Building Capacity with Federal Funding Opportunities

A guide for Centers for Independent Living (CILs)

April 2023

DVAO

DISABILITY VACCINE ACCESS OPPORTUNITIES CENTER

About Able South Carolina (Able SC)

Able SC is a federally recognized Center for Independent Living that represents half of the counties in South Carolina and is a recognized leader in statewide, national, and international programs to increase capacity for disability rights, disability justice, and independent living. Able SC is a disability-led organization seeking transformational changes in systems, communities, and individuals. Since 1994, we've remained a consumer-controlled, community-based, cross-disability nonprofit that seeks to make South Carolina a national model of equity and inclusion for all people with disabilities. To learn more, visit www.able-sc.org.

About Independent Living Research Utilization (ILRU)

Founded in 1977, has a long history of providing research, education, and consultation in the areas of independent living, home and community-based services, and the Americans with Disabilities Act. ILRU is operated by community living and disability law experts with disabilities. To learn more about ILRU, visit www.ilru.org.

About the Partnership for Inclusive Disaster Strategies (PIDS)

PIDS is the only U.S. disability-led organization with a focused mission of equity for people with disabilities and people with access and functional needs throughout all planning, programs, services and procedures before, during and after disasters and emergencies. To learn more, visit www.disasterstrategies.org.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately impacted people with disabilities. As the needs and barriers people with disabilities faced due to the pandemic became clearer, federal funding opportunities emerged to help support the disability community. Some of these funding opportunities specifically targeted Centers for Independent Living (CILs). Although funding was available, not all CILs had the resources and experience to apply for these grants. As a result, this publication was created for CILs to use when preparing and applying for any source of federal funding.

By design, CILs are led and operated by people with disabilities and provide consumer-directed services, programming, and advocacy. They can bring substantial value to any initiative, including federally funded opportunities. CILs can often lead the charge in advancing community access, inclusion, and equity for people with disabilities; however, limited funding and small budgets are often a barrier. While most CILs in the United States receive some support from federal funding authorized by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act), there are nearly 100 CILs that only receive state funding. No matter how the Center is funded, all CILs must conduct resource development activities to increase their funding and capacity to better serve people with disabilities in their communities. Even with the requirement to diversify funding, CILs do not always consider federal opportunities outside of allocations established in Part C of the Rehabilitation Act.

Applying for federal opportunities can feel like an overwhelming task for a CIL, that may never have applied for one. But federal grants can be an excellent tool for expanding how a CIL supports consumers and increases organizational capacity and sustainability. A federal grant award can also enhance a CIL's credibility with other potential funders.

This publication is intended to guide CILs in writing a successful grant proposal. While numerous steps are involved in applying for federal funding the process is quite achievable, especially with a team approach. Try not to be intimidated by the process and approach each step in phases. It is important to note that grant applications are usually competitive, meaning only a select few of the strongest grant applications will get funded. However, don't give up on securing potential funding to help meet the CIL's mission.

In most cases, applying for federal funding is a valuable exercise. The grant writing experience can help an organization clarify its proposed programs and prepare the case for future proposals.

Chapter 1: Why Seek Federal Funding?

CIL Resource Development

The Federal Standards and Indicators for Centers for Independent Living (CILs) includes a section that focuses on resource development activities. CILs must conduct resource development according to these indicators. Resource development can be described as conducting activities to secure funding from sources other than Chapter 1 of Title VII of the Rehabilitation Act. Part C CILs must report on resource development activities in their annual performance reports. Resource development activities include securing donations, operating fee-for-service programs, competing for funding from public and private sources, and contracting for services. This chapter will review the requirements and explain why federal funding may be a good opportunity for CILs.

Enhance Existing Programs or Launch New Initiatives

Federal grants, cooperative agreements, and contracts can provide a CIL with opportunities to enhance existing programs, expand initiatives, and build capacity. Some opportunities are specific to test a concept, program, or project to see what can be learned and determine if they are feasible. These programs are often called pilot projects or demonstration programs. They are typically time-limited, and the funding can be provided through grants or cooperative agreements.

Some grants and cooperative agreements are focused on building the capacity of an existing program or project. The federal government may be interested in providing a CIL with funds to expand current services and programs in volume or to a new geographic area or specific population. Determining how the CIL's priorities for services, outreach, and growth align with grant opportunities may allow the organization to take advantage of new funding.

Why Federal Funding?

The federal government uses several different mechanisms to fund ideas or projects that will provide public services and stimulate the economy. Federal funding can help further the organization's mission, reach CIL-specific outreach or service goals, fulfill the goals and objectives of the State Plan for Independent Living, and expand a CIL's presence in the community.

Often, federal funding is awarded for multiple years. This provides the opportunity to start new programs, expand upon current programs, and partner with other community-based organizations in new ways. This initial federal investment can also lead to setting up a program with a strong foundation for success and sustainability.

Types of Federal Funding Opportunities

There are several different types of federal funding opportunities:

- Grants
- Cooperative Agreements,
- Subawards
- Contracts

Contracts are awarded when a federal agency is acquiring a service. Both grants and cooperative agreements are awarded when a federal agency is assisting. In cooperative agreements, it is expected that the federal agency will be heavily involved in the work.

Grants

A federal grant is a type of financial assistance a federal agency provides for a specific purpose.

Cooperative Agreements

A federal cooperative agreement is a form of financial assistance that includes additional involvement by the federal agency. Often, this will mean the federal agency's employees could be involved in implementing the program or project.

Subawards

When an organization receives federal funding and asks another organization to do a portion of the work required by the statement of work (SOW), the agreement is called a subaward. In this agreement, the organization agrees to complete part of the SOW and receives funding to cover those costs. The organization then becomes a subrecipient and is responsible for following all federal laws and the requirements of the original award.

Contracts

A federal contract is not a type of federal financial assistance; instead, it is a legal agreement in which property or services are purchased to carry out a program or project.

A great resource for additional information is the Grants.gov Community Blog. Their "What Is…" series provides straightforward explanations of federal grants and other types of financial assistance.

Chapter 2: Pre-planning

Introduction

There are multiple local, state, and federal funding opportunities. Finding funding opportunities that fit within the mission and purpose of the organization may be difficult. Later chapters of this guide will provide information on where and how to find funding opportunities. While it can be tempting to jump in and begin work on a funding application, there are several things to consider before getting started.

Strategic Plan

While all efforts to diversify an organization's funding should always align with the strategic plan, mission, and independent living philosophy, there may be times when revisions or quick pivots are necessary to meet the direct needs of consumers during certain situations. An example could be during a public health emergency or natural disaster. Therefore, it is important to have flexibility in the plan to adapt to consumers' immediate needs.

While CILs are required to have and report annual work plans, strategic plans can fulfill that requirement but also strengthen the overall organization. A good strategic plan serves as a compass and guide for the organization. A strategic plan can be time intensive and requires participation from the board and staff. The payoff is a blueprint that provides organizational leadership with clearly defined goals and objectives. These strategic goals should be considered when reviewing and evaluating potential funding opportunities. An organization should not apply for funding that doesn't meet the goals or mission of the CIL.

If the organization's strategic plan is more than three to five years old, it is recommended to develop a new plan before committing significant time toward grant writing. While an organization certainly can be successful in getting funded, the risk is that programs may begin that could bring about challenges in the long term. Additionally, there is a risk in investing time in areas that may not be priorities for the board, consumer base, and the broader disability community served.

When determining whether to apply for a funding opportunity, consider if the program or initiative that would potentially be funded addresses one or more of the goals and priorities in the strategic plan. If funding is awarded, would the work result in changes that strengthen the organization or address a critical need in the community, as identified in the plan?

Buy-In and Support from the Board of Directors

It is essential to involve the board of directors in key decisions and opportunities related to funding. Talking with board leadership about funding opportunities and updating them on potential opportunities will help assess current capacity and growth possibilities. Share how funding opportunities address and fit within the strategic plan's goals and the organization's long-term financial stability. Additionally, let the board know the plan to sustain the new or expanded program when the grant funding cycle ends.

Some federal funding opportunities require evidence that the board has taken formal action supporting the proposal. A signed statement from the board chair or president supporting the application may be required with some funding applications. Other applications may request meeting minutes where a formal vote was held in which the board supported the proposal. Finally, funding applications may require a formal resolution of the board authorizing the organization to apply for the funding and/or accept the funds. Make sure to review and understand the funding application requirements and manage the process so the organization can provide what is needed on time.

Staff Capacity

It is important to consider how the funding responsibilities will be met if the proposal is selected to be funded. The funder will outline expectations, deliverables, and timelines to meet the various obligations. All this information will be included in the request for proposals (RFP) document. The response to the proposal will outline the plan to provide services and meet deliverables. Providing these deliverables within a timeline and meeting other due dates is essential. Missing due dates or submitting reports late may freeze the CIL's access to funding or even disqualify the organization from future eligibility.

