

Navigating the Federal Grant Lifecycle

A Guide for Maryland Municipalities

Introduction

While the federal funding landscape has shifted under the current administration to meet emerging goals, the core grants processes and governing regulations remain largely unchanged. Many grant funding opportunities are undergoing agency reviews to comply with current executive orders, shortening or delaying grant application windows. Regardless, the federal grant lifecycle is complex and can be challenging to navigate, especially for first-time federal grant applicants. To assist municipalities in approaching federal programs, this document summarizes the three stages of the federal grant lifecycle while clarifying the roles of funding agencies and applicants throughoutⁱ.

What is a Federal Grant?

A [grant](#) is one of many forms of financial assistance provided by federal government agencies to support an array of programmatic or financial objectives. Award amount and project types can vary greatly. Funding is often available as competitive (discretionary) or non-competitive (formula) grants and are subject to the federal grant lifecycle:

Formula Grants: Formula grants distribute funds to every recipient in a group (such as all 50 states) to accomplish the same purpose. They are not competitive because the funding amount for each recipient is calculated based on pre-determined parameters.

Discretionary Grants: Discretionary grants are grants that are awarded to eligible applicants through a **competitive** selection process. A competitive grant process means that funding is awarded based on the merits of each proposal, rather than automatically given to all eligible applicants. The fact that a grant is "competitive" simply means applicants must submit proposals that are reviewed and evaluated according to set criteria, and not every proposal is guaranteed to be funded. Eligible applicants vary by program but may include state, tribal, and **local governments**, transit providers, universities, research institutions, law enforcement agencies, nonprofit organizations, and othersⁱⁱ.

Types of Grants: Examples

SLFRF: Formula Grant

SLFRF allocations are an example of a formula grant. The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) provides direct assistance to local jurisdictions through SLFRF allocations. Non-Entitlement Units of Government (NEUs), typically municipalities with fewer than 50,000 residents, received their AARPA funding directly from the U.S. Treasury through the assistance of State governments.

SS4A: Competitive Grant

The U.S. Department of Transportation has provided over \$5 billion through SS4A to fund community-led projects aimed at improving roadway safety. This competitive grant typically offers funding support for implementation or planning and demonstration activities and is re-opened annually.

The Grant Lifecycle

Pre-Award (1-4 months)ⁱⁱⁱ

The pre-award phase marks the start for potential recipients of federal funding. This phase involves several key stages.

The following information summarizes each stage of the pre-award process while clarifying elements for potential funding recipients:

Elements of Pre-Award Phase	Description
Registration	<p>Potential applicants should register with Grants.gov and SAM.gov as early as possible if they do not already have accounts on both websites. Activating accounts can take several weeks on each site. A fully established Grants.gov account is necessary for managing both applications and documents throughout the submission process, and a SAM.gov account is a requirement to receive any federal grant (including SLFRF).</p> <p>MTAP has resources available to help municipalities establish these accounts on the program's website on the Compliance Resources page.</p>
Planning	<p>The federal funding agency plans and develops a funding program. Once complete, the funding agency will publish details of the funding opportunity on Grants.gov.</p> <p>To prepare for funding opportunity search and eventual application pursuit, local governments should focus on developing a list priorities and unmet needs. This includes a thorough review of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">» Capital Planning Documents» Strategic Plans» Planning and Zoning Documents» Specialized Planning Documents and Reports (e.g. Housing, Economic Development) <p>Local governments can also identify potential project partners at this point in the process. Engaging with other municipalities, community-based organizations, nonprofits, or private sector</p>

	<p>entities can help build capacity and leverage additional resources to strengthen grant applications.</p>
<p>Opportunity Search</p>	<p>When identifying potential funding opportunities, applicants should carefully review Funding Opportunity Announcements (FOAs) or Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFOs) to assess their eligibility, capability, and interest.</p> <p>Applicants can identify potential funding sources by searching Grants.gov or searching for available grant funding on specific agency websites. Some examples of resources include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » The Local Infrastructure Hub – provides bootcamps, events and grant search services to prepare municipalities for open and upcoming funding opportunities. » The DOT Navigator – provides grant search and webinar resources for upcoming DOT funding opportunities. » The NGA Infrastructure Implementation Resources – provides federal resources and a calendar of all milestones and upcoming funding opportunities. <p>The MTAP team provides a Fund Mapping Service to match IRA and IJA funding streams with municipalities' interests. This service includes Opportunity Searching, Project Scoping, a Potential Partners Database, and Agency-Specific Proposal Checklists. Municipalities can complete the Project Intake Form to begin the Fund Mapping process.</p>
<p>Opportunity Assessment</p>	<p>After an opportunity is identified, potential applicants should assess the opportunity and determine if they will be competitive for it. The MTAP team offers Project Scoping as part of the Fund Mapping Service to assist municipalities in a thorough review of their intended project and the required opportunity assessment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » One critical component to grant coordination involves confirming internal capacities to apply for and administer grant funding. » Read FOA or NOFO to confirm applicant's and project's eligibility for the funding. » Applicants should review their capacity for fund matching requirements. Fund matching, also called cost share, refers to the portion of a project's costs that must

