

Winning Library Grants Handout

Turning Community Needs into Funded Projects

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Strong grants start with real community needs. Focus on people, not money or stuff.

Grant Process Cycle*



Quick Wins You Can Use Right Away

The alignment test

- Who is this for?
- Why now?
- Why us?
- Why this funder?

Micro-evaluation

- Comment cards
- Photos
- Short surveys
- Observation

Outcome in one sentence

- As a result of this project,
- [audience] will
- [change / benefit].

If / Then budget logic

- If we buy X,
- we can deliver Y.
- Connect every cost to a benefit.

Top Tips for Success

1. Start with needs

Use what you already have: strategic plans, staff observations, data, and community feedback.

2. Shape the project

Define audience, activities, outcomes, timeline, budget, and evaluation.

3. Find aligned funders

Use [ALA's CA](#) Look for funders that match the project, community, and library capacity.

4. Write a focused proposal

Answer the application clearly and keep every section aligned. [ALA's CA](#)

5. Measure impact

Track what changed for people, not just what the library purchased. Do. Change. Show.

6. Implement and continue

Learn from results, strengthen relationships, and build toward future grants.

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Winning Grants: A How-To-Do-It Manual for Librarians (ALA Editions) • \$10 off: code WGWJ26 by 5/1/26

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AI is most helpful for drafting, summarizing, and analyzing. People are essential for judgment, relationships, and strategic decisions.

AI Support

Where AI can help

- Draft early versions
- Summarize long guidelines or notes
- Brainstorm activities, partners, or outcomes
- Improve clarity and readability

Where people are essential

- Identifying real community needs
- Judging funder fit and strategy
- Building trust and partnerships
- Checking accuracy, equity, costs, and local fit

Responsible AI Use

Guardrails

- Do not paste confidential or sensitive data into open tools.
- Verify facts, citations, costs, and claims with a human review.
- Document where AI was used in drafting or analysis.
- Check equity impacts and keep a simple audit trail.

Helpful tools

- ChatGPT or similar LLMs
- Grammarly / editing tools
- AI summarizers for long RFPs
- Transcription tools for interviews

AI Prompts

Assign a role, such as "Act as an experienced library grant writer" or "Act as a grant reviewer."

- Summarize these survey notes into 3-5 community needs and suggest possible library responses.
- Rewrite this draft needs statement so it is clear, specific, and people-centered.
- Review this project idea against the funder guidelines and flag weak fit, missing details, or risks.

Bottom Line

A strong grant project does not start with perfect writing. It starts with a real need, a clear plan, and a funder that fits.

Resources: your strategic plan, local plans and data, partner input, [Library Grants Blog](#), and your project planning worksheet.