



# Build Your Women-Owned Business Through Grant Opportunities



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Women-owned businesses are critical to the success of any economy. They are significant drivers of job creation and economic growth. The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) notes that women represent one in three innovative, high-growth entrepreneurs globally. Women are two out of every five early-stage entrepreneurs globally as well. The World Economic Fund (WEF) looked at data across 22 countries and found the growth in the share of women founders has far outpaced that of men founders over the past five years. There is also an increase in the dollar investments in women-owned businesses worldwide.

In the United States (U.S.) alone as of 2018, there are over 12 million women-owned businesses that employ over 10.1 million workers in total. These businesses span all major sectors of the U.S. economy and contribute over \$2 trillion in annual sales. GEM reports elevated levels of early-stage entrepreneurial activity during the COVID-19 pandemic, although WEF notes that at least some of these were necessity founders due to job scarcity.

The [Dell Women's Entrepreneur Network \(DWEN\)](#) started during the height of the 2009 recession as a way to empower women entrepreneurs during another tough economic period. DWEN supports women entrepreneurs in three main ways:

- **Connect:** Access to a growing global community of women entrepreneurs, investors, and advisors both in-person and online.
- **Inspire:** Sharing stories, learning from others. DWEN spotlights its members on DWEN.com and through Dell Technologies
- **Transform:** Tailored content and technology resources to help accelerate women-owned businesses and help them reach their maximum potential.

Although there continues to be increases in women-owned businesses, they still make up only a relatively small percentage of all businesses in the U.S. and worldwide. Founders often struggle to access capital, networks, and resources needed to build their businesses. As noted in the DWEN Women Entrepreneurs (WE) Cities Index 2023, location can also have an enormous impact on women entrepreneurs trying to build a business, with wide variation in markets, talent, capital, culture, and technology from city to city. DWEN empowers female founders and provides them with the tools and resources to build their businesses.

Want to explore the DWEN Women Entrepreneurs Cities Index 2023 in more detail? Check out the report [here](#).

Additionally, through the WE Cities Index, Dell looked at [a deep dive into the Technology pillar](#) to provide insight into how technology impacts women entrepreneurs' ability to start and scale a business. One



entrepreneur Dell interviewed summed it up best: “You cannot scale without technology. Technology can save time, human error, it collects vast amounts of information, it can simplify processes, it helps with engagement, it helps reach people in different geographies and create far more impact + generate more revenue.” (CEO, 1-10 employees, Management Consulting, Australia). The report also highlights some of the strategies to take when funding technology, as it appears to be one of the main barriers to technology adoption.

Even with all the available resources, finding funding to support business growth can still be a challenge. In the following sections, DWEN and Grants Office LLC will describe the grant funding landscape for women-owned businesses in the U.S., as well as tips for getting grant-ready and successfully pursuing funding. There is also a glossary of helpful terms at the end to help with understanding grants.

## Grant Funding Landscape for Women-Owned Businesses in the U.S.

### Major Federal Funding Sources

[Small Business Innovation Research \(SBIR\)](#) grants are the most common source of federal funding that small businesses can pursue. The SBIR program aims to stimulate technological innovation, promote research and development (R&D), and encourage small businesses to commercialize their innovations. Individual federal agencies administer their own SBIR programs, with a total of twelve agencies participating in the SBIR program, such as the Department of Health and Human Services, the National Science Foundation, the Department of Commerce, and the Department of Education. These highly competitive grants are primarily awarded based on the technical merits of a proposed project and its commercial potential.

SBIR grants are highly competitive and typically awarded through a phased approach. The program consists of three phases:

1. Phase I: In this initial phase, small businesses receive funding to conduct feasibility studies, proof-of-concept research, or preliminary development of innovative ideas. Phase I grants are usually relatively small, allowing businesses to evaluate the technical merit and commercial potential of their proposed project.
2. Phase II: If a small business completes Phase I and demonstrates the project's potential, it may be eligible for Phase II funding. Phase II grants support further R&D efforts, prototype development, and more comprehensive testing. These grants are larger and longer in duration compared to Phase I grants.
3. Phase III: Unlike the previous phases, Phase III does not involve SBIR funding. Instead, it refers to the commercialization stage where small businesses are expected to pursue additional funding from non-SBIR sources to bring their products or services to the marketplace. Phase III can involve partnerships with private investors, government contracts, or other means of funding.

