



Grantseeker FAQ

General Questions

How flexible is the community foundation's grant deadline?

The application must be postmarked on or before the deadline. Late applications will not be reviewed.

Can I e-mail my proposal?

Most of our grant programs do not accept applications by e-mail. Please check the guidelines for the individual program to see whether or not you may e-mail your proposal.

Can we include additional documents with our application, such as brochures, photographs, and letters from supporters?

It depends on the grant program to which you are applying. Some grant programs request additional support documents. For those programs, it is appropriate to send whatever additional information is requested. For example, the Maine Expansion Arts Fund, and the Maine Theater Fund both use the common grant application but accept additional information. Most other grant programs do not accept additional material. For more information, please consult the guidelines for the grant program to which you are applying.

We have an application that is bound and ready to go. Can I send that?

No. All documents should be sent unbound, on paper that can be readily scanned and filed.

Our completed application is longer than the page limits described on the application. Does it matter?

Yes, it does. We understand that you may want to provide more information than the page limits allow, but in the interest of fairness to all grant applicants and our reviewers, we ask that you adhere carefully to the page limits.

I've never filled out a grant application before. Can you give me some advice?

Yes. Please take a look at our Tips for Creating a Strong Grant Application (www.mainecef.org/strongapptips.aspx) to get some general information. Also, if you "like" our Facebook page (www.facebook.com/mainecef) or subscribe to our nonprofit organization e-mail list by filling out the News for Nonprofits subscription form on our website, you'll receive news about upcoming grant writing workshops and other resources you may find helpful.

What is “capacity building”?

Capacity building is quite simply any activity designed to improve, or build, an organization’s ability to do its work. Capacity-building activities, which are intended to help a nonprofit be more sustainable in the long term, may involve the staff as well as the board, and usually focus on improving internal organization and structure. Here are a few examples of capacity-building activities: professional development training; specialized technical assistance for financial record keeping; fundraising, technology or management training. Capacity building grants generally do not support conference fees and travel.

How will reviewers evaluate proposals for capacity-building support?

When reviewing a capacity-building grant proposal, grant review committees will consider the following:

- Logic and clarity of the proposed strategy for building organizational capacity
- The extent to which an organization is financially healthy and stable. Is the organization facing any significant threats to survival (e.g., major financial crisis, major leadership turnover or significant understaffing)?
- Is there experienced strong leadership on both the staff and board?
- Organization’s past performance and reputation for making an impact
- If the organization reaches its goals, what will be different and how will this increased capacity serve the region or make the organization more effective in addressing an issue?
- How will the organization know it is making progress toward its goals?

When we are applying to the Community Building Grant Program, can we submit a proposal for a project grant and a proposal for capacity building support on the same deadline?

No. An organization can only submit one proposal per cycle. Also, per Maine Community Foundation policy, a grantee has to wait a year to reapply to the Community Building Grant Program after receiving a grant award.

What’s the difference between project support and operating support?

Project support is funding for activities that have a clear start and end, and defined goals that are related to, but not the same as, an organization’s mission. For example, a fictional organization called The Purr Project has a mission to reduce the number of homeless cats and kittens. If The Purr Project is seeking funding to hold a spay/neuter clinic in an area town, that would be considered project support. The spay/neuter clinic is a one-time activity with a clear beginning and end, and providing low-cost spay/neuter services is related to the mission of reducing the number of homeless cats and kittens.

Operating support, on the other hand, includes support for ongoing activities that are part of the organization's mission. It also includes regular overhead expenses such as rent, insurance, utility bills, office supplies, or staff salaries. If The Purr Project is seeking funding to buy a new copy machine, pay the executive director’s salary, and buy food for the cats in its care, that would be considered operating support.

My organization is raising money for an endowment fund. Can I apply for a Community Building Grant?

Community building grants typically do not support ongoing operating expenses such as rent or utility bills, endowments, capital campaigns, camperships, acquisition of capital equipment (any item over \$250 that will be depreciated over time), or costs of repairing equipment.

