

Funding Challenges for Community-Based Initiatives



Community groups often face challenges to securing funding, especially those with limited resources. Funders should consider these factors that influence the ability to apply and produce effective outcomes. Below are some common challenges faced by community groups.



Lack of Ability or Incentive to Apply

- Limited staff capacity, expertise and time needed to apply
- Funding priority misaligned with community priority
- Funding amounts are either too small to justify the effort or too large for small organizations to manage
- Allowable expenses don't match actual needs (e.g., food, honoraria)
- Short application and project implementation timelines



Arduous Application Requirements

- Restrictions on eligibility (i.e., who can apply or be a Principal Investigator/Lead)
- Match requirements are too high or restrictive
- Overwhelming (long, complicated) applications, including complex budget forms
- Unclear or unfamiliar language used in funding instructions



Rigorous or Unfair Post-Award Requirements

- Funding periods are too short to accomplish community goals
- Communities lack ownership, control, and use of their data
- Onerous reporting requirements
- Complicated, time-consuming processes for receiving payment
- Lack of staff capacity, expertise and time to manage funds

This guide was informed by the Sea Grant Grant Making Workgroup and the Ocean Litter Strategy Los Angeles Needs Assessment Community Advisory Group.



Best Practices Guide for Funding Community-Based Initiatives



This guide offers suggestions for funders looking to reduce common challenges faced by communities applying for funding.

1. Broaden Participation to Strengthen Outcomes



Broaden Audience Reach

Expand the reach of announcements to a wider range of audiences. Provide applications in multiple languages when possible.



Align Priorities with Community Needs

Ensure funding priorities and parameters (e.g., eligibility, spending restrictions) align with community goals and needs to strengthen impact.



Expand Timelines & Maintain Continuity

Consider multi-year funding, rolling deadlines, and expanding timelines when possible to alleviate time constraints and allow for long-term impact and financial stability.

2. Ease the Application Process



Provide Clear & Straightforward Announcements

Streamline applications to be easy to follow. Use plain language, headings, and bullet points to improve clarity and accessibility.



Offer Application Guidance & Support

Offer resources to ease the application process, particularly for new applicants (e.g., workshops, office hours, grant-writing support, budget templates, step-by-step instructions).



Mitigate Match Requirements

High or restrictive match requirements can deter community groups. Reduce or eliminate them where possible, and clearly define what qualifies as match to make the process clearer for applicants.

3. Support Collaborative Relationships Throughout the Award



Minimize Reporting

Streamline reporting requirements and frequency to reduce administrative burden. Request only the information you will actively use.



Clarify Data Management & Sharing

Address data ownership and usage early. Establish clear agreements on how project data will be shared and safeguarded for use by the community.



Ensure Transparency & Accountability

Ensure transparency throughout the funding process to foster trust, accountability, and respect.

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