Winning an SBIR grant can enhance the credibility and visibility of women-owned businesses, giving them a competitive advantage when seeking additional funding or attracting investors. SBIR funding can also provide crucial funding for entrepreneurs to refine their ideas and bring their products or services closer to commercialization.

## State and Local Funding Opportunities

While there is not much funding available that businesses can directly apply for, many states across the country administer their workforce development grant programs. These programs are often designed to enable workforce training entities to build a pipeline of workers who can support the state's major economic industries. State workforce grants can be a valuable way to foster collaboration between workforce development entities and businesses in need of talent. While the types of grants available will vary by state, they often center around areas such as:

- **Workforce Training and Education:** Equip participants with the skills and knowledge needed to meet the demands of specific industries or occupations. These might include apprenticeship programs, education programs, or on-the-job training.
- **Job Placement and Career Services:** Provide job placement assistance, career counseling, and support services to help connect job seekers with available opportunities.
- **Employer and Industry Partnerships:** Encourage collaboration between employers, industry associations, and educational institutions to bridge the gap between industry needs and the skills of the local workforce.

Additionally, many state workforce grants prioritize projects that will benefit populations who have traditionally been excluded from the workforce, such as justice-involved individuals, people with disabilities, immigrants, and veterans.

For instance, California's Workforce Accelerator Fund brings together teams of employers, workforce experts, and other labor or policy groups to develop innovative employment solutions for disadvantaged populations. By bringing together diverse stakeholders, Workforce Accelerator projects can potentially foster new and impactful workforce projects that are scalable.

There are also grants like the Massachusetts Workforce Training Fund Program, which provides grants to Massachusetts employers to train current and newly hired employees. Depending on the employer's needs, they can receive funding for a large-scale two-year training project or express short-term training.

## Funding Priorities

Below are some federal and state grants that women-owned businesses can pursue either on their own or in partnership with other workforce organizations.

While there are no specific grants that women-owned businesses are solely eligible to apply for, the federal government has a direct interest in receiving more applications from them. The Small Business Association's (SBA) [Federal and State Technology \(FAST\) Partnership Program](#) is designed to help increase the number of SBIR/STTR (Small Business Technology Transfer) awards from different underrepresented groups, including women.

Moreover, housed within the [SBA is its Office of Women's Business Ownership](#), which oversees initiatives to empower women entrepreneurs and address the unique challenges they face. While this office does not provide direct funding to women-owned businesses, it does provide additional resources to foster



the growth of women entrepreneurs. This includes educational resources and training programs, facilitating loan programs, and organizing networking opportunities.

### Table of Grant Opportunities

<b>Small Business Innovation Research</b>	<b>Funding Amount and Deadline</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Program Page Link</b>
Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR)	Phase I amounts are typically up to \$295,924 Phase II amounts are typically up to \$1.9 million (unless otherwise noted below)	Small businesses can explore their technological potential through investments in Federal research funds based on critical priorities	<a href="http://www.sbir.gov/funding">www.sbir.gov/funding</a>
<b>Agencies Administering SBIR and Additional Funds</b>			
Small Business Administration	Management and Technical Assistance Program  Contact the local SBA office for deadline information.	Provide high-quality assistance to eligible businesses to help them be competitive for federal, state, and local government contracts	<a href="https://www.sba.gov/federal-contracting/contracting-assistance-programs/7j-management-technical-assistance-program">https://www.sba.gov/federal-contracting/contracting-assistance-programs/7j-management-technical-assistance-program</a>
Department of Agriculture	Phase I solicitations are typically released in July with October deadlines. Phase II solicitations are typically released in December with February deadlines.	Topic areas include: Forests and Related Resources; Plant Production and Protection - Biology; Animal Production and Protection; Conservation of Natural Resources; Food Science and Nutrition; Rural and Community Development; Aquaculture; Biofuels and Biobased Products; Small and Mid-size Farms; and Plant Production and Protection - Engineering	<a href="https://www.nifa.usda.gov/grants/programs/sbir-sttr/sbir-topic-areas">https://www.nifa.usda.gov/grants/programs/sbir-sttr/sbir-topic-areas</a>
Department of Commerce	Applications are typically due in June.	Sample of 2023 topic areas include:	<a href="https://www.nist.gov/tpo/small-business-">https://www.nist.gov/tpo/small-business-</a>

