# Common Grant Application
# User Guide

Welcome to the Washington Regional Association of Grantmakers' Common Grant Application (CGA). This user guide was revised in 2012 to reflect the changes in the CGA that were implemented at that time.

**About this user guide:**
This guide will help those seeking grant funds to make the best use of the CGA by explaining the purposes of key elements of the application and suggesting some possible avenues for responding to particular sections. It is important to note that the examples provided in this guide are fictional and are intended to give you an idea of how to begin to approach the questions in the application. Your responses will likely require more detail than is provided in the examples.

While we have attempted to discuss any points that may be unclear, **<u>it is very important that you contact the funder you are approaching if you have any questions about what that particular funder requires.</u>**

**Formatting notes**:

- Observe any formatting requirements the funder provides you. In general, your application should be easy to read: 12-point type size (Times New Roman or similar), one-inch margins all around, and page numbers on every page.

- Observe any binding requirements the funder provides you. Many funders have to make multiple copies of applications as part of their review process. Complicated bindings, including report covers or binders, interfere with this process and increase the funder's burden. Please observe the binding requirements.

## SECTION ONE: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**<u>This section should be no more than one (1) page single-spaced.</u>** The first part of the Executive Summary asks for basic information about the organization making the funding request. This information is used by funders for data-entry and grant tracking purposes; it may also help funders to determine quickly whether or not the application fits their guidelines. It also asks for the signature of your executive director or other authorizing official, such as the chair of your board of directors or highest ranking staff person.

Question 12 in the executive summary asks about the purpose of this funding request, including information about the population you serve and geographic area(s) that will benefit from this proposal. In this section, the grant seeker should succinctly state the need or issue addressed by the request. It should be focused, and not attempt to provide an in-depth introduction to the topic as a whole. What are you going to do?  Who are you seeking to serve?  Where are they?

**Example:** "ABC is requesting $40,000 in project support to provide and evaluate peer-based HIV prevention activities within D.C.'s sex working community. ABC serves approximately 500 sex workers in Wards 5, 6, 7, and 8 in Washington, D.C. Funding will partially support the cost of operating and maintaining an outreach van, staff time, and supplying condoms to outreach workers."

## SECTION TWO: NARRATIVE

The Narrative section of the application has been revised. The previous version of the CGA had four different sections for general support, project support, capacity building, and capital campaigns. This version has revised the sections pertaining to general support and project (sometimes referred to elsewhere as "program") support. The capacity building and capital campaign sections have remained the same and are included as appendices at the end of the application. Once again, it is very important to contact the funders to which you are applying to ensure that they make the type of grant you are seeking.

### Organizational Information

The first part of the narrative asks for information pertaining to your organization as a whole. All requests must include responses to these questions. For general support requests, this section comprises the entirety of your narrative. **If you are applying for general support, this section should be no more than five (5) pages double-spaced. If you are applying for project, capital campaign, or capacity building support, this section should be no more than four (4) pages double-spaced.**

**Question 1: Briefly describe the organization's history, mission, and goals.**
Here funders are looking for an outline, rather than an exhaustive account. They are interested in understanding the organization's successes, challenges and, if applicable, evolution over time. A brief statement of the organization's mission and goals is a fundamental part of organizational self-definition; it is important and should be thought through carefully.

**Example:** "Founded in1998 by a group of physicians and other health care providers who recognized the need for more teen pregnancy prevention education for young people, Let's Talk (LT) is the only community-based organization in Prince George's County focused solely on the needs of middle and high school students as they relate to sex education. LT outreach and services are provided to youth aged 11 to 19 years of age in 15 public schools throughout the county with the goal of ending teen pregnancy in the county."

**Question 2: Briefly describe the role of your organization's board of directors, including how your board carries out its responsibilities for financial and programmatic oversight and fundraising.**
Provide a brief description of your board's engagement in your organization's work, the committees of the board, and the board's fundraising, as applicable. Funders often want to see that organizations have a sound governance structure that enables them to effectively carry out their work. Many funders also like to see that the board is engaged in fundraising, or that board members make personal financial contributions to the organization. Funders also like to

understand the role of the board as it relates to your leadership and staff. Are there any formal modes of communication and financial oversight in place? If so, describe those briefly.

This question is not asking for a list of board members; that information will be included with your proposal as an attachment.

**Example:** "The board of directors of the Montgomery County Arts House meets quarterly to review the organization's activities and provide strategic guidance to the executive director. The finance and resource development committee meets monthly to review organizational finances and ensure progress in meeting the annual budget. Members of the board make an annual commitment to contribute or raise a minimum of $1,000 each."