When developing the funding proposal, here are some key items to remember:

- Consider how the work included in the proposal will be completed. Will existing employees be expected to take on additional tasks, or will new team members be hired? Does existing staff have the capacity to take on the work? Do they have the capacity and skills to fulfill the obligations stated in the application?

- If hiring new employees, include those costs in the budget and highlight this in the grant narrative section. Think about the essentials, such as whether there is a workspace for the new employee(s) or a computer, laptop, phone, or any other technology that is needed. If new equipment is needed, make sure to include these costs in the budget. Be sure to develop a job description for all new positions, as these will likely be required in the funding application.

- Consider whether the current management structure supports the additional work and employee count. Before taking on a funding opportunity that would expand the organization's work, discuss it with the key leadership team to determine if the team has the time, ability, and resources to take on something new. Be clear about the new opportunity and what would be expected of them. This is especially important in relation to supervision, data collection, and reporting. It may be necessary to create a new role on the management team. Take advantage of the opportunity to evaluate how tasks might be redistributed among the team. Other considerations include whether changes are needed to enhance the leadership team and the employees they manage. Be mindful of this need as the budget is developed for the new funding.

Infrastructure

Consider the organization's current infrastructure, including accounting and financial operations, data collection, grant reporting, and internal operations. It is essential to be aware of areas where capacity may be lacking and unable to support a large influx of funding and organizational responsibility.

Be sure the CIL uses a data collection system that collects appropriate and accurate information to develop the Program Performance Report (PPR) and other reports for major funders. If the data collection system currently being used cannot accurately collect the information needed for reports needed for future grants, modifications will be necessary. Delays could occur if data collection challenges are discovered once the program begins, which could cause delays in submitting required reports.

The organization must also have skilled employees in finance and administration who are familiar with all the requirements of operating federal funding mechanisms. This may include separate accounts for the program, knowledge of allowable expenses, and the technical experience to submit information on time. The organization must have clear, structured accounting and financial policies to ensure this practice.

The board should review these policies at least annually to ensure appropriate measures are in place, including

- Internal controls,
- Separation of duties,
- Monitoring of federal reports, and
- Reporting of information to management, the board, and funders.

Writing the Proposal

More information about grant proposals will be shared later in this resource. However, before getting started, think about the actual writing process. While some organizations have a dedicated grant writer, it is more typical for the Executive Director, Program Director, or other senior staff to be responsible for this function at a CIL. While senior staff may ultimately be responsible for ensuring funding applications are completed, it is more effective to distribute funding proposal tasks among several team members, especially if they have expertise in a specific area to contribute. This can also provide newer team members with an opportunity to support the application writing process thus further developing their skills.

Tips for Proposal Writing

Consider the following tips and suggestions when working as a team:

- Before starting on a funding proposal, bring together the team who will work together to write the funding application.

- At the meeting, discuss the project in detail, establish timelines, and assign specific parts of the project to each team member.

- During the writing process, follow up with the team members frequently to offer support.

- Schedule team meetings at specific points during the writing process to maintain a supportive environment and allow for problem-solving.

- Establish a date by which all sections of the funding application must be completed, so there is time for editing and bringing the proposal together.

Chapter 3: Documents and Registrations Needed for Funding Applications

Introduction

Make sure to gather all corporate and organizational documents requested in the RFP before you spend significant time on a federal funding application. This may include proof of nonprofit status, your most recent 990 form, previous year financial reports, and others. Gathering required documents will ensure the application is submitted successfully. Be sure to store these documents in a place where the leadership team can easily access the information and monitor when the information may need to be renewed or updated.

DUNS Number

The federal government's Office of Management and Budget previously required applicants to provide a Dun and Bradstreet (D&B) Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number when applying for federal grants or cooperative agreements. A DUNS number is a unique, nine-digit identification number that is free and easy to obtain. The CIL likely has one if it receiveed federal funds before April 2022. If key leadership at the CIL is unfamiliar with a CIL's DUNS number, check online.

In April 2022, the DUNS Number was replaced by a new, non-proprietary identification number provided by the System for Award Management (SAM.gov). This new identifier is the Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) or the Entity ID. To register for a UEI or to complete a SAM registration, visit the SAM.gov website.

SAM and Why It Matters

To do business with the U.S. Government, an organization must maintain a user account in SAM. This is a no-cost registration that allows an organization to:

- Register to do business with the U.S. government,

- Update or renew an organization's entity registration,

- Check the status of an entity registration, and

- Search for entity registration and exclusion records.

To register in SAM or to receive a Unique Entity ID, review the checklist for full SAM registration.

Important information to include is the CIL's:

- Legal business name,
- Physical address (a post office box may not be used as the physical address),
- Date of incorporation, and
- State of incorporation (U.S. entities only).

SAM.gov will validate the entity name and address. If SAM.gov cannot validate the organization entity, create a help ticket with the Federal Service Desk (FSD) from the page. Once Unique Entity ID is received, registration is completed.

If a CIL receives or has applied for federal funds, the SAM account is likely active. The SAM does need to be renewed annually, though a new account is not needed. It is important to document when the organization's SAM account needs to be renewed to prevent issues with any federal funding.

If staff roles have changed since the last renewal, the authorized Entity Administrator may need to be modified. When registering or renewing a registration, a notarized letter signed by the board appointing the authorized Entity Administrator is required.

The UEI registration and SAM registration can take several weeks. If there are errors in the registration information, further delays will occur. It is crucial to begin the registration process in SAM as soon as possible if a current UEI number or active SAM registration is needed.

For FREE help registering in SAM, contact the supporting FSD. For information on the notarized letter, go to the FSD website and access the "Help Topics (FAQs)" located on the lower left side of the page.

SAM is an official website of the U.S. government. There is no cost to use SAM. Please be aware that other entities may reach out via emails and phone calls, offering to manage this process on the organization's behalf for a significant fee. It is recommended to ignore these offers, as paying an entity to complete this task is unnecessary.

Using Login.gov with SAM.gov

SAM.gov now uses Login.gov for authentication. Several government agencies use Login.gov to access their websites by using one online profile for a user. To link to the information already developed in SAM.gov, use the same email address for the Login.gov account. You can change the primary email address once the SAM.gov profile and Login.gov account are linked together.

Employer ID/Taxpayer IDs and Proof of Non-Profit Status

As part of the SAM registration process, a Taxpayer Identification Number (TIN) and Taxpayer Name associated with the TIN is needed. Review tax documents from the IRS (such as a 1099 or W-2 form) to find the Taxpayer's Name and the TIN.

While the IRS has a search process that allows an organization's tax filings and tax-exempt status, funding applications may request a copy of an IRS Determination Letter. An Exempt Determination Letter, or a Determination Letter, is a letter from the IRS letting an organization know its application for tax-exempt status has been approved.

If the organization received its original determination letter before 2014, this information might not be available online. If a replacement copy of the determination letter is needed, this can be requested by submitting Form 4506-B. Please note that processing the request may take up to 60 days so plan accordingly.

List of Board Members and an Organizational Chart

Typically, a non-profit organization will have an organizational chart, complete with staff and board member positions, reviewed and approved by the board each fiscal year. A copy of the organizational chart with the board chair's signature showing it was voted on and approved by the board may be required as part of the funding application submission process.

Indirect Cost Rate Agreement or Approved Cost Allocation Plan

An indirect cost rate or cost allocation plan can be confusing and overwhelming. More information about these topics will be discussed in Chapter 7. However, it is essential to note that a key part of creating a budget for a federal project is estimating how shared organizational costs are assigned to funding mechanisms and base funding as a CIL. If federal funding is new to the organization, the organization will likely not have an existing indirect cost rate agreement or cost allocation plan. These agreements and plans determine how the organization shares expenses for activities, time, and costs that cannot be directly attributed to a particular project across the full agency budget. CILs' primary federal funding source is the Administration for Community Living (ACL) under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Plans are submitted to ACL, and an indirect cost rate agreement is approved.

As an alternative, some organizations have a cost allocation plan approved by the board of directors each fiscal year, with a set process of determining shared and administrative costs. An organization can either have a cost allocation plan or an indirect cost rate agreement; they cannot use both methods. An approved copy is often required to be submitted as part of the federal funding application process.

If the organization does not have an indirect cost rate agreement or a cost allocation plan, a standard 10% de minimis rate may be claimed. De minimis rate is an opportunity for organizations that do not have a current indirect cost rate agreement to receive an indirect cost rate of 10% of modified total direct costs.

Chapter 4: Where and How to Find Opportunities for Grants, Cooperative Agreements, and Contracts

Introduction

Funding opportunities for federal grants and contracts are often released to the public. This chapter will provide information and resources on where to search for federal funding opportunities.