Some community foundation grant programs do fund operating expenses or annual support, but it is very rare for our competitive grant program to fund an endowment. We suggest you review the Additional Grant Programs (www.maineef.org/foigrants.aspx) page to find a grant program that will suit your needs.

Who makes the grant award decisions?

The community foundation engages community members, our board members, donors, and staff in our grant review process. In most cases, a donor, community member, or staff member will contact applicants. Committees then discuss the proposals and make grant recommendations.

When will I know whether my application has been approved or declined?

Applicants are typically notified of committee decisions within 10 weeks of the deadline date.

We've received Maine Community Foundation grant funds in the past. When can we apply again?

If you've received a grant through the Community Building Grant Program (including County and Regional Funds) within the past 12 months, you must wait until one year has passed since the deadline date of your funded application before applying again. You are still eligible to apply to other MaineCF grant programs within the 12-month period.

My organization received a Community Building Grant in the May 15, 2010 cycle. Even though it's been less than a year since we got our grant, can we apply for the new 2011 deadline, Feb. 15, or do we have to wait until 2012?

You may apply for a Community Building Grant in 2011 even if you received your most recent grant in the May 2010 cycle.

Downloading and Using the Common Grant Application

Why is the common grant application available in three file formats, and which one should I use?

If you have Microsoft Word installed on your computer, download the **Word Document** version. Mac users should use the Word Document version.

If you use Open Office, WordPerfect, or other non-Microsoft word processing software, download the **RTF (Rich Text Format)** version.

If you do not have any word processing software, download the **PDF** version of your application.

I clicked on the link to download the grant application, but nothing is happening. What's going on?

Our website needs to open a pop-up window in order to allow you to download the application. If your browser has a pop-up blocker, this could be the problem.

If you don't want to play with your pop-up blocker settings, there is another way to download the application. Right-click (control-click for Mac users) on the version of the application you wish to download, and select "Save Target As" (Internet Explorer) or "Save Link As" (Firefox). Save the **mcfgrantapplication** file in the folder of your choice.

I've downloaded the RTF version of the common grant application, and it's not working. I can't fill in the form fields properly and there's a lot of extra space in some of the text boxes.

We've encountered this problem before, almost always with applicants using Macintosh computers. We suggest that Mac users download and fill out the Word Document version of the application.

Completing the Common Grant Application

Part I: Applicant Information

I'm not sure which program my proposal best fits. Can I apply to more than one grant program at a time?

Yes. The first line of the common grant application allows you to list the grant programs for which you want your proposal to be considered. Do not submit multiple copies of the same proposal for review by several different committees.

I've applied for a grant through the County & Regional Program. My project is serving more than one county. Do I need to submit a separate application for each county fund?

No. In the space provided, list the counties where your services will be delivered. Community foundation staff will forward your application to all appropriate county and regional committees.

We are not sure if our project fits into the Issue Areas listed. Where can we find out more about each of the Issue Areas?

The Issue Areas we list are part of a larger list of standard categories that many nonprofit organizations and funders use. This list of categories was provided by the National Center for Charitable Statistics. You can review a longer list, with the subcategories of each of the major issue areas and definitions at <http://nccsdataweb.urban.org/PubApps/nteeSearch.php?gQry=all&codeType=NTEE>

What is a fiscal sponsor, and do I need one?

If your organization is not a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) nonprofit, you will need to make an agreement with an organization that does have this status in order to qualify for Maine Community Foundation grant funding. Please read the Fiscal Sponsorship FAQ

(www.mainecef.org/FiscalSponsorshipFAQ.aspx) for more information about fiscal sponsors and how to secure a fiscal sponsor if you need one.

Part II: Financial Information

We have an audited financial report. Can we attach this to our application instead of completing the financial information section of the common grant application?

No. It is important that we have comparable financial information from all applicants in a similar format. This will help insure a fair and accurate review.

What are the fiscal year start and end dates on the financial information page?