**Question 3: Briefly describe current activities, recent accomplishments, and future plans.**
"Recent" usually refers to the past 12 months. "Accomplishments" may include statistics on the organization's successes in pursuing its mission. Additional appropriate information might include any awards won by the organization or staff members, significant national grants received, or new programs or products produced. You should also include a brief synopsis of the work that your organization plans to undertake in the near future (i.e., during the period for which you are requesting funding).

**Example of accomplishments:** "VAC's recent organizational accomplishments include:
1. "Awarded a $102,000 planning grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to design and plan a mobile HIV testing and counseling program for minority youth populations at high risk for HIV infection.
2. "Hosted a National AIDS Fund AmeriCorps member for the 4th consecutive year. AmeriCorps members assist in the implementation of this peer-based HIV prevention education program.
3. "Provided HIV/AIDS prevention education to 250 youth, ages 13-24, in three DCPS middle schools, three DCPS high schools, and five faith-based institutions last year.
4. "Provided HIV testing and counseling to an additional 250 youth at area festivals and events."

**Question 4: Briefly describe how the population you serve is involved in the work of your organization.**
Funders are concerned that organizations are engaging the populations they serve in their work. They often prefer to support organizations with strong ties to that population and community that can increase the relevance and efficacy of the organization's programs and activities.

**Example:** "The youth served by the NoVA Teen Center are key partners in conducting the outreach and education activities that are the organization's hallmarks. A cadre of youth peer educators are trained each year and, together with professional staff and adult volunteers, make thousands of outreach and education contacts. Last year we revitalized our peer education and internship programs with young people playing key roles in the design and implementation. This year we are implementing a Youth Advisory Board that will provide direction and oversight for our programs. The youth help design the layout of the center and assist with creating its programming. Our staff members, interns and volunteers are young people, many of whom reside in the communities we serve."

**Question 5: Briefly describe your most significant collaborations and partnerships with other entities in your field or geographic area.**
Funders want to see that organizations are leveraging partnerships with others in the community in order to maximize their effectiveness. Partnerships and collaborations can serve a variety of purposes, including sharing resources, coordinating advocacy efforts, or improving operations.

**Example:** "Reading is Radical works with the District of Columbia Public Schools' central office to identify elementary schools with the lowest reading achievement scores and works closely with principals and teaching staff to coordinate the program during students' lunch hour. RR also partners with a number of after school programs and youth centers to integrate the reading program into their curricula. In addition, RR partners with several nonprofit organizations in D.C. that work with older adults to recruit volunteers."

**Question 6: What results are you committed to achieving during the grant period? What is the timeline for accomplishing these results? What evidence will prove your success?**

**Note:** Only general support, capital campaign, and capacity building requests need to answer this question under Organizational Information. Proposals for project support will answer the same question in the Project Support section, providing information specific to the project for which they are requesting funding.

**Example:** "During the grant period, the Community Health Clinic will ensure that, among the 1,000 individuals enrolled in the Clinic's preventative care program, 85 percent of infants will receive recommended vaccinations prior to age 2; 80 percent of women aged 18 – 60 will receive annual Pap smears; and 100 percent of clients identified as being at risk for diabetes will enroll in a healthy eating program and complete two visits with the Clinic's nutritionist. The Clinic tracks overall health outcomes for all of its clients through a tracking database that is regularly maintained by trained clinical staff, as well as by medical case managers who see clients on a quarterly basis. This data will be used to evaluate the Clinic's results."

**Project Information**
The next section is for project information**.** Only proposals requesting project support need to complete this section. **<u>This section should be no more than four (4) pages double-spaced.</u>**

**Question 1: What problem or need does your project address?**
Your response should present specific information about the need that your project aims to address. Provide specific, data-driven information that shows a clear understanding of what the need in your community is.

**Example: "**The D.C. Women's Economic Security Project works to improve the economic security of women in Washington, D.C, with a specific focus on African American women. Twenty-six percent of African American women in D.C. live below the poverty line, and across the region, 39 percent of African American women have a high school degree or less, which substantially affects their earning potential. In addition, there is a high rate of unemployment among women, particularly in areas east of the river. With the city's high cost of living and of child care, there is a significant need for an effective workforce development program that gives women the skills they need to support their families and lift themselves out of poverty."

**Question 2: What is your proposed solution to this problem or need?**
Your response should explain how your project addresses the problem you described above.