		Cybersecurity and Privacy; Advanced Communications, Networks, and Scientific Data Systems; Physical Infrastructure and Resilience; and Health and Biological Systems Measurements	<a href="#">innovation-research-program-sbir</a>
Department of Defense	Deadlines are established throughout the year for assorted topics	Investments typically include: Establishing a DoD-wide, mission-focused roadmap to chart the path to deliver the technical capabilities needed by our warfighters; Assessing the range of activities in their technical area, including what is occurring in DoD, other executive branch agencies, the commercial world, academia, and other countries; Leading independent technical analyses; and Conducting engagement and outreach across the community	<a href="https://www.defensesbirstr.mil/">https://www.defensesbirstr.mil/</a>
Department of Education	Solicitations are usually released in early winter with deadlines approximately 60 days later	Phase I is rapid prototype development and evaluation of new education technology prototypes  Phase II is the full-scale development and evaluation of new	<a href="https://www2.ed.gov/programs/sbir/index.html">https://www2.ed.gov/programs/sbir/index.html</a>



		education technology products	
Department of Energy	Phase I solicitations are typically released in August with October deadlines. Phase II solicitations are typically released in October with December deadlines.	Topics will support DOE's mission in Energy production; Energy use; Fundamental energy sciences; Environmental management; and Defense nuclear nonproliferation	<a href="https://science.osti.gov/sbir">https://science.osti.gov/sbir</a>
Department of Health and Human Services	Applications are typically accepted three times a year: September 5, January 5, and April 5.	Example research areas include: Alzheimer's Disease; Neurological or Neuromuscular Disorders; Research on Pain, Pain Management, and Opioids in Aging, among many more	<a href="https://seed.nih.gov/small-business-funding/find-funding/sbir-sttr-funding-opportunities">https://seed.nih.gov/small-business-funding/find-funding/sbir-sttr-funding-opportunities</a>
Department of Homeland Security	Solicitations usually open in December with January deadlines.	Topics relevant to these organizations: Borders and Maritime Security; Chemical/Biological Defense; Cyber Security, Explosives; and First Responder Group	<a href="https://sbir.dhs.gov/sbir/public">https://sbir.dhs.gov/sbir/public</a>
Department of Transportation	Maximum thresholds for Phase I and Phase II awards at \$200,000 and \$1,500,000, respectively. Phase I and Phase II solicitations are typically due in March.	Some 2023 research topics included: traffic monitoring using edge computing; novel design for passenger railcar glazing securement; VR training on impaired driving for law enforcement; and wearable PPE-integrated sensors for first responders	<a href="https://www.volpe.dot.gov/work-with-us/small-business-innovation-research/23-solicitation-document">https://www.volpe.dot.gov/work-with-us/small-business-innovation-research/23-solicitation-document</a>