	<p>be covered by non-federal sources and not by the federal award itself. For many federal grants, the recipient agency or named applicant partner is required to contribute a specific percentage of the total project budget from approved non-federal funding sources.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Applicants should review past award history in opportunities of interest to better understand how competitive they are. <p>As mentioned above, the MTAP team's Fund Mapping Service can be a helpful tool towards opportunity assessment.</p>
<p>Grant Writing, Application Development, and Application Submission</p>	<p>Completing a grant application is a process that can span weeks or months. While dependent on the scope or size of the project, minimum application requirements often include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Organizational information » Project description » Project budget » Project timeline » Documentation reflecting status as an eligible recipient <p>Be sure to check agency websites for the most up to date information regarding technical assistance opportunities and points of contact. To support applicants during the application process, many funding agencies offer technical assistance resources, including but not limited to those below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » The DOT Navigator provides general information to develop grant applications and assistance on reviewing or completing frequently required documentation. » EPA's Green Infrastructure Funding and Technical Assistance Opportunities offer resources on how to obtain funding through various federal mechanisms. » EPA's Water Infrastructure and Resiliency Finance Center (Finance Center) provides financing information to help local decision makers make informed decisions for drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure to protect human health and the environment. <p>Once an applicant has completed their application, it is recommended that they complete a thorough review to ensure they have all required documentation, have answered all</p>

	<p>questions completely, and have detailed their project with the most accuracy. The funding program's FOA or NOFO will generally have a grading rubric to help applicants complete their review. After this review, the application is ready for submission through Grants.gov or the associated submission portal.</p> <p>It is important to note that as of 2025, many programs coming online have shortened application windows, causing the pre-award phase to shorten to one month in some cases. It's vital for applicants to monitor posted funding opportunities regularly to ensure proposals are submitted on time.</p>
Application Review	<p>As the funding agency reviews applications, various program stakeholders will participate. The review process takes time and will vary based on grant type.</p> <p>The generally applicable steps are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Initial screening to ensure application is complete » Programmatic review and assessment of the substance of the applications » Financial review of the proposed budgets » Award decision and announcement <p>Applicants can track the status of their application by communicating with the funding agency.</p>

Award (1-5 months)^{iv}

The award phase begins once the funding agency completes the application review process. The final award decisions rest solely in the hands of the funding agency and often go through multiple reviews before a determination is made. The table below summarizes each stage of the award phase.

Elements of Award Phase	Description
Award Notification	Once the final award decisions are made, the awarding agency sends a Notice of Award (NOA) to the entities selected for funding. Expected award notification dates are sometimes outlined in the FOA or NOFO, allowing applicants to plan accordingly for when they may receive funding.

Accepting Grant Funding	Once an organization accepts the grant (i.e., by signing the grant agreement or by drawing down funds) the organization is legally obligated to carry out the full terms and conditions of the grant.
Project Start	After an applicant receives a Notice of Award, they will commence their project. Award recipients are generally responsible for complying with all administrative, financial, and programmatic requirements associated with the federal award, as described further below.

Post-Award (1-5 years)^v

Once funding is disbursed in the award phase and through eventual closeout of a federal grant, oversight is provided by a grants management officer at the funding agency that monitors an awardee's [reporting](#) compliance. This process spans the life of the grant award and involves reviewing reports submitted by the awardees. Representatives from the funding agency, in many cases, should perform on-site visits with the project director and implementation staff, which may also occur in the form of [auditing](#).

