

COMMUNITY SCHOOL SUSTAINABILITY TOOLKIT

Sustaining and growing community schools requires strategic funding, strong partnerships, and effective communication. This toolkit is designed to equip community school practitioners and partners in Idaho with the resources they need to secure funding, engage local support, and share their impact. Inside, you'll find guidance on grant writing, leveraging partnerships, navigating federal funding opportunities, and advocating for your community school through storytelling and site visits. Additionally, real-life experts showcase how Idaho schools have successfully sustained and expanded their community school efforts during a recorded panel discussion.



Grant Resources

Securing funding through grants is a crucial part of sustaining and expanding community schools. Grants provide financial support to individuals, organizations, or projects for a specific purpose or goal. While they do not need to be repaid, they are not simply “free money.” Grants are competitive, targeted, extensive, and conditional, requiring thoughtful preparation and

alignment with funder priorities. This section offers resources to strengthen your grant-writing efforts, including links to helpful articles and graphics, templates, and example winning proposals. Whether you’re new to grant writing or refining your approach, these tools will help you craft compelling applications and secure essential funding.

Purpose of Grants

Grants provide financial support to individuals, organizations, or projects for a specific purpose or goal. Unlike loans, grants are not expected to be repaid. However, they should not be considered “free money,” as they come with specific requirements and expectations.

Key Characteristics of Grants

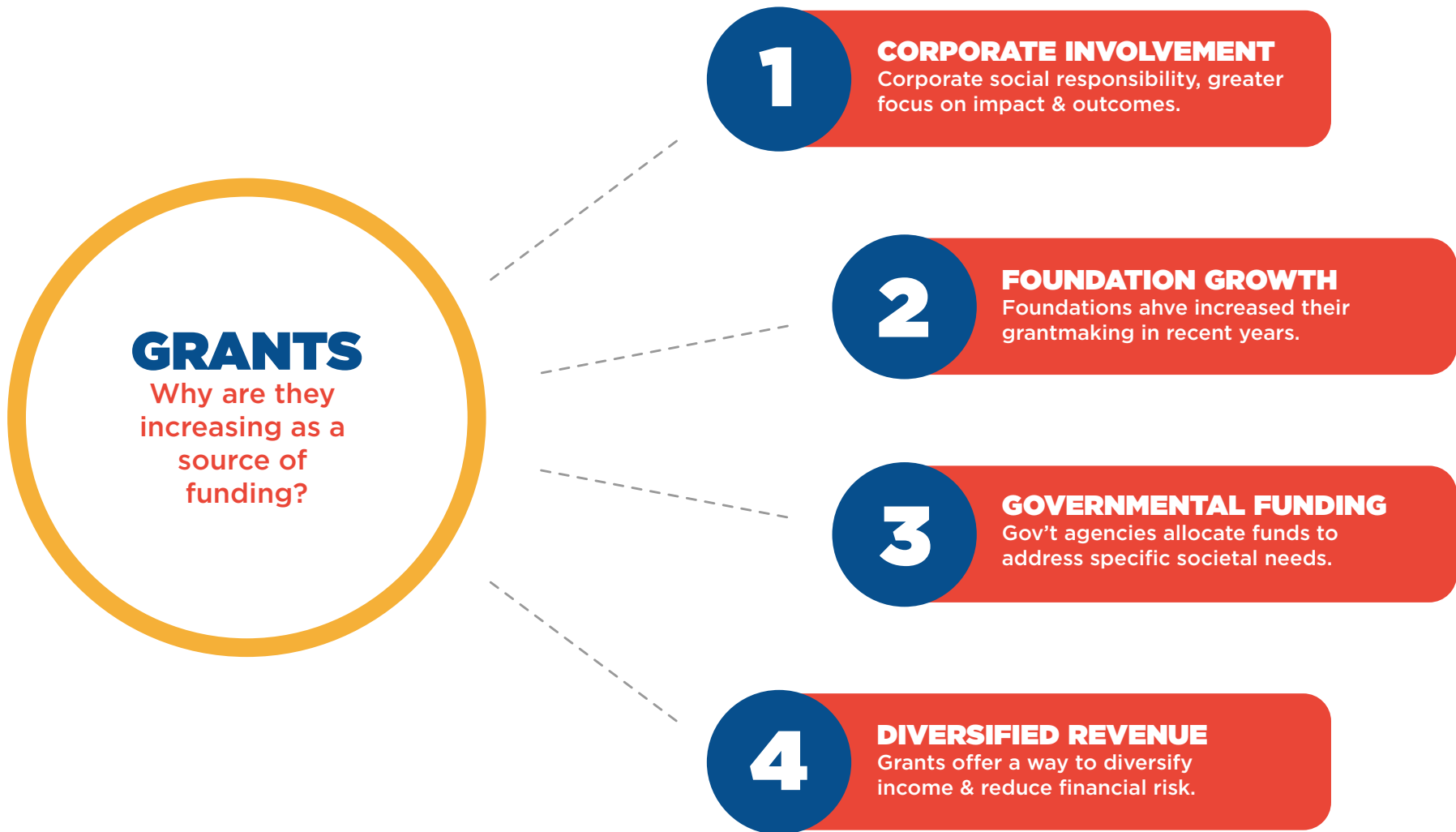
Competitive. Many organizations apply for limited funding opportunities.