Environmental Protection Agency	Phase I solicitations open in June with August deadlines.	2022 projects included: technologies for detecting methane emissions, methods to prolong the shelf life of foods and reduce food waste, software systems to improve recycling and materials management, and a water sampling device to detect the presence of PFAS	<a href="https://www.epa.gov/sbir">https://www.epa.gov/sbir</a>
National Aeronautics and Space Administration	Solicitations typically open in January with February deadlines.	Examples of research topics from recent solicitation include: in-space propulsion technologies; communications and navigation; sensors, detectors, and instruments; advanced telescope technologies	<a href="https://sbir.gsfc.nasa.gov/">https://sbir.gsfc.nasa.gov/</a>
National Science Foundation	Phase I deadlines are typically early March, July, and November each year.	Funding topics such as: Advanced Manufacturing; Artificial Intelligence; Cloud and High-Performance Computing; Cybersecurity and Authentication; Digital Health; IoT; Medical Devices; Mobility; Power Management; Quantum IT; Robotics; Semiconductors; Space; Wireless Technologies; and more	<a href="https://www.sbir.gov/node/2279115">https://www.sbir.gov/node/2279115</a>

## Getting Grant Ready & Common Proposal Elements

Grant funding can be just what you need to launch a new program or project, but before you even begin looking for that perfect grant opportunity, you need to get your grant toolbox ready. Your toolbox is



essential for every grant. While some tools may need to be added over time for specific grants, each toolbox should contain the basics.

### What do you need to get started?

First, you need a grants team. Your team will include, but not necessarily be limited to based on the grant requirements, a project lead/manager, a grant writer (if you don't have someone, there are contractual options), a member of your finance team, and at least one member of each of the departments/divisions that will be part of the grant project or program if awarded. You will also need the approval of appropriate management staff before applying for a grant, so it is important to include them in your team as well or at least keep updated as you plan. Smaller organizations may require team members to wear multiple hats.

Next, you will need to collect your key documents. These are standard documents most grants require. These include your most recent audit (or financial statement if an audit is not complete), tax documents, non-profit/ 501c3 documentation (if applicable), most recent budget, organizational chart, and listing of the board of directors. Some grants will also request a copy of by-laws, strategic plans, mission/vision statements, the history of the organization, needs assessments, applicable licenses/certificates, and key policies such as non-discrimination and conflict of interest policies (if you don't have these it is a good idea to be pro-active and create them in advance, especially if they have to be approved by legal and your board). Additional documents such as demographics, key programmatic or applicable data, or access to updated data sources, letters of support, and annual reports can also be helpful. These documents will need to be updated at least annually. This is a suitable time to review and update your mission and vision statement if it has not been done in quite a while. Having an updated strategic plan also helps not only in the grant application process but also helps identify which grants best align with your goals and needs, now and in the near future, allowing you to apply for the grants that best meet your needs.

If you are applying, or planning to apply, for federal or state grants you will need to set up certain required account registrations, which will need to be kept active and up to date. Key accounts to register for include but are not limited to [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov), [SAM.gov](https://www.sam.gov), and your local state grants system (often each state agency has its own. Make sure to register for all agency systems that apply to your business). When considering a new grant opportunity, read the NOFO (Notice of Funding Opportunity Report) as soon as it is posted and apply for any additional accounts not already in your toolbox. These accounts can take some time to set up and get approved, up to 4-6 weeks in some cases, so it is advised to do this as soon as possible. Failure to set up and keep these accounts current can delay or prevent an organization from applying for a grant opportunity. Many of these accounts require renewal to be kept active. Make sure you can access these accounts regularly and keep passwords, users, and required uploaded documents up to date. Some accounts require certain documents to be uploaded within a certain period after approval or change. Make sure you are aware of and abide by all account requirements. Note who the assigned user for the account is, as well as any important renewal dates. If an assigned user leaves or the organization moves, make sure the account is updated as soon as possible. Assigned users should provide their username and password for access before their departure if possible.

Now you are ready to start your grant search. To help narrow your search, consider what is the problem or project you are looking to fund. Develop a problem statement. Consider grant opportunities and sources that fit this need. Do not try to fit your project or program into an ill-fitting grant. This is a recipe for wasted time and an unfunded grant. In addition to your problem or project/program statement, also have a plan of action, plan timeline, budget estimate, sustainability plan (how will you continue to fund and run the program after the grant ends, if applicable), and benefits of the plan, program, or project to the larger community. Having a well-thought-out ready-to-go project or program shows the grantors you have invested time, talent, and knowledge into your proposal. It is also beneficial to have this information always ready as some grant opportunities arise with short deadlines, which makes organizations that are otherwise unprepared unable to apply in time.