Announcements of Funding Opportunities

The process of announcing a funding opportunity and the application process is typically called the "Pre-Award" phase of a federal funding cycle. When funding is available, federal agencies provide an official notice called a Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA) or a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO). Typically, this notice will provide the basic instructions for applying and submitting a successful application.

The notice has at least the [following components](#):

- Program purpose, goals, and measurement,
- Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) number for the funding program,
- Type of award (e.g., discretionary grant or cooperative agreement),
- Due date for applications,
- Funding opportunity number,
- Reporting requirements,
- Full text of the announcement, and
- Instructions to apply.

The FOA or NOFO will also provide contact information and the process for asking questions about the opportunity. Reach out to the contact person if there are any questions about the intent of the funding or application process.

Where to Search for Federal Grants and Cooperative Agreements

When federal agencies have grants or cooperative agreements available, they typically announce them on their websites and through Grants.gov. Grants.gov is the central source for agencies to publish federal funding opportunities for organizations and entities to support the development and management of federal programs or projects. Creating an account by registering the CIL as an applicant is strongly recommended. Once registered, it is easy to sign up to receive email updates of new funding opportunities or create a saved search of notifications by funding status, funding instruction type, eligibility, category, and agency. For example, some agencies a CIL may want to receive funding notifications from could include the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Justice, the Department of Transportation, and the National Council on Disability.

A CIL can search for funding opportunities by going to the Search Grant Opportunities tab on Grants.gov and using the keyword search or search criteria feature. This feature will allow a search by eligible organizations, agencies, keywords, when the opportunity was announced, and financial assistance types.

SEARCH TIP

When searching keywords, try adding quotation marks around the entire phrase (e.g., "independent living") to narrow the search. By using quotation marks, the database will search for the words appearing next to each other rather than having the search results show all instances of the word "Independent" and all of the cases of the word "Living." It is recommended that CILs search many different phrases like "disability rights," "people with disabilities," "Center for Independent Living," "human rights," etc.

Searching for Federal Contracting Opportunities

While Grants.gov may have a few general announcements about future contracting opportunities, the primary source for all contracting announcements is SAM.gov. Contract opportunities, posted on SAM.gov, are procurement notices from federal contracting offices. If a CIL is interested in doing business with the government, this system can be used to search for opportunities.

Explore these opportunities by visiting the SAM.gov website and using keywords to find contracting opportunities. Like the Grants.gov website, opportunities can be narrowed by specific agencies, time frames, and other search criteria. These searches can be saved for future use and provide updated results emailed directly to the administrator.

Technical Assistance and Training about the Federal Contracting Process

There are 94 [Procurement Technical Assistance Centers (PTACs)](#) across the country, which provide free assistance to small businesses and organizations navigating the federal contracting process. Local PTACs will offer in-person and sometimes virtual training to learn the basics of the federal contracting process. Staff and counselors are available to dive deeper into topics where more individualized assistance is needed. Such topics include:

- Determining suitability for contracting,
- Securing necessary registrations,
- Marketing and networking,
- Researching procurement histories,
- Identifying bid opportunities,
- Proposal preparation,
- Contract performance issues,
- Production and quality systems,
- Accounting system requirements, contract payments, and payment systems,
- Logistics coordination, such as packaging and transportation,
- Subcontracting,
- Property, and
- Preparing for audit.

Chapter 5: Responding to Requests for Proposals (RFP)

Introduction

Now that the CIL has found a funding opportunity through Grants.gov or another source, it is time to respond to the request for proposal (RFP). This chapter covers what an RFP is and how to prepare to apply. All RFPs are different, but the information in this chapter will provide a solid base to draft a proposal.

What is a Request for Proposal?

A request for proposal, or RFP, is an official document announcing an upcoming project and is used to solicit proposals from qualified organizations. RFP solicitations are a standard method used by federal agencies to advertise funding opportunities. The document provides necessary instructions that applicants must follow for funding consideration. The RFP should be thoroughly studied, and referenced throughout the life of the proposal and overall project. The RFP includes the benchmarks, deliverables, expectations of the program and outcomes it should achieve, instructions for grant format, critical due dates, and other critical details.

Important Information and Details

The first step in responding to an RFP is to gather information. Once the RFP is reviewed, with close attention to the following details. The list below covers the basics though it is important to read all the RFP for the small details carefully.

Admin Top Level Information

Before applying for the funding, understand the timeline and eligibility requirements.

Here are some key things to expect:

LETTER OF INTENT
Some funding opportunities require a letter of intent before the application due date. The letter of intent informs the funding agency that the organization plans to apply. These letters are short and do not obligate the organization to any specific program or firm commitment for the program to be applied for. It is critical to review the specific instructions about the information required in the letter of intent, including the due date and process for submitting the letter.

APPLICATION DUE DATE

The RFP will list a due date, which will often include an exact time of the day that applications will be accepted. For example, applications will be accepted until May 1, 2023, at 11:59 p.m., Eastern Standard Time. If a funder indicates that the due date is 11:59 p.m., Eastern Standard Time, this will not be a floating time to reflect 11:59 in another time zone. It is the applicant's responsibility to be aware of the due date, and what this time may be in their relevant time zone. Be sure to note the time zone the funder is requesting, as that will be the official time zone to follow when ensuring the proposal is submitted on time.

Allow enough time to develop a strong proposal without rushing at the last minute. Large proposals can take weeks to prepare. Most funding applications are submitted online, so ensure the CIL's account is active well in advance. Additionally, be mindful that internet outages or other technical challenges can arise. Therefore, make plans to ensure the proposal is submitted well before the due date.

SUBMISSION METHOD

Review the RFP to confirm how to submit the application. Federal grants often use Grants.gov, but there may be exceptions. CILs are encouraged to learn the platform on which the application will be submitted early in the process so they will know how to format their application and how supporting documentation will need to be uploaded.

AWARD RANGE, FLOOR, AND CEILING

Most RFPs will list an award range regarding the amount of funding allocated towards the funding opportunity. The estimated total program funding listed in the RFP is the entire amount of money available for the funding announcement. The expected number of awards simply lists the number of awards to be funded to different entities. For example, if the expected number of awards lists 1, the grant is highly competitive as only one applicant will be awarded. The grant ceiling means the maximum amount of funds an applicant may request in their grant proposal; this number is typically already divided by the total amount that will be awarded by the number of organizations to be funded. Some RFPs also include an award floor, meaning the lowest amount of funding that will be awarded. If the RFP consists of both the award floor and ceiling, the applicant must request an amount that falls between the two numbers. Applications that do not follow these guidelines may be disqualified.

COST SHARING OR MATCH REQUIREMENT

Some funding applications require the organization to share or match a portion of the cost of the proposed program without using federal funding. The funding agency will not fund this portion of the budget. Cost sharing or matching funds are typically stated as a percentage of the total funds awarded. If this is the case, factor this into budget planning, as this is required to explain how the cost-sharing or match will help support the total cost of the proposed program.

The requirements and what is considered cost sharing or a match is often listed within the RFP. For example, the RFP may include in-kind services, volunteers or unpaid interns, non-federal funding from partner organizations, staff time paid by nonfederal or obligated funding, or donations as an allowable form of cost share or match to use to help fund the proposed program.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Review the eligibility requirements to ensure the CIL meets the funding application's criteria. Eligibility is determined by the type of organization represented. For example, the CIL is a nonprofit organization. If the RFP's eligibility section lists nonprofit organizations, the CIL can apply for the grant.

If the CIL does not meet the requirements listed in the RFP, an option is to partner with another eligible organization to take the lead on the funding application.

Project-Specific Information

When reviewing an RFP, consider the following program-specific questions:

PURPOSE

Review the purpose of the funding grant. Does the purpose align with the CIL's mission and vision? Does the project idea meet the purpose of the proposed funding?

Outlining project ideas prior to writing is recommended. Going through the following few questions can help with this organization.

AUDIENCE

Who is the funding intended to serve? Is it focused on people with disabilities? Is it designed to educate the community or build partnerships? Is it intended to create systems change? Knowing the target audience will help prepare the project's focus while meeting the expectations of the proposed funding.

ALLOWABLE ACTIVITIES AND COSTS:

Ensure the proposal is aligned with the proposed activities and costs in the RFP. Therefore, reviewing what is not allowable is critical, so that appropriate activities or costs are included in the application. For example, federal grants or cooperative agreements typically don't fund food or construction, so they should not be included in the application.

DELIVERABLES:

Look for expected deliverables, such as services in a specific area, materials, partnership agreements, events, or training. Suppose the RFP does not include specific deliverables. In that case, include them in the proposal to demonstrate to the funder that the project will create measurable deliverables needed to achieve the objectives of the proposal. A deliverable is a product or service created or performed during the proposed project.

