Navigating a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)

What is a Notice of Funding Opportunity?

A Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) is a formally issued public announcement of the availability of federal funding and the procedures a federal agency will follow when making awarding decisions for the federal opportunity. The document contains the requirements, terms and conditions, and submission process for that specific federal award.

Where to start?

The NOFO should be your guide when building an application for federal funding. Following the detailed instructions and regulations is critical to ensure you meet all the requirements. Start with answering the initial questions below to determine if the opportunity is an appropriate fit for your project.

Step 1: Initial Questions

Technical Considerations	Strategic Considerations
- Are you eligible to apply? - When is the submission deadline? Do you have enough time? - Is there an earlier deadline for a Letter of Intent (LOI) or pre-application? - What funding is available? - Maximum/minimum amount per award - Expected number of awards - Award date - Lenth of award - Cost-sharing or matching requirements	Is funding size meaningful relative to the effort required to apply and implement?

Step 2: Review the Specifics of the Funding Opportunity

Technical Considerations	Strategic Considerations
Do the purpose, objective, and goals of this funding opportunity align with the work you're trying to fund? (*Program Description section*)	- Does the opportunity align with your organization's mission and priorities? - Are you likely to be competitive? - Are required activities consistent with what you already do well?

• Can your organization follow the specific funding policies and limitations in the NOFO? (*Policies and limitations section*)	• What partnerships or political leadership should be needed to be competitive?

Step 3: Understand the Application Specifications – Narrative

Technical Considerations	Strategic Considerations
• What are the page limits? • What sections are included in the page limits? What sections should be attached separately? • What are the font, spacing and margin requirements? • How should references be noted? • What required sections must be addressed in your narrative? *(Proposal Guidelines section)* • Are there required or suggested subheadings? If not, align your structure in the same order as it is formatted in the NOFO	• Do you have compelling data and evidence to demonstrate need and justify your approach? • Can you articulate a strong theory of change and expected outcomes that align with the NOFO's goals? • Can you outline a clear, story that distinguishes you from other applicants?

Step 4: Understand the Application Specifications – Budget and Budget Narrative

Technical Considerations	Strategic Considerations
• Is there a budget maximum? Can it be spread over multiple years? • Is there a cost-sharing or match requirement? • Does the funding opportunity require that certain costs are included in the budget? (travel to conferences, staff, etc.) • Are there costs that are not allowed under this NOFO? • Do you need to provide any specific details related to salary or sub-granting costs? • Are there restrictions on indirect rates or administrative costs? • Is the budget submitted in a standard SF 424-A? • What documents must be provided for a Budget Narrative or Justification? In what format?	• Are there financial risks (i.e. cash flow, reimbursement delays, audit exposure) that leadership needs to consider?

Step 5: Additional Attachments

Technical Considerations	Strategic Considerations
• What other documents must be attached beyond the main narrative? This can often include things like a: management plan, implementation timeline, letters of support, compliance agreements, organizational charts, position descriptions, work plans, and lobbying disclosure forms.	• Are any attachments an opportunity to showcase innovation, readiness, or demonstrated success?

Step 6: Understand how your application will be reviewed and scored

Technical Considerations	Strategic Considerations
• What is the scoring criteria or rubric? • Which sections are worth the most points? • Have you addressed each review criteria in your project narrative?	• Are there reviewer biases or priorities you can anticipate?

Additional Tips

☐ Read the NOFO twice – missing any required components might mean your application is not reviewed.

☐ Attend any scheduled informational webinars offered by the Federal Agency, or review the recording/slides before submitting

☐ Utilize the application checklist if one is provided, or create your own

☐ Read and understand the award obligations should you be awarded (*post award requirements and administration section*) to be clear about the terms and conditions for reporting and compliance.

Helpful Resources

☐ Find Posted and Forecasted NOFOs and get registered at Grants.gov

☐ Get registered at SAM.gov (required for all applicants)

☐ Find general cost principles for allowability when budgeting in the Code of Federal Regulations: 2 CFR 200.400

☐ Find standard form templates (SF424, abstract) in the grants.gov form library