

Cooper Foundation Funding Considerations

We fund projects and organizations of many different types and sizes. Our application form is intentionally simple, with broad questions that are generalized to accommodate numerous and diverse applicants. Four narrative sections include: Request Description, Who is Served, Funding, and Outcomes. We also require supporting documentation including budgets, financial reports, and board and staff lists.

We review applications with two overall questions in mind:

1. Are the programs, services, and mission important to the community?
2. Does the organization have the operational and governance capacity to fulfill its mission?

As we review applications, we ask a variety of questions to be sure we understand the request and to assess the organization's ability to make a difference in the community. We most often include conversations with applicants to supplement this review.

Programs and Services – Does the organization have expertise in the field? Are programs and services described in detail? Are they designed and delivered using the best practices? Has the organization succeeded in similar endeavors of equal size and scale to what they are now proposing?

Audience/clientele – How many are directly served by the program/organization? What are the demographics of the people who are served? Who are the indirect beneficiaries of this work? How does the organization reach their audience? If a goal is to increase the numbers served, how will that be done?

Partnerships and affiliations – What agencies, institutions, or other entities does the organization work with in planning, delivering, funding, or evaluating their programs and services?

Staffing – Who is responsible for the work described in the application? Is staffing sufficient to achieve the objectives of the proposal?

Funding – What is the organization's plan to raise the funds necessary for this proposal? Besides this request, what are the other sources of funding? Is that funding confirmed or pending? What are the fundraising methods, tactics, and strategies? What is the longer-term plan for sustainability?

Outcomes – Are the goals clearly stated? How does the organization measure its effectiveness? What are the measurement tools and how are they deployed? What are the benchmarks that indicate success?

Project budget – Does the project budget fully reflect the scope of the activities described in the application? Is it accurate and complete? Does the income in the project budget reflect the funding plan described in the application?

Operating budget – Is it accurate and complete? Are sources of income specified? Is the budget balanced (zero balance or net income)? Is the organization projecting a deficit budget? If so, why? Deficit budgets are a concern and will not be accepted unless the organization has a compelling reason and explanation for presenting a deficit operating budget.

Financial reporting – Are current financial reports complete, accurate, and timely? Is the time period clearly stated? Do separate reports for the same time period reconcile each other? Are the reports presented in a format that is adequately sophisticated for the size and scope of the organization?

Audit, Review of Financial Statements, or Year-End financial reports – Does the organization have a third-party financial review? Is the level of review adequate for the size and scope of the organization? Did the organization have an operating loss at year-end? If so, why?

Leadership – Does the organization have an active, engaged and diverse board that meets regularly and systematically reviews the organization’s financial reports and programs? What is the board’s role in planning, fundraising, and oversight of senior staff?