone involved back together and go over the details.

Also, there are administrative duties throughout the life of the grant for performance management as well as the fiscal management side of it. These duties aren't optional and often require untold hours of time to accomplish. This can be a financial burden, especially if there isn't already a grant management function set up in your agency to take care of these items.

When is the money coming in?

The short answer is, it's probably not. Many grants you will likely apply for are handled on a reimbursement basis (just about all federal grants, for example). That is, you pay for everything up front as it's received (through normal procurement procedures or payroll) then request reimbursement from the funder on a scheduled basis.

That's one reason why it's so important to coordinate with your budget department throughout the entire grant process, particularly on expenditures. Do this part before you even consider applying.

It is possible to receive a waiver that will allow you to actually receive the funds prior to making expenditures, however. You need to have a compelling reason (such as financial hardship caused by natural disaster), but it could be an option with federal funders.

The good news is that foundations and companies that give grants are more likely to send you the funding in advance. But check to make sure before making the commitment.

What happens if we don't follow the rules?

I worked with a gentleman who was fond of telling people they could go to jail if they messed up a grant. Strong words to say to a Sheriff!

Believe it or not, however, it's true. Realistically you would have to have larceny in your heart in order for that to happen, and most people who mess up grants don't do it on purpose. But there are repercussions for violating grant rules.

Federal grantees found to be in violation of grant requirements can have the grant rescinded, which means you would have to pay back anything that had received from the funder. Also, improper grant management can negatively impact your ability to apply for and receive future grant funding.

The bottom line is, you need to follow the rules. When problems crop up (and they will!), go to the funder immediately and see what can be done to remedy the situation. The funder doesn't want you to fail, and they really don't want the money back, so maintain constant contact with the funder throughout the grant period to address these problems as they arise.