

Managing Tribal Grants

A guide to helping tribal governments standardize grant management processes for compliance and maximum drawdown.

Introduction

Many tribal governments sustain their nation with grant funding. These awards fuel everything from their infrastructure to the healthcare, education, and housing provided to their members.

Unfortunately, a lack of resources plagues many tribal nations, making winning awards and maintaining successful grant management difficult to achieve. Not only do many tribal governments experience frequent turnover, but many tribes do not have enough people in the community to build out a full grants team nor do they have access to as many tools and as much information as other award applicants.

Along with funding community services that improve tribal members' quality of life, grants are also vital for tribal nations across the United States to preserve their culture. But to keep their cultures intact, tribes must learn how to focus on proper management of their grants and how to maintain compliance with Federal regulations to win and keep awards.

To ensure your tribe can properly handle these integral funds, read on to learn best practices for managing your tribal grant programs.

Compliance and Grant Dollars

Federal initiatives, such as the Digital Accountability and Transparency Act (DATA Act), OMB's Uniform Grant Guidance (UGG), and the Grant Reporting Efficiency and Agreements Transparency (GREAT) Act are continuing the trend of results-based fund distribution. Federal agencies increasingly want to know that they are funding programs that drive results and that money isn't being wasted or abused. As such, grant applicants that can demonstrate a history of performance results and the ability to accurately track outputs and outcomes will be favored.

Uniform Grant Guidance (UGG)	"Aims to reduce the administrative burden on award recipients and, at the same time, guard against the risk of waste and misuse of Federal funds." (grants.gov)
Digital Accountability and Transparency (DATA) Act	"The nation's first open data law. It requires the U.S. federal government to transform its spending information into open data." (datacoalition.org)
Treasury "Do Not Pay" Initiative	"The purpose of this order was to reduce improper payments by intensifying efforts to eliminate payment error, waste, fraud, and abuse in the major programs administered by the Federal Government, while continuing to ensure that Federal programs serve and provide access to their intended beneficiaries." (fiscal.treasury.gov)
Grant Reporting Efficiency and Assistance Transparency (GREAT) Act	"The proposed law will transform federal grant reporting from disconnected documents into open data by directing the executive branch to adopt a standardized data structure for the information grantees must report to agencies." (datacoalition.org)

Challenges and Solutions to Tribal Nation Grant Management

According to the United States government, there are now nearly 600 Federally recognized tribal nations that are eligible for funding and services from the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

With the aforementioned changing Federal regulations, now more than ever, compliance is of the utmost importance for tribal nations if they want to win and retain grant funding for their programs. Because of limited access to information and resources as well as the sheer breadth of services that grants fund for tribal nations, however, the distribution of grant funds is more crucial and more difficult. Some of the specific challenges tribes face today when it comes to managing their grants are below.

Understanding what these challenges entail as well as potential solutions to these setbacks is the first step to standardizing your tribal nation's grant management.

1. Difficulty maintaining accountability over Federal grant regulations

2. Lack of resources to dedicate to grants

3. Issues managing separate awards that fund a variety of services

4. Inability to secure funding

5. Issues with audits and fund spend

1. Difficulty maintaining accountability over Federal grant regulations

The Federal government is becoming more aware of the dollars it is allocating and is becoming more stringent when ensuring that recipients manage these dollars appropriately. If tribes aren't remaining educated on and complying with legislation, it could result in fees and the inability to acquire future funding.

SOLUTION

First and foremost, tribal nations should partner with a thought leader in the grants industry so they can remain abreast of any and all changes to Federal regulations before they go into effect, giving them time to adjust any processes, if needed.

There are also a number of practices recipient tribal nations can implement to make sure they are remaining compliant with Federal performance requirements. To properly manage performance, tribes should:

1



Associate costs with activities for performance progress

2



Identify potential changes in timeframes

3



Identify when performance goals were met and identify associated costs

4



Identify new strategies being used

2. Lack of resources to dedicate to grants

Because many tribes count less than several thousands of people as members, it can be difficult to retain a knowledgeable and robust team dedicated solely to the management of grants.

