

GRANT SEEKING TIPS



This handout is an introduction to grant seeking for animal rescues/shelters. It includes a description of steps in the grant seeking process, items to consider before embarking on grant seeking, tips on preparing a grant request, and additional resources.

An Overview

Grants are awarded by a “grant-maker,” usually a nonprofit foundation. In the animal welfare field, different funding sources are suited to different rescue activities. While individuals are often moved to help individual dogs whose stories and progress they can follow, foundations want to make an impact on the root causes of a problem and support programs that are aligned with their mission. Foundations seek to fund innovative programs and share successful program models with rescues across the animal welfare field. A foundation grant can provide a larger amount of funding than an individual but is more restrictive in how the funds can be used. Grants are a good source of funding for starting a new program or expanding a successful program.

The Process

Obtaining grants to support your work is much like successfully matching animals and adopters. Rescues need to research and carefully identify grants where there is a match between the foundation’s goals and those of your rescue.

Grant size and what is funded. Numerous animal welfare foundations provide small, one-year grants for program activities that range from \$1,000-\$5,000 to rescues in each state. Many of them are foundations created by pet businesses, such as Petco, Pedigree, and Petfinder, who want to support animal rescue. Grants are awarded for program activities including spay/neuter, adoption, foster programs, transportation, emergency veterinary assistance, and other needs. Some grant-makers fund capital projects (buildings and equipment). Foundations typically do not fund operating costs unless the costs are associated with the program for which you seek funding. This can include staff time, supplies, rent, transportation, etc.

Common grant requirements. Some foundations require you to become a member or partner of the foundation to be eligible for a grant and require grantees to submit an annual report on the number of animals saved to be eligible for funding. The Bissell Foundation, one of the largest rescue foundations, requires rescues to be a partner for six months prior to submitting a grant request. Most foundations require a brief annual report on the number of animals saved. A few foundations require a site visit as part of the grant approval process.

Grant deadlines and receipt of funds. Most grant-making for animal welfare is done once or twice a year. A few grants are given on a rolling basis, meaning that you

can apply at any time during the year and decisions are made several times per year. Emergency veterinary costs or disaster assistance are examples. Be aware that it can take several months for you to be notified about whether you've been awarded a grant.

The application. Applying for a grant is a simple online process in which you answer questions and attach supporting documents. You may need to set up an account in the foundation's grants portal. Grant applications often include the following.

- Mission statement (clear and succinct)
- Program goals and activities for which you are seeking funding (specific and measurable)
- Program budget (by line item)
- Number of animals your rescue saves per year and number that will be saved through the proposed program
- Board of Directors list (including their role in the organization and professional affiliation, if applicable)
- Annual financial report (income and expense report, profit and loss statements or Form 990 for the past 1-3 years; in most cases, a third-party audited financial statement is not needed)
- IRS Determination letter

What to Consider Before Investing in Grant Seeking

One of the first questions to ask yourself before deciding to apply for a grant is: Do you have someone who can compile the necessary information and prepare the grant request? This person can be the director, a board member, or a key volunteer. You don't need a "grant writer," but you do need someone who can explain clearly what you want to do and has access to the financial and program information requested, including number of animals saved, budget, financial reports, board list, etc.

You can also reach out to your community to find a volunteer who has grant preparation experience or is willing to learn. Note: Who Will Let the Dogs Out is available to provide advice and training. Don't hesitate to contact Nicole Sandler, Who Will Let the Dogs Out Grants Advisor, at nicole@wwldo.org to discuss your readiness for grant seeking and how to get started.

Other questions to consider:

- Is the grant consistent with your mission and strategy or are you stretching yourself to fit your rescue to the grant criteria?
- Can you meet the grant conditions, for example, spending the funds in the allotted time, tracking the number of animals saved, and preparing a final report?
- How will you sustain the activity after the grant funding ends? This is a common question in grant applications.

Tips for Preparing a Grant Request

- **Do some research before starting an application.** To begin, sign up for several animal welfare foundations' mailing lists and check the grants section of their website periodically. Attend the foundation's annual grant guidelines webinar if possible (Petco Love offers one at the start of each grant cycle). Review their areas of interest, eligibility criteria, types of activities funded, deadlines, average grant size, and whether they've funded an organization like yours in the past. Most foundations list prior grantees on their website. Read the fine print to ensure that your rescue is eligible in terms of your areas of work, nonprofit status, and budget size, etc. Most foundations require that you have 501c3 tax exempt status to apply. Remember that WWLDO has prepared a helpful summary of grant opportunities to help get you started or use throughout the year.
- **Follow application guidelines and requirements carefully.** Read grant guidelines and FAQs carefully. Be sure to answer every question in the application. If a question doesn't apply, put "not applicable" or a "0" in the budget line item. Include exactly what they ask for, and don't add extra information. Note that many applications have a word limit on each section or question. Most applications have a checklist of required documentation, attachments, schedules, financials, signature pages, etc. Note that some funders require the Executive Director to sign the cover page, so make sure they're available.
- **Carefully consider the amount to request.** Check to see whether the foundation has a funding threshold. In general, it is not advised to request more than 25-30% of your annual budget. Some foundations only allow you to request up to 10% of your annual budget.
- **Collaborations/partnerships are important to funders.** Make sure to highlight collaborations and partnerships in your proposal, including fellow rescues or shelters, community organizations, local government, or businesses.
- **Reporting.** Funders normally require a brief final report on how the money was spent and the number of animals saved as a result. Some funders have their own reporting format. If they allow it, submit great pictures of the dogs helped.
- **Documents or information to have on hand, up to date and accessible to the person preparing the grant application:**
 - IRS determination letter.
 - Board list with names, addresses and professional affiliations.
 - Form 990 for the last three years.
 - Annual budget.
 - Demographic information about your city, county or region, including number of people/households; race/ethnicity; per capita income or poverty rate (You can find at this at [census.gov/quickfacts](https://www.census.gov/quickfacts))

Finally, here's an interview with a shelter advocate and a volunteer grant writer who have successfully secured grants for one struggling shelter. The interview is conducted over two videos: [Part One](#) and [Part Two](#). Hopefully they'll answer some of your questions, elaborate on some areas you'd like to better understand, and most of all, provide you some inspiration. You too can write successful grants! Good luck!