The term “fiscal year” refers to the twelve-month period or financial calendar that your organization uses. Organizations start and end their fiscal year according to their own policy, so the start and end dates of the fiscal year can vary dramatically from organization to organization. Some nonprofits align their fiscal year with the calendar year, so their fiscal year starts on January 1 and ends on December 31. Other organizations may use July 1 and June 30 as start and end dates or some other dates. You should be able to find out from your accounting staff or bookkeeper the month, day, and year that your organization uses for its fiscal year.

We’re a start-up with no financial history. How do we complete the financial section of the common grant application?

Estimate the amount of in-kind support (e.g., donated office space) and volunteer hours your organization has received; include either actual or projected operating budget for the next year.

Part III: Project Budget

How do I fill out the project budget table?

Please look over the sample budget on our Tips for Creating a Strong Grant Application page (www.mainecef.org/strongapptips.aspx) for an example of how to fill out the project budget form.

What kind of items should I include in the project budget table?

You should provide a list of any part of your project that is an expense, and for which you are seeking funding. For example, you can list materials, meeting expenses, printing costs, postage, services from other organizations or individuals, or transportation. Remember that community foundation funds do not typically support capital expenses (for example, large equipment purchases or repair or purchasing costs related to real estate). See Tips for a Strong Grant Application for a sample budget.

I need to include some notes about my project budget, but they don’t fit in the project budget form.

The fields in the budget form are for items, funding sources, and dollar amounts only. If you want to include any other information about your project budget, please use the Additional Budget Information space at the bottom of the page.

What are in-kind donations?

In-kind donations are items or services that are provided for your project at no cost, and items that your organization will contribute to the project. The dollar amount you list here should be the actual or estimated cost of obtaining the same item. For example, if a consultant has agreed to provide free services for the project, you should list the fee that s/he would normally charge for the same service.

We don't have a plan for future funding of this project. Do we really need one?

Yes. We tend to think of our grants as seed or start-up funding, invested to help get a project going. While we know that it is often difficult to make long-term predictions about the funding of a project, we expect that you will have a plan to keep your project going after our grant funding has been exhausted. Examples of future funding may include an expectation that the project will generate sufficient revenue to support operating costs, changes in your organization's finances that will allow it to absorb project costs as part of its operating budget, or even other foundation or donor support that you expect to pursue.

Part IV: Organization and Project Overviews

My organization and project overview is longer than one page. Does it matter?

Yes, it does. We understand that you may want to provide more information than one page allows, but in the interest of fairness to all grant applicants and our reviewers, your answers to sections 1 and 2 must fit on one page. The information requested for section 3 should be attached on separate sheets of paper.

Can I use 9- or 10-point type to get my answers to fit on one piece of paper?

No. The smallest type size we allow is 11-point.

Part V: Project description

My project description is longer than one page. Does it matter?

Yes, it does. We understand that you may want to provide more information than one page allows, but in the interest of fairness to all grant applicants and our reviewers, your project description must fit on one page.

Can I use 9- or 10-point type to get my answers to fit on one piece of paper?

No. The smallest type size we allow is 11-point.

Collaboration and Fiscal Sponsorship

What do you mean by collaboration? We've asked another organization to partner with us on this project. Does that mean that we are collaborating?

A project is considered a collaboration when more than one organization is contributing resources that are critical for the success of the project. If your partner organization is providing a resource necessary to achieve the project's goals, then you can consider it a collaboration. Note that not all assistance or partnerships are considered collaborations. Of course it is possible for an organization to provide support that helps but isn't critical to the success of the project.

We're a collaborative of nonprofits seeking support for a joint project. How do we apply?

One member of the collaboration must take fiscal responsibility for receiving and expending the grant. This organization should complete the grant application. Letters from the collaborating organizations should explain the approach and shared responsibilities.

We're a community collaborative applying with another agency serving as our fiscal sponsor. What is required?

If you do not have an eligible tax-exempt status and are applying with a fiscal sponsor, you must submit a Fiscal Sponsorship Agreement form (available in PDF or RTF format at the MaineCF website) with your application, as well as a copy of the sponsor's federal IRS 501(c)(3) ruling letter. For more information about fiscal sponsorship, read the Fiscal Sponsorship Overview or Fiscal Sponsorship FAQ, also available at mainecf.org.