Most projects have deliverables demonstrating what had to get done to achieve the project's objectives and outcomes. When developing a project proposal, there will be elements of both inputs and outputs. For example, inputs are activities such as time, resources, and information that go into the project. Outputs are what the input created – the deliverables.

For example, if the proposed project includes facilitating monthly stakeholder meetings to meet the project's objectives, the deliverable could be a copy of the meeting minutes. Another example is if the proposed project includes developing a fact sheet about the importance of vaccinations for people with disabilities; the deliverable could be the published fact sheet.

Organize the Process

Once the basic information for the funding application is received, it is vital to organize the application process. The process will depend on each specific organization and structure. However, a successful process should include:

- A central location for documentation and version control,
- Clear staff assignments and responsibilities, and
- A clear approval process.

Establishing a process like this will help ensure the application is complete, accurate, and follows the application's requirements.

Determine Where and How to Work on the Application

To ensure that everyone is working on the most up-to-date version of the funding application, use version control.

Here are some common ways to manage document versions:

- Consider hosting the document online where team members can see updates in real-time. Many programs such as Google Workspace, Microsoft OneDrive, Amazon Drive, Box, and DropBox are convenient for multiple team members. However, accessibility may be a concern with some of these services, so choose the best option for all staff.

- Use clear titles in the document description. If versions are emailed back and forth among multiple staff, ensure the titles are clear and include the date last edited or a version number (e.g., v.1, v.2).

- Limit access to application documents on an as-needed basis. Not all staff members need access to the information in the funding application. For example, sensitive information such as staff salaries should only be accessible to certain people. Limiting access can help ensure that the right people have access to the correct information.

Assign Clear Tasks and Approval Processes

Have clear assignments and steps for approval to make the funding application process go smoothly.

Here are some tips to help with this:

- Assign team members to specific sections of the application. Dividing the work will help ensure all aspects of the application are covered. It is also helpful to set internal due dates for each section to allow for adequate time for review and approval.

- Have a clear approval process. Make sure to understand the organization's approval process and how long this will take. This information is needed to create a timeline and to get items approved in the proper order.

Chapter 6: Funding Proposal Structure and Narrative

Introduction

This chapter provides information about writing the narrative for the funding application and the basic structure of a funding proposal. Each funding opportunity is different, and all funders have different requirements. Take time to review all instructions in the RFP carefully. Funders often allow applicants to submit questions in writing or participate in a meeting to learn more about the funding opportunity. Participating in informational sessions about an RFP is encouraged as the funder will share expectations related to the funding opportunity.

Before Beginning

1 **FIRST STEP:** Read the application several times before starting and throughout the process. Because some applications can be long, it is easy to miss details. Read the application closely and provide the information within the RFP. Funders will reject applications if instructions are ignored.

Consider who will read the application and what they already know about the organization and work. For example, suppose the grant opportunity is from the Administration for Community Living (ACL). Here, the reviewers will likely know about CILs and Independent Living Services. Therefore, spend less time educating the reader about what a CIL is and focus more on the work in the community. However, if the application is from a first-time funder who may not be familiar with CILs, explain more about the purpose of the organization, the Independent Living philosophy, and how it relates to the funding opportunity. Keep in mind that there may be multiple application reviewers. While it is common for staff of relevant funding entities to review applications, it is also essential to understand volunteers or community members may also be part of the application review process. Therefore, always provide a strong summary of the organization.

> **EXAMPLE**
> [name of CIL] is a consumer-controlled, community-based, cross-disability, nonresidential private non-profit agency designed and operated within a local community by individuals with disabilities and provides an array of independent living services. The organization is committed to fostering an inclusive society that empowers people with disabilities to live fully engaged and self-directed lives.

2 **SECOND STEP:** Research the funder's goals and priorities. The RFP was created to meet a need associated with the funder's mission. It is essential to connect with the funder through the proposal that demonstrates how the program would help the funder meet a need and how it relates to the mission of the funding entity.

> **EXAMPLE**
> While [state] is without a [program] in place, [state] has the sixth highest unemployment rate for people with disabilities in the country, leaving thousands of people at risk for negative outcomes associated with unemployment ([source]). While [state] has attempted to address employment barriers, accessible farming has not been approached for potential career opportunities for people with disabilities, despite the available options throughout the state.

3 **THIRD STEP:** Understanding how the reviewers will score applications is essential. Most RFPs provide the criteria or a scoring rubric that explains how the application will be evaluated but, most importantly, what must be included. To write a successful application it is crucial to ensure the highest scored sections of the application are focused on, so spend more time on writing these sections. For example, if the application criteria includes a project description the proposal should be clear and have solid evidence demonstrating the issue has been carefully researched.

4 **FOURTH STEP:** Understand the funding format. The funding format will guide the development and organize the grant application. Some grant funding opportunities will not include an application template; some will include an application in an online portal, and some applications will need to be developed in Microsoft Word. The application structure could be very complex and include a word or character limits, restrictions on font size, an executive summary, an evaluation plan, and more. Be prepared to follow the specific requirements of the RFP.

Overview of Organization

When writing a funding proposal, an organizational overview will be required. This is the opportunity to describe the organization, its history, the programs, and its impact on the community. The goal of this section is to demonstrate the capacity to meet the services requested by the funder, collect required data, submit reports on time, and have the means to bill for and receive funds. Be sure to establish the organization as being credible, professional, and show it can meet the funding requirements. In this section, address the following:

- Date established and, if appropriate, a brief history of the organization.
- What is a CIL and what services are provided?
- What is the organizational mission and vision?
- What else makes the CIL unique?
- Number of offices, counties served, and size of the organization.

Organizational Expertise

The goal of this section is to show that the organization has the skills and qualifications that will lead to project success. Exactly what is addressed in this section will change depending on the RFP.

The suggestions below are examples of areas common to CILs and could spark ideas:
- legislative, policy, and advocacy activities,
- the role of Independent Living philosophy in work,
- previous success with obtaining federal, state, and/or local government funding,
- similar successful programs,
- alignment with core services and other programs,
- consumer satisfaction,
- top-level training/organizational-wide training, and
- employee credentials, certifications, and/or professional development.

Accomplishments and Successes

Part of demonstrating the ability to manage and deliver on a funding proposal includes highlighting accomplishments and successes. Think about current and prior funding, programs and services the organization has or currently offers, initiatives, activities, and partnerships in the community. Identify accomplishments and successes that show the strengths of the organization and help to support the funding application.

Here are some examples to consider:

- successful efforts securing funding and how it has benefited the work,
- programs and services that have been recognized, including awards, conference presentations, coverage in the media, etc.,
- growth and expansion of the organization,
- successful collaborations and partnerships that have achieved change or impact in the community,
- trainings and educational activities provided by the organization,
- fee-for-service programs that generate unrestricted revenue, and
- ways the organization can sustain programs after grant funding ends.

Collaboration, Community Involvement, and Partnerships

The RFP will most likely include a section that asks to provide an overview of community partnerships. This section should demonstrate that the team has established relationships with other organizations that can help the project succeed. If there is no specific section where this is requested, including this information in the narrative will significantly strengthen the proposal.

When developing this section, focus on partnerships with organizations working on similar issues as the proposed project. For example, if applying for an employment-focused grant, mention past work with local workforce boards or Vocational Rehabilitation Departments. These organizations may also bring expertise that will benefit the work. Be sure to specifically highlight any plans for collaborating with these organizations under the grant or cooperative agreement if it is awarded. A letter of support will likely be asked for as a part of the funding application. These organizations will be good candidates to provide letters of support.

Next, mention any affiliations or partnerships with larger state or national groups. This information will help to show the reach and impact of the proposed project.

Program Staff and Key Personnel

When writing a funding application, providing information about employees who will work on and manage the project is a requirement as part of the application. The purpose of these questions is to demonstrate that the organization has the necessary expertise and staffing needed to carry out the project successfully. It is important to consider existing and potential workloads, conflicts, and expertise.

As planning begins, consider:

- What are the essential staff or roles that will be needed for this project to succeed?
- What administrative staffing is needed to support the project? This could include staff for employee oversight, accounting, or project administration.
- Is there a match requirement for the grant? If so, where is the match coming from?
- Who will be the lead for the funded project? Remember that a single person can only lead a limited number of projects or grants. Avoid setting the key leadership team up for failure by taking on too many responsibilities.

Remember, the goal of this section is to highlight the experience, leadership, and ability of organizational staff to execute the project. Reference additional guidelines and suggestions related to staffing in other chapters of this tool kit.

Personnel

The personnel section of a funding application requires the ability to forecast who will work on the project. Executive leadership must determine their roles and duties. Include information about the supervisory structure, time allocated to the grant, key duties, and other relevant information.

One strategy is to organize staff into three categories: direct program staff, support staff, and oversight staff.