## Grant Term Glossary

- **Applicant:** The organization requesting a grant. This entity will be responsible for the management of the project if awarded. Also known as the lead application or recipient.
- **Application Package:** A collection of one or more files that has all the information and forms needed to apply for a particular grant.
- **Budget Narrative:** A description of the budget, including explanations about how each line-item amount in the budget is derived, the totals, the purpose of purchased supplies and services, and the justification of the size of salaries, fringe benefits, and indirect costs. Also known as the budget justification.
- **Budget Period:** The interval of time that a project period is divided into for budgetary purposes, usually 12 months.
- **Competitive Grant:** A discretionary funding program where applications are scored by subject-matter experts and the most highly scored applications are considered for funding. In most cases, only some of the applicants will get an award.
- **Cost-Match:** A type of cost-share where the funder expects the recipient to contribute an amount equal to a certain portion of what the funder has granted. Cost matches are usually presented in the form of a ratio, such as a 1:1 match (meaning: applicants must provide a dollar-for-dollar match of non-federal funding for each grant dollar requested).
- **Cost-Share:** A general term for when the recipient must provide funding towards the proposed project. Cost shares are usually presented in the form of a percentage, such as a 50% cost-share (meaning: applicants must provide 50% of the total project costs from non-federal sources).
- **Deadline Date:** The date when an applicant must submit a grant application (by mail or electronically) to be considered for funding. In many cases, the funder requires that the application be received by the deadline date.
- **Formula Grant:** A funding program where the distributions to eligible recipients are pre-set by formulas. Also known as an entitlement grant.
- **Funding Priorities:** The one or more areas of focus on the grant funder. They are particularly interested in seeing applications on these topics. There are several types of priorities: (a) absolute: the applicant *must* address the priority to be considered for funding; (b) competitive:



the applicant may choose to address the priority and may receive additional points; and (c) invitational: the applicant is encouraged but not required to address the priority.

- **Grant:** A funding opportunity where a government or other funder provides monies to organizations to address a particular purpose.
- **Grant Application Reviewer:** An individual who reads and scores applications for a funder. Also known as a field reader, a proposal reviewer, or a peer reviewer.
- **Grant Award Notification (GAN):** An official document signed by the authorized official stating the amount, terms, and conditions of an award for a grant.
- **Grantee:** An individual or organization that has been awarded funds under a grant program. Also known as a recipient.
- **Indirect Cost Rate:** A percentage established by a funding agency for a grantee organization that is used in computing the dollar amount the recipient charges to the grant to reimburse itself for indirect costs incurred from conducting the grant project. This rate is most typically used by Federal departments and agencies, with a single indirect cost rate negotiated for a grantee organization to use for all projects from any Federal funder.
- **Indirect Costs:** The costs an entity incurs for common or joint objectives that cannot be identified with a particular grant project or other organizational activity.
- **Pass-Through Funding:** A grant program where dollars are transferred from a grant-making agency to an intermediate agency before being made available to local recipients. This type of funding is most often used by the Federal government to pass funds through States to end recipients.
- **Project Period:** The total amount of time that a funder authorizes a grantee to complete the approved work of the project described in the application. Project periods of more than one year are typically divided into budget periods.
- **Request for Proposals (RFP):** A general term for a funding solicitation that includes information about the program and what applicants will need to do to apply. Also known as a notice of funding opportunity (NOFO) or application guidance.
- **System for Award Management (SAM):** A United State Government system used to register entities that receive Federal funding. This registration will need to be renewed annually.
- **Sub-Grant:** An award provided to a grant recipient that is then passed on to another entity to complete part of the planned project.
- **Sub-Recipient:** The entity that receives a sub-grant.
- **Unique Entity ID (UEI):** A nine-digit number assigned to an organization as part of their SAM registration. Most Federal grant applications (and some other applications) will require the UEI as part of the submission process. This number does not expire.



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