The post-award phase comprises a significant amount of work over the duration of the grant, including project implementation, submitting reporting, and completing the closeout requirements. Funding agencies are typically available throughout this phase to ensure that awardees remain compliant with the grant terms and conditions. Additionally, funding agencies will also monitor recipients and often require recipients to complete reporting requirements. The table below summarizes the recipient's role throughout the award phase:

Elements of Post-Award Phase	Description
Best Practice: Grant Implementation Planning Organizations are encouraged to develop a Grants Management Implementation Plan to navigate the Post-Award process effectively. This strategic framework would provide a comprehensive guide for managing recipient monitoring, retaining documentation, conducting single audits, fulfilling reporting obligations, and executing closeout procedures. It is crucial for local governments to incorporate compliance requirements as outlined in the grant agreement, and to set metrics and key milestones to monitor progress. Doing so lays the groundwork for successful grant management and ensures that all project objectives are met in accordance with the stipulated requirements.	
Recipient Monitoring	After an award has been disbursed, a grants management officer will often monitor an awardee's compliance with the

<i>Grantor Support and Oversight</i>	terms and conditions of an award. Monitoring is usually carried out through on-site visits or auditing .
Single Audit	<p>Organizations spending over \$750,000 in federal funds annually must conduct a single audit for that year and submit the audit to the Federal Audit Clearinghouse within nine months after the end of the audit period, addressing any identified issues. The funding agency ensures compliance and responds to audit findings within six months of receiving the report. The non-federal entity also performs all follow-up and corrective action to the audit findings.</p> <p>Certain SLFRF recipients are provided with an option to have an Alternative Compliance Examination Engagement (ACEE) in lieu of a Single Audit or a Program-Specific Audit under 2 CFR Part 200, Subpart F.</p> <p>SLFRF recipients that expend \$750,000 or more during the recipient's fiscal year in Federal awards, and which meet both criteria listed below have the option to undergo the ACEE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » The recipient's total SLFRF award received directly from Treasury or received (through states) as a non-entitlement unit of local government is at or below \$10 million; and » Other Federal award funds the recipient expended (not including their SLFRF award funds) are less than \$750,000 during the recipient's fiscal year.
Reporting	<p>As described above, recipients must fulfill all financial and programmatic reporting requirements. These reports provide information about the overall financial status and program performance of the grant project.</p> <p>Financial Reporting: Includes detailed records of any expenses paid for with federal funds.</p> <p>Programmatic Reporting: Includes project data highlighting progress and/or community impact.</p> <p>While timelines vary, recipients may be required to submit reports on a quarterly, bi-annual, or yearly basis.</p>
Compliance	To remain eligible for continued funding, the recipient is required to comply with the terms and conditions outlined in

	<p>the grant agreement as well as requirements outlined in 2 CFR 200 (Uniform Guidance).</p> <p>Your compliance requirements will often include, but not be limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Allowable and unallowable costs (2 CFR 200, Subpart E) » Program management (program-specific requirements) » Procurement requirements (2 CFR 200.316 – 327) » Subrecipient oversight and monitoring (2 CFR 200, 200.331-200.333) » Internal control (2 CFR 200.303) » Financial management (2 CFR 200.302) » Asset management (2 CFR 200, Subpart D, Property Standards)
Closeout	<p>To close out an award, recipients are required to submit all final financial and programmatic reports to the funding agency.</p> <p>Once submitted, the funding agency will examine these reports to ensure compliance with all federal and programmatic requirements.</p> <p>The funding agency will follow up with the recipient to confirm satisfactory completion of the required grant work and applicable administrative tasks.</p> <p>MTAP has created resources to help municipalities prepare for closeout of federal funding on the program's website on the Compliance Resources page.</p>

This document is designed to provide policy-related guidance, not individual application assistance. By referencing this document, the Municipality explicitly disclaims any responsibility of the State of Maryland or Hagerty Consulting with respect to the actions or decisions taken by the Municipality based on the information, recommendations, or analyses provided. Recipients of federal funds are responsible for administration and compliance of funding awarded. For assistance navigating federal and programmatic requirements related to your SLFRF or IJJA award or general questions on the grant lifecycle, you can submit a question through [MTAP's Question Portal](#).

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- ⁱ The Grant Lifecycle Overview, CDC, available [here](#).
 - ⁱⁱ Federal Funding and Financing: Grants, available [here](#).
 - ⁱⁱⁱ The Pre-Award Phase, Grants.gov, available [here](#).
 - ^{iv} The Award Phase, Grants.gov, available [here](#).
 - ^v The Post-Award Phase, Grants.gov, available [here](#).