- Direct program staff usually spend the most time working on the project. Include information about their role, how much time they will spend on the project, and any relevant expertise.
- Support staff members will track time for the funded project, but their support will be more general in nature. Examples of support staff include administrative staff, accounting staff, and public relations/communications staff.
- Oversight staff supervise direct staff members or the organization as a whole. This may include direct staff supervisors, directors, or executives.

Below are examples of each type of staff member.

DIRECT PROGRAM STAFF EXAMPLE

Project Director
Jane Doe currently serves as the Lead position for [CIL's program] in a full-time capacity. They currently supervise two full-time positions. As Project Director, Jane would be responsible for running the program, supervising the subcontractor [position], and creating monthly and quarterly reports, in addition to their already assigned duties. They served on our state's [workgroup] and have trained hundreds of professionals, waiver participants, and their families on the value of person-directed services. Jane also serves on the [state's] Disability Employment Committee, which plans and executes monthly workshops across the state. Jane brings valuable professional knowledge to the team. Jane will dedicate 100% of their time (2,080 hours) to this project.

SUPPORT STAFF EXAMPLE

Administrative Assistant
James Doe has been Administrative Assistant at [CIL] since 2009. James has performed many duties that help the staff stay on track, including data entry, scheduling Benefits Summary & Analysis reviews, and making follow-up calls. James will dedicate 80% of their time (1,248 hours) to this project.

OVERSIGHT STAFF EXAMPLE

Quality Assurance Director
Jonathan Doe ensures the quality of services for many of [CIL's] programs by tracking data and outcomes to streamline internal processes and increase efficiency. Jonathan has a master's degree from [university] and a certificate in Project Management from the [university]. Jonathan ensures overall benchmarks for [CIL program] are tracked appropriately and supervises the [CIL program] administrative assistant. Jonathan will dedicate 5% of their time (104 hours) to this program.

Executive Director

Jill Doe has served as the Executive Director since 2010. Under Jill's leadership, [CIL] has experienced years of growth and success and has become a nationally recognized organization for creating innovative and successful programming. Jill holds a Master of Social Work degree from [University] and has over twenty years of disability rights experience. Jill is a recognized leader with a physical disability, which she uses to better connect with people with disabilities, understand their barriers, and develop solutions through the CIL's programming and advocacy efforts. Jill will provide leadership and mentorship to the staff to ensure the requirements of this project are successful. Jane will dedicate 5% of their time (104 hours) to this project as a match.
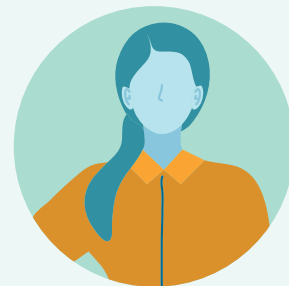
Resumes and Curriculum Vitae (CVs)

Resumes or CVs of key project staff are often requested as supporting documents in funding applications. It is best to keep these documents on file for staff members and update them yearly. There is no one right way to write a resume or CV but the goal is to highlight the expertise of the staff.

A resume is typically a one or two-page document that summarizes the employee's qualifications, work history and education. Be sure to highlight any relevant skills or training that are specifically related to the project. Save time by keeping staff resumes on file to submit when applying for future funding.

A curriculum vitae or CV, is a more in-depth version of a resume. The CV includes work and education experience, as well as information about a person's honors, awards, publications, and skills. A CV is a multiple page document, typically used in an academic setting.

Planning for New Hires

The CIL may not have the necessary staffing for the proposed project. This is expected as planning for a new project begins. When writing the proposal, consider the type of employees and roles needed for the work. Think through what requirements and experience that person should have. When writing the qualifications, demonstrate an understanding of the project's needs. Even better, save time by developing job descriptions for all positions that may be created if the funding is awarded. Additionally, give consideration to the amount of time needed to find and hire qualified staff for any new positions that may result from the award. Be ready to post position announcements immediately once notified of the award.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

A growing number of RFPs will ask about an organization's diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts. If the RFP does not explicitly ask about the CIL's DEI efforts, it is strongly recommended that the CIL's DEI efforts be incorporated into the information provided about the organization and in the details of the proposed project. Focus on the organizational commitment to DEI and, more importantly, how DEI is demonstrated in the hiring and promotion strategies, internal policies and practices, employee recruitment, board recruitment, and service delivery.

Below are a few points to consider when incorporating DEI into the proposal:

- Does the project staff mirror who will be served with this program? CILs often think representation is covered because we are led and staffed by people with disabilities. Being represented by people with disabilities is only one of many things to consider. Ensure staff who are hired have multiple marginalized identities, representing multiple racial and ethnic identities, sexual orientations, gender identities, and other marginalized and intersectional communities.

- Discuss how the organization addresses and promotes inclusion in everyday employment practices. This includes recruitment, promotion, policies, and standard operating procedures.

- Have staff completed any DEI training?

- Does the organization provide any training for other businesses related to DEI and inclusion?

- Does the CIL conduct outreach to communities not immediately represented in the consumer base?

Proposal Narrative and Structure

Now that program staffing needs are identified and clearly stated in the plan for the proposed project, work on the details of the project can begin. Not every funding application will have the same structure or naming conventions, but the information below can be adapted to the structure of most applications.

Remember, this is a core document, along with the budget, that will be referenced throughout the execution of the project. Make sure all goals and timelines are realistic.

Executive Summary

The executive summary is a high-level overview of what the program will deliver and the activities that meet the grant objectives. It is typically no more than 500 words. The summary will set the tone for the entire narrative, so ensure the summary is confident, direct, and showcases the outcomes that will result from this funding.

Program Description and Activities

The program description and activities are the focus of many applications. Explain here the type of work to be completed with the funding and how it will impact the community. Below is a common structure that can help make an argument clearly and effectively.

Identify the Problem or Issue to be Addressed

The RFP will state a general problem or issue that the funder will expect to be addressed if the funding is awarded. Explain how that issue or problem impacts the organization, community, and those served. Further, explain how the organization will address or resolve these issues later in the narrative.

When writing this section, use research and data to support the position made. This will show funders understanding of the problem and how the issue affects the community.

Be careful to ensure that the data used is from an updated, relevant, trusted, and verifiable source. Consider how data, and other peer-reviewed academic sources, strengthen the case for the need for additional services for the designated population. When using this information, it is important to properly cite the source and to not pass it off as original work or research. Many reviewers will have an academic background and will identify if there is a discrepancy.

Below are common resources for finding relevant information to support the proposal.

US Census Data Site
- State and county-level statistics from the census and other national surveys are available. The data is useful for assessing disability employment, poverty, housing, and education and for comparing data as compared to the general public.

Center for Research on Disability
- Operated by the University of New Hampshire, this is a trusted source for relevant and statistics on community participation of people with disabilities examining topics including employment, public programs, health, transportation, education, and more.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Website
- This data will explore specific disabilities in the selected community.

Local and state resources
- Look to the local workforce board, health department, or other relevant state agencies and organizations to find local data and information.

Example of Identifying the Problem

The disability community faces many barriers to economic mobility. In 2020, the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) conducted a needs assessment to guide the development of the three-year State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL). The survey identified barriers to living independently in the community that people with disabilities encounter. Of those surveyed, 61% identified education and transition skills as a barrier, 67% linked financial instability and budgeting for being a reason they could not find housing, 54% identified the lack of independent living skills as a barrier, and 65% listed the perception of disability by the community as a barrier. The results of this needs assessment will guide our program development and advocacy priorities. We will address many of these barriers through individual skill-building activities as a part of our Project.

Barrier	Percentage
Education and transition skills	61%
Financial instability and budgeting	67%
Lack of independent living skills	54%
Perception of disability by community	65%
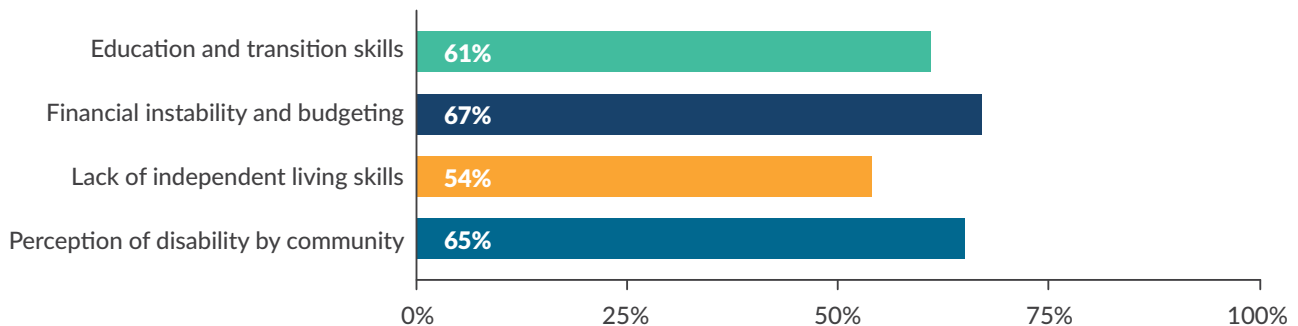
The 2019 American Community Survey estimated that 20% of people with a disability live below the poverty level, compared with 12.3% of those without a disability (American Community Survey, US Census). The cycle of segregation and discrimination that leads to poverty begins early in life as people with disabilities encounter segregated classrooms and continues in education with non-diploma tracks. Students with disabilities leave high school without job experience or soft skills. A lack of affordable, accessible transportation and a lack of employers trained on how to successfully recruit, train, and support employees with disabilities widens the gap. In 2021, the employment gap between those with disabilities and those without was 39% (2021 Annual Disability Statistics Compendium). From working with our consumers and our needs assessment, we know that financial instability results from broken systems that prevent people with disabilities from reaching their independent living goals. The poverty gap is even starker for individuals with a disability and is part of other marginalized groups, particularly Black, Hispanic, Indigenous, and Latinx communities. Our staff helps multiple marginalized people with disabilities navigate these systems, advocate for change, and build skills to achieve their goals.