**Example: "**The Women's Economic Security Project takes a two-pronged approach to addressing economic security. The Project runs a six month job training program that prepares 75 women per year for jobs in culinary arts, customer service, and administrative office support. In addition, the Project provides trainings in financial and computer literacy, and connects clients to GED programs. The Project also partners with other organizations in the Women's Economic Security Coalition to advocate before the District of Columbia government for adequate funding for workforce development, economic security, and affordable housing programs."

**Question 3: What is the plan for implementation of this project?**
The implementation plan is a description of how the project will address the need – the specific tasks (daily, weekly, monthly, as appropriate) that will take place. You should provide the plan in the simplest format you can, unless the funder specifies or requests otherwise (e.g., narrative, table, or logic model).

**Question 4. Is this a new project? If yes, how was the approach developed? If not, what have you accomplished so far?**
If this is a new project, funders are interested in understanding how you decided to take the particular approach you did. What factors went into the decision? Was there demand from the community or the population you work with? Was there a change in circumstances (i.e., disaster, rise of an epidemic)? Why did this particular response emerge as the best?

For existing projects, this question is similar to the one you answered about your organization under Organizational Information. This time, it refers to your project. It is always best to refer to concrete, measurable outcomes when telling funders about your project's accomplishments. These should be meaningful and relevant, and ideally should point to results, changes, or improvements that are the focus of the organization's mission.

**Example:** "In the past fiscal year, VAC's peer education HIV Prevention Education Programs trained 153 peer educators, 72% of whom were youth of color. Peer educators worked with VAC personnel to reach nearly 15,000 youth with traditional education programs and community outreach, 66 percent of whom were youth of color.

"Preliminary results from a recent evaluation of program outcomes for the fiscal year indicate improvements in peer educator HIV risk behaviors:

1. "28% improvement in frequency of latex condom use during sexual intercourse.
2. "62% reduction in the number of reported sexual partners in the past three (3) months.
3. "42% decrease in those reporting that they used alcohol or drugs the last time they had sexual intercourse.
4. "24% increase in those who had been tested for STDs, including HIV."

**Question 5: Are there additional partners that you are working with for this project (that were not listed in the previous section?) If so, who are they and what are their roles?**
As you did under Organizational Information, please explain if there are other organizations that you are working with on this project.

## SECTION THREE: FINANCIALS

All requests must complete this section. You may submit this information in the format most convenient to you; it must, however, include as much detail as possible. Footnotes may be used to explain budget items.

**Financial statements:** The reports requested in this section should be provided in the order requested – that is, all reports for the previous year, followed by reports for the current year, then the projected figures for the next year (if applicable).

**Revenue and expense categories:** The application asks you to list specific amounts requested from foundations, corporations, government, and individuals for this proposal, as well as the status of those requests. Funders are interested in knowing to what other sources you have applied for funding, for what, and at what amount? Not all categories may be applicable to your organization or request. If a category has no amount attached, it can be omitted. If there are revenue or expense categories not included in the list provided, include them as appropriate.

**Note: It is critical to include both committed AND pending revenue.** Funders want to know that you are seeking funds from other sources as well.

For project support requests please show two columns of expense categories – one listing the total expense and one listing the specific costs requested in this grant proposal. Funders are interested in seeing what percentage of a project or organizational budget they are being asked to support.

## SECTION FOUR: ATTACHMENTS

While the attachments listed in the Common Grant Application are required, there are certain items that should NOT be sent without prior discussion with the funder. These include, but are not limited to, newspaper clippings, video tapes, or any bulky or irregularly shaped items. Most funders do not have the capacity to store such items. These items can be requested separately or are often found on your website, if applicable.

A few notes about some of the attachments:

**A one-page organizational chart:** This does not have to be fancy or complicated. Many word processor and presentation programs have simple templates. Generating an organizational chart is important in understanding the flow of responsibilities in an organization.

**Short biographies (no more than 1/2 page) of staff and volunteers essential to the success of this request:** Here funders are interested in finding out something relevant about those people most important to the success of the request. It is not necessary to include all biographical or career data. Given the particulars of a project it is possible, for example, that “essential” personnel may not include the executive director.

**Current, dated Memoranda of Understanding or Memoranda of Agreement with other organizations for collaborative or cooperative activities, as appropriate:** If you have no significant partnerships, this is not an applicable attachment. Attached Memoranda should clearly delineate the responsibilities of all signatories. Funders are interested in ensuring that any Memoranda are current, and that they show the date.