SOLUTION

According to feedback from users of Grant Management Software, **administrative time can drop by 72 percent following the adoption of Grant Management Software.**

Grant Management Software can help tribes that are unable to operate with a full grants team by:

1



Capturing all elements as data throughout the entire grant ecosystem

2



Automating financial and programmatic reporting

3



Receiving real-time snapshots of program effectiveness and internal status reports

4



Managing and receiving for all activity down to the subrecipient level

5



Easily integrate with Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP), financial and accounting, and HR/payroll systems

3. Issues managing separate awards that fund a variety of services

As mentioned, tribal nations are heavily reliant on grant funding to maintain their members' quality of life. But with grants supporting so many tribal functions, it can be hard to accurately and effectively manage them all at once, especially given tribal nations' lack of resources.

SOLUTION

Instead of using disparate systems, consolidate your information in one system to keep everyone from your team on the same page. So rather than relying on dry erase boards, sticky notes, and Excel spreadsheets, consider investing in one simple portal for grant management and reporting that your tribal members can access from any device, from any location.

It's also imperative that tribes devise a grant management process that they can customize, whether through tools or otherwise. By customizing tracking and reporting through specific field types, it's easier to provide each funder the information and data they need.



4. Inability to secure funding

Given the Federal government's recent push for grant accountability, many tribal nations may qualify as "high-risk applicants." This is because funders equate a lack of resources to a higher need for monitoring of performance and/ or an inability to achieve goals.

SOLUTION

Consider the SMART goals framework (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Timely) when applying for an award. Make strong connections back to this goal throughout your proposal.

If possible, let data tell your story. Grant making is moving toward results-based funding distribution. Clearly align grant funds with program objectives, then collect ample data to be used in your next application.



5. Issues with audits and fund spend

Improper allocation of grant funds can lead to missed drawdown or even repayment to the funding source. A number of public sector recipients have had to make repayments of hundreds of thousands of dollars to reconcile errors.

SOLUTION

Monitor spend and performance regularly. Reconcile balance sheets, review bank and investment accounts, and run financial expenditure reports (e.g. expenditures by project, time/cost versus budget, cost and trend).
Flag unusual activity.



Improving Tribal Nation Grant Management with Software

Specifically, tribal nations who have procured Grant Management Software have been able to successfully engage in the following grant management practices:



Automate a number of grant management tasks to reduce administrative burden on tribe members.

.....

Maintain awareness of and automatically comply with the Federal grant regulations.

.....

Keep all grant-related paperwork centralized and track all activities in one centralized location.

.....

Mindfulness of spending; Tracking grant parameters and not allocating money to items not outlined.

.....

Ability to prove and maintain accountability by tracking activities against goals.

.....

Maintain reports on both time and effort.

Next Steps for Tribal Nation Grant Management Improvement

Grant funding is what fuels the services tribal nations can provide to their members. So once a tribe can start developing better grant management habits, they are likely to see more tangible results from their grants. Along with the ability to sustain the tribal nations, once tribes start making changes to streamline their grant management, they will see increased funding, improved compliance, and a better overall focus on their grant programs.

1. Evaluate and understand the current grant landscape

Understand grant requirements when evaluating your grant funding for the next year. For example, due to recent revisions to Federal grant guidance, funders have more power now than ever to make risk-based decisions on awards. Ensure that your tribe is ready to maintain accountability over grant performance.

2. Pinpoint where your grant management processes are succeeding as well as lacking

Start with current grants. Properly allocate them toward goals and regularly monitor to meet performance expectations. Use this data to set your tribal nation up for future grant success.

3. Consider if procuring technology could streamline your grant management processes

Everything from the number of grants you manage to the tools you are currently utilizing will influence if software is right for your tribe. Think your tribe might be ready to consider Grant Management Software? [Take our readiness survey today.](#)

When you improve your grant management processes, it will not just make your internal workflow more streamlined. It will also result in more money for important programs and initiatives, ultimately improving your citizens' quality of life.



AmpliFund

AmpliFund is the leading purpose-built grant management platform designed for federal, state, local, and tribal governments to manage every phase of the grant management process. Our configurable solution provides a full suite of features needed by grant funders and recipients to maximize grant outcomes, meet performance standards, and increase compliance so they can achieve their missions.

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(216) 377-5500 | 812 Huron Rd E. | Cleveland, OH 44115 | [amplifund.com](#)