12.3%
people without a disability
live below the poverty level

20%
people with a disability live
below the poverty level
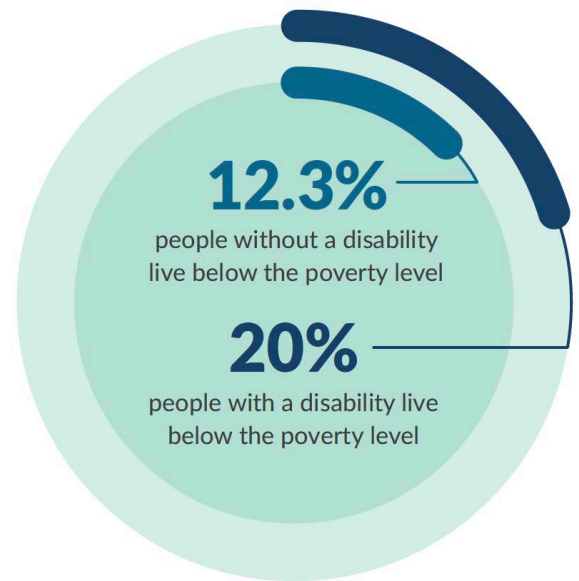
Explain How the Organization will Address the Problem

Once the problem in the community is identified, explain how the organization is uniquely suited to address the issue. Is there a program in mind that can address the problem? Are there other successful programs that can be replicated in a new geographic area?

As a CIL, the organization is distinctive from other agencies applying for funding. Make sure to highlight how peer support and being disability-led can lead to improved outcomes.

Example of How the Organization is Positioned to Address the Problem

[CIL] will promote and implement our current financial programming in [county]. Our financial literacy program includes one-on-one support services, group financial education classes, school-based financial education, and benefits planning by [CIL staff]. [Organization] is uniquely equipped to help families and individuals with disabilities build financial stability through our peer-based model and established community connections.

Describe the Approach and Plan to Address the Problem

Here, explain how the problem will be addressed. This is the section to start putting numbers and timelines to the project. The case is already made that the problem is understood and how it affects the community. Now provide a solution to the problem.

When explaining the approach, make sure to provide details. For example, if staff are working one-on-one with consumers, address some of the following:

- how often they will meet,
- what they are meeting about,
- how to determine when to meet, and
- how to know when the consumer has successfully reached their goals.

If working on a community-building project, explain what the coalition will look like, how often they will meet, and how the coalition has successfully achieved the intended outcomes of the project.

Example of Describing the Approach and Addressing the Problem

[CIL] is a consumer-driven organization, which means that consumers set their own goals and plan of action with the support of our staff. Consumers will set independent living and financial stability goals most relevant to their situation. A survey is used at the beginning of services based on the United Way of [state] Self-Sufficiency Standard. This helps focus on goal areas and create a detailed action and outcome plan for consumers with a financial goal. They will then meet one-on-one with an Independent Living Skills Specialist to work on these goals. Examples of goals that consumers choose could include the following: understanding their credit score, applying for benefits programs, learning about work incentives for Social Security recipients, understanding budgeting, banking, and credit cards, creating resumes and practicing interview skills, navigating public transportation and rideshare services, and many others. Independent Living Specialists will teach, encourage, and motivate them throughout the process to help them connect to resources, develop the necessary skills, and, most importantly, build their support networks and self-advocacy skills.

The time spent working one-on-one with an Independent Living Skills Specialist will depend on the goals the consumer plans to work on and the consumer's foundational knowledge and skill set. Specialists are required to make at least one contact per month with the consumer. The frequency and duration of services will depend on the consumers' needs. Some consumers may be able to complete a goal in one session, like learning to use Uber or Lyft. Other goals may require multiple hours/visits,

such as creating and following a budget. A goal is complete when the consumer has demonstrated mastery of the skill and feels confident closing out the goal.

Our Independent Living Specialists meet with consumers where they feel most comfortable. Locations could include the CIL, the consumer's home, a library, a coffee shop or casual restaurant, and other easy-to-access locations. This flexibility prevents transportation from being a barrier to receiving services. Our program addresses barriers by meeting people where they are and providing individualized services tailored to their schedules, support needs, and cultural identities.

Our program is based on a model of equipping consumers with the skills to navigate services and advocate for their support needs. Therefore, when a file is closed (although it can be reopened any time there are new goals), the individual has the knowledge, tools, confidence, and a plan of action to move forward with their financial independence goals.

Targeted Population

Funding opportunities are often specific to a population or defined group. The funder will clearly state the demographics, geographical location, or other defining aspects of the targeted population to be served under the grant. Make sure to address how the program will reach this target population. This may be through outreach efforts, new or existing partnerships, or an entirely new initiative. Be sure to describe how outreach efforts will be inclusive, equitable, and will reach diverse and often overlooked and marginalized communities. Marginalized communities can include disabled people of color, disabled LGBTQ+ people, and disabled people who experience poverty or homelessness.

Measuring Success with Outcomes

Developing outcomes can help provide a clear picture of the goals and objectives of the project. Outcomes show the potential impact of the work to funders and are incredibly useful in promoting the organization's impact on the community. By using plain language, the outcomes will be easier to understand and compelling to the reader.

Here are some tips for writing effective outcomes for a grant application:

- Develop a clear and concise statement of the project's goal. This should be the main outcome to achieve through the work. For example, "Our project will increase the awareness of COVID-19 vaccinations in [state] among persons with disabilities."

- Identify the specific objectives that will help reach the goal. These should be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, time-based, inclusive, and equitable (SMARTIE). For example, "We will increase consumer knowledge about where they can receive a COVID-19 vaccination by 25% within the first year of the project."

- Use simple, direct language to describe the proposed outcomes. Avoid jargon or technical terms that may be new to the reader. For example, instead of saying, "We will conduct a qualitative study to assess consumer attitudes towards vaccination," simply say, "We will ask people in our target neighborhoods about their thoughts on vaccination."

- Be specific about how outcomes will be measured. Will surveys, focus groups, or another method be used? Will individuals be contacted by phone, with a door-to-door campaign, or at community events?

- Consider the potential impact of the project on the community. What changes are expected as a result of the work? For example, "As a result of the project, we expect to see a decrease in people going to the hospital and a decline in deaths from COVID-19 in the disability community."

Resources

ILRU offers training on outcomes measurement for CILs. It is currently available on their website, and work is being done to revise it in the future. This is available on the ILRU webpage under "Outcome Measures for Centers for Independent Living."

Monitoring, Quality Assurance, and Data Collection

Setting Realistic Project Goals and Numbers

Now that a project is designed, decide on benchmarks and realistic numbers. There is not one correct way to set these numbers. Organizational experience or prior projects may be helpful when arriving at projected goals.

A common tool is a three-point estimation. Below is an outline of how to use it with the program.

Three-Point Estimation

Three-point estimation is a common project management tool. The method uses staff knowledge to make a reasonable estimate of a number. To arrive at this number, make three estimates. The first is a pessimistic estimate. Base the estimate on if things go wrong with the project. This could be due to internal or external issues. Examples include a public health emergency, disaster, or lack of staff. The second estimate is an optimistic estimate of the time frame. Make this estimate based on if everything goes right! Finally, a realistic or likely timeline estimate. This is what is most likely to happen and will fall between the pessimistic and optimistic estimates.

ESTIMATE 1
Pessimistic

ESTIMATE 2
Optimistic

ESTIMATE 3
Realistic

Example of a Three-Point Estimation

Situation: An organization is applying for an employment grant. In this grant, staff will be working one-on-one to build employment skills. There will be two primary goals for the project: how many consumers will be served and how many employment goals they will complete.

STEP 1: GAIN THE ESTIMATES

- Talk to the Independent Living Specialist, who is involved in employment services. Learn how many people receive employment services during a difficult year. Numbers can be provided of when the program went down for different reasons. The estimate produced is they will serve 35 people in a bad year with employment goals. Those people will each complete 2.5 goals on average. Goals could include resume writing, interviewing skills, getting a job, etc.

- Ask the same question about the best outcome. As the expert, the Independent Living staff member will consider how many consumers the staff could serve. The staff member will think about good years for employment services. Expecting an optimistic year, they have enough staff to support 75 consumers. Each consumer would complete 2.5 goals on average.

- Finally, ask what the realistic estimate for employment cases is. The Independent Living staff member may look at an average of previous years. They say they average 48 cases in a typical year, with 2.5 goals completed per person.

STEP 2: PLUG IN THE ESTIMATES INTO A WEIGHTED FORMULA

- A weighted formula is helpful because it allows an organization to see what is most likely. The formula for the estimate is (Pessimistic Estimate plus (4) Realistic/likely Estimate plus Optimistic Estimate) divided by 6 = Estimate

- For our example, that would be (35+48(4)+75)/6= 50
- 35 plus 48 multiplied by 4 plus 75 divided by 6 equals 50
- The estimate would be 50 Consumers served, and since we average 2.5 goals per person, that would be 125 goals complete.

STEP 3: COMPARE TO EXPECTATIONS

- As with any formula, it will not consider everything. So, look back at the result and see if this seems likely based on everything else that needs to be considered.

Monitoring, Tracking, and Reporting

It is the organization's responsibility to ensure progress is monitored and on track to meet the goals specified in funding agreements. Further, it is a key responsibility to submit reports to funders in the requested format and ahead of established timelines. Once goals and outcomes are identified, the next step is to define what items are tracked and the method to measure them.

Define What will be Tracked and Measured

This should be stated based on the program narrative, but if not, it is time to get specific. Determine what metrics will measure progress towards each goal and objective. These metrics need to be quantifiable and allow the organization to track progress over time.

Develop a Plan to Collect Metrics

Once the metrics are identified, determine the best way to measure them. This may include conducting surveys or utilizing collecting data from databases.

Tips:

- Surveys are useful when determining a change in attitude, knowledge, or awareness. For example, if the desired outcome is to increase disability pride, a survey is likely needed.

- Don't create a new system to collect data unless necessary. Write the grant plan and outcome measurements to use what is already in place. This may be a CIL database system like CIL Suite, MyCIL, or an internal spreadsheet.

- Begin to identify responsibilities. Will Independent Living staff collect the data? Will admin staff call consumers to do surveys?

Establish a schedule for collecting and analyzing data. This should include regular intervals for collecting data (e.g., weekly, monthly) and due dates for analyzing and reporting on the data. Often grants will have reporting requirements in their RFP. If that is the case, work to align the schedule with reporting timelines.

Reporting and Quality Assurance

The final step of monitoring the progress will be identifying the quality assurance plan. As an organization, consider who will monitor the information as it comes in and how to ensure quality assurance. If working on a program with goals that are consumer specific, this could be a description of the supervision and case review process. If focused on services and goals, this could be a description of how the database works and how the system ensures data integrity.

Once the process is mapped out, identify checkpoints to ensure the program is on track. For some grants, this may be a quarterly meeting to review the goals and progress. For others, it may be an internal monthly report on the current progress. Checkpoints are critical to determine if the project is off track and to make course adjustments as needed.

Next Steps

Now that the grant application is written, make sure this aligns with the program budget. The next chapter will cover how to create a grant budget. The programmatic application and budget narrative work together, so make sure these efforts are coordinated.

Chapter 7: Preparing the Budget

Introduction

This chapter will serve as a general guide in preparing the program budget. A comprehensive budget will provide an overview of actual costs, and a well-laid-out budget will increase the likelihood of the funding application being approved for funding. All items included in the budget must be reasonable, allowable, and allocable.

It is important to note that budget guidelines and instructions will vary based on the request for proposal from the funder.

Budget Categories

Typically, there will be nine categories to address when preparing the budget. These include:

- personnel,
- fringe benefits,
- travel,
- equipment,
- supplies,
- construction,
- consultant fees,
- other costs, and
- indirect costs.

Developing the Budget

With an understanding of the budget categories, begin brainstorming program costs. Take some time to review the proposal's requirements, and which staff time is anticipated.

Personnel

The first step in developing the budget is determining the staff time involved. There are several ways to calculate staff time, but the most common way is to determine what percentage of a full-time equivalent (FTE) the work will take per staff member.

EXAMPLE 1

Mary is a full-time employee who works 40 hours per week, 52 weeks per year. Mary's annual salary is $50,000. For the program, it is anticipated that Mary will contribute 20% of their time to the new funded project. Using Mary's salary, and the amount of their time allocated to the new project with the below calculation:

$50,000 X 20% = $10,000

Annual salary multiplied by the percentage of time equals Mary's annual cost to the new project

In this example, $10,000 annually would be charged for Mary's time.

EXAMPLE 2

Jared is a part-time employee who works 27 hours per week, 52 weeks per year. Jared's hourly rate is $20 per hour. It is anticipated that Jared will contribute 10% of their time to the proposed program. Jared's salary for the project can be determined with the below calculation:

27 hours per week X 52 weeks = 1,404 hours

27 hours per week multiplied by 52 weeks equals 1,404 hours

Jared will work 1,404 hours in one calendar year. 10% of Jared's time equates to the following:

1,404 X 10% = 140 hours

1,404 multiplied by 10% equals 140 hours

Knowing that Jared will likely spend 140 hours on this project, multiply this by their wage of $20 per hour to determine the cost for Jared that would be included in the budget:

140 X $20 = $2,800

140 multiplied by 20 dollars equals $2,800.

In this example, $2,800 would be charged annually for Jared to the project. Note that you can easily adjust this formula to the length of time in a grant cycle.

In addition to project staff, be sure to include management costs in the personnel calculation if they are not included in indirect costs.

Fringe Benefits

Annually, anticipate the organization's fringe benefit costs based on a percentage of salary costs.

Fringe benefits typically include:

- Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA),
- unemployment insurance,
- workers compensation,
- health benefits (medical, life, dental, vision, disability insurance), and
- IRA/401K contributions.

Let's use some examples below to figure out fringe benefit costs for an organization.

EXAMPLE 3

The annual personnel costs for the organization are $500,000. This includes the following monthly fringe benefit costs across their organization:

- FICA - 7.65% of wages - $3,187.50/month
- 401K 5% Contribution - $2,083/month
- Medical Insurance - $5,000/month
- Life Insurance - $250/month
- Vision Insurance - $50/month
- Dental Insurance - $80/month

In this example, the organization pays $10,650.50/month on fringe benefits, which equates to $127,806 annually.

If we take the annual fringe benefits amount and divide that by the annual personnel costs, we will get our fringe benefit rate (assuming all employees receive the same benefits).

$127,806 divided by $500,000 = 25.5%

The annual fringe benefit rate is 25.5%

When completing the funding application budget, compute each staff member's fringe benefit costs.

EXAMPLE 4

The organization is requesting $10,000 in this funding application for Mary's time. Calculate the fringe benefit costs by multiplying the organization's fringe benefit rate by the salary amount.

$10,000 multiplied by 25.5% = $2,550

Mary's fringe benefit costs for the funding application budget is $2,550.

Travel

Travel costs typically include lodging, meals, mileage, transportation, and local travel. Federal funding applications will require the use of the per diem rates from the United States General Services Administration when calculating travel expenses.

Consider that per diem rates may vary across the year depending on where and when staff are traveling. An example would be if staff will attend a conference as part of the program. Often, a lodging rate will be different in a highly populated metropolitan area during the peak travel season, typically the summer. Using a per diem rate reflective of lodging rates during the winter may result in a budget shortfall.

Please refer to the specific guidelines in the request for proposal when preparing the travel budget.

Equipment

Equipment includes those non-expendable items with a purchase price of $5,000 or more and a useful life of two or more years. If the budget includes items in the equipment category, the item must be necessary to fulfill program deliverables.

Pay attention to federal requirements for an annual count of any equipment purchased using federal dollars. Often, an organization will provide a unique identifier on the equipment (such as a computer) to include in the annual equipment audit.

Supplies

Supplies will typically include office supplies, postage, paper, and expendable items costing less than $5,000.

Construction

Construction costs are not allowable for federal applications. Please refer to the request for proposal and funding application budget instructions if there are anticipated construction costs and review the funder's guidelines on including this in the budget.

Consultant Fees

Consultant fees include costs to individuals who are not officers or employees of the organization and where the services rendered are needed to fulfill program deliverables.

Among other services, this could include sign language interpreters who are required for staff as a reasonable accommodation or interpreters provided to project consumers. This could also include fees for making written material accessible to staff or the public with visual disabilities.

Direct vs. Indirect Costs

In developing and understanding the budget, it is important to distinguish between direct costs versus indirect costs.

DIRECT COSTS

Direct costs are costs that can be specifically attributed to the program. The following budget categories are typically known as direct costs: personnel, rent, fringe benefits, travel, equipment, supplies, construction, consultant fees, and other costs.

These are the costs that can easily show how they are allocated, allowable, and reasonable toward meeting program objectives.

INDIRECT COSTS

Indirect costs include items not easily allocated towards one program objective, but are necessary to operate the business in order to fulfill program objectives. Typical indirect costs expenses could include general supplies, utilities, accounting costs, computer costs, etc.

INDIRECT COST RATE

An indirect cost rate provides a percentage of an organization's indirect costs to its direct costs to charge indirect costs against cost objectives fairly.

Suppose the organization does not have a federally-approved indirect cost rate. In this case, a de minimis rate of 10% of modified total direct costs may be opted for. Another option is to request an indirect cost rate from the representative federal agency.

Budget Narrative

Now that budget costs are outlined, a budget narrative must be included (also called a justification) to those outlined costs. The narrative should show the reasonableness of each expense and show how it is allocated (allocable) and allowable.

When completing the narrative, ensure details are as specific as possible and try to avoid using estimates.

A sample budget is explained below to provide a general overview of what is typically requested. Please follow the budget narrative guidelines provided in the request for proposal, as each budget narrative request will vary.

EXAMPLE 5

Sample Budget Narrative

A.   PERSONNEL

Name	Position	Salary	Grant Percentage	Grant Cost
Mary Smith	Program Coordinator	$50,000	20%	$10,000
John Garcia	Program Assistant	$35,000	15%	$5,250
Total				**$15,250**

Mary Smith will serve as the program coordinator for this award and will provide 20% of their time to ensure program deliverables are met, complete monthly internal and quarterly reports, manage partner relations for the program and supervise the program assistant.

John Garcia will serve as the program assistant for this award. They will provide 15% of their time by coordinating meetings between partners, taking meeting minutes, and providing administrative support to the program.

B. FRINGE BENEFITS

MARY SMITH, PROGRAM COORDINATOR			
Fringe Benefit	Annual Cost	Grant Percentage	Grant Cost
FICA	$10,000	7.65%	$765
Retirement	$10,000	5%	$500
Medical Insurance	$10,000	8%	$800
Life Insurance	$10,000	1.85%	$185
Vision Insurance	$10,000	1%	$100
Dental Insurance	$10,000	2%	$200
Total			$2,550

JOHN GARCIA, PROGRAM ASSISTANT			
Fringe Benefit	Annual Cost	Grant Percentage	Grant Cost
FICA	$5,250	7.65%	$402
Retirement	$5,250	5%	$263
Medical Insurance	$5,250	8%	$420
Life Insurance	$5,250	1.85%	$97
Vision Insurance	$5,250	1%	$53
Dental Insurance	$5,250	2%	$105
Total			$1,340

Total Fringe Benefit Costs: $3,890

The following fringe benefits are provided to employees: FICA, retirement, medical insurance, life insurance, vision insurance, and dental insurance. The organization's fringe benefit rate for this award year is 25.5%.

C. TRAVEL

Purpose of Travel	Location	Computation	Cost
Local program mileage	City / State	50 miles per month multiplied by .625 cents per mile multiplied by 12 months	$375
Total Travel Costs			**$375**

Local program mileage is anticipated for the program personnel to use their personal vehicle when meeting in-person to conduct program activities with consumers and partners. The rate is calculated using the current 2023 General Services Administration, GSA mileage reimbursement rate of .625/mile and estimated at 50 miles for 12 months for one staff member working on this program. Check the GSA website for current reimbursement rates.

D. EQUIPMENT

Item	Notes	Computation	Cost
Braille Notetaker Tablets	Five braille notetaker tablets will be purchased to ensure participants have access to course materials	5 at $5,000	$25,000
Total Equipment Costs			**$25,000**

E. SUPPLIES

Item	Notes	Computation	Cost
General Office Supplies	Office supplies necessary for routine operations	$25 per month multiplied by 12 months	$300
Laptop Computer	Computer for Program Coordinator to allow for remote work	$1,400	$1,400
Total Supplies Cost			**$1,700**

General office supplies will be purchased for the general operation of the project. Supplies may include pens, paper, notepads, etc.

A laptop computer will be purchased for the Program Coordinator for project work and presentations.

F.   CONSTRUCTION

Total Construction Costs: $0
No construction costs will be purchased for this project.

G.   CONSULTANT FEES

Item	Notes	Computation	Cost
AA Interpreting	Sign Language Interpreting	$150 per hour multiplied by 15 hours	$2,250
Total Consultant Costs			**$2,250**

AA Interpreting will serve as a contractor to provide 15 hours of sign language interpreting to ensure program participants have equal access to information being provided.

H. OTHER COSTS

Item	Notes	Computation	Cost
Rent	Rent costs for program participants to utilize classroom space during the project year	$35 per square feet multiplied by 400 square feet	$14,000
Total Other Costs			**$14,000**

I. INDIRECT COSTS

Item	Notes	Computation	Cost
	An approved indirect cost rate of 14.5% is on file with the US Department of Health and Human Services. The base is calculated using Direct Costs (excludes equipment and contractor costs)	$53,001 multiplied by 14.5%	$7,685
Total Indirect Costs			**$7,685**

Item	Cost
Personal	$15,250
Fringe Benefits	$3,890
Travel	$375
Equipment	$25,000
Supplies	$1,700
Construction	$0
Consultant Fees	$2,250
Other Costs	$14,000
Indirect Costs	$7,685
Total	**$70,150**

Matching Funds

Some funding applications will require (or encourage) the use of matching funds. Matching funds are funds the organization provides in addition to the funding award. Matching funds can include a cash match contribution or an in-kind service (volunteer hours, donated equipment, etc.). A cash match contribution could include operating funds from the organization or another funded award with similar goals and objectives.

If submitting a grant application to a federal funder, there are specific standards on what may be counted towards the match and how this must be documented. Please refer to the request for proposal application instructions for specific details on how to determine matching funds.

Uniform Guidance (2 C.F.R. Part 200)

Uniform Guidance is listed in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), and it outlines the administrative requirements, cost principles, and audit requirements for federal awards to non-federal entities.

UNALLOWABLE COSTS

Uniform guidance will dictate unallowable costs. Unallowable costs are costs that are not able to be charged to a federal funder. Typically, unallowable costs can include (but are not limited to): entertainment, alcohol, food, and lobbying activities.

Chapter 8: Implementation and Resources

The following resources can help with finding, applying for, and managing funding opportunities. Some are specific to CILs while others are more general.

Additional Resources

Operational Management

INTERNAL CONTROLS FOR CENTERS FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING
Strong, comprehensive internal controls are a critical piece of sound financial management at successful CILs. This training provides an overview of nonprofit internal controls that every CIL needs. The free training provided by ILRU provides an overview of necessary written controls and procedures for federal awards.

APPLYING INDIRECT COST RATE AT CENTERS FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING
This training provides guidance on how to apply a federally approved indirect cost rate. Information includes how to prepare drawdowns and vouchers, how to monitor the rate throughout the year, and how to resolve variations in actual expenses.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT FOR CENTERS FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING, REGULATIONS AND BEYOND
Provides guidance on how to strengthen Center operations, effectively manage finances, and ensure compliance with federal regulations. This training provides the skills and resources essential to sound financial management in a thriving Center for Independent Living.

Grant Opportunities

GRANTS.GOV
Database and resource tool that collects all federal and cooperative agreement opportunities from across all agencies. Ability to search by funding agency, type of funding, and category of funding. Also provides resources such as grant writing tips, grant learning center, and support center.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Includes listing of grants specifically available under the administration of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Some relevant agencies are below. Note, this is an abbreviated list of agencies under the auspices of HHS authorization.

- Administration for Children and Families
- Administration for Community Living
- Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response
- Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality
- Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services
- Food and Drug Administration
- Health Resources and Services Administration
- Indian Health Services
- National Institutes of Health
- Office for Civil Rights
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

From here, an organization may be able to focus on program development based on the available funding stream as provided by the appropriate agency. As Administration for Community Living may be the primary department to begin a search, this list allows an organization to think across other agencies to support their mission.

Remember, other federal departments may be interested in reviewing from time to time including the Department of Education, Department of Justice, Department of Agriculture, Department of Labor, Department of Housing and Urban Development, among others.

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