Targeted. Funds are designated for specific purposes, programs, or initiatives.

Extensive. The application process can be detailed and time-consuming.

Conditional. Recipients must meet reporting and compliance requirements.





The Grant Writing Process

When you're working through the grant process, keep a few things in mind as you navigate through these six stages linked below:

Stage One

- Are your goals and mission clear?
- What are your funding gaps?
- Do you have capacity to fulfill the work?

Stage Two

- Utilize a variety of tools + use a grants calendar to track opportunities.
- Read the funder's RFP carefully.
- What did other organizations do right?

Stage Three

- Connect via email, LinkedIn, mutual contacts.
- Research their 990 and past awards, attend webinars (if available).
- If they've funded key partner(s), start a dialogue with them about it.



 [Sky Learning: 6 Stages of Grant Writing](#)

The Grant Writing Process *(CONT'D.)*

When you're working through the grant process, keep a few things in mind as you navigate through these six stages:

Stage Four

- Does your program fit with the funder's goals?
- If you aren't aligned, have alternatives ready to explore.
- Make notes as you explore different opportunities.

Stage Five

- Address the funder's priorities in your application.
- Include: need for project (incorporate data/storytelling), organization/community description and qualifications, budget, measurable outcomes and results, supporting doc's.
- Have someone else proofread/edit your application.
- Submit at least one full day before the deadline.
- Read the fine print! Sometimes there are character/word limits.

Stage Six

- Submit EOG (End of Grant) reports in a timely manner, if required.
- Thank the funder if you win an award.
- Thank them still even if you don't, and express gratitude for the opportunity.
- Keep lines of communication open.



LINKS & RESOURCES

 [Articles and Graphics](#)

 [Templates](#)

 [Winning Proposals](#)

Federal Resources

This toolkit was created by the federal government, and is designed primarily to help community school leaders, coordinators, advocates, and other stakeholders understand the scope of federal funding that has historically been used to support community schools. It links to many different funding streams and outlines the ways in which they can support various programs and activities that seek to support kids and families in a community school.



[Whitehouse Toolkit \(revised 2023\)](#)



Recorded Panel

Hear from four education professionals advancing community school strategy across Idaho, as they talk about blending and braiding funds, sustaining partnerships, and prioritizing this work in their districts.



[Watch Video](#)

[Read the Panel Transcript](#)



Communication

Effectively communicating the impact of your community school is essential for building support and securing long-term sustainability. This section provides resources on advocacy strategies, storytelling, and hosting site visits or tours to engage stakeholders. Whether you're speaking with policymakers, funders, or community members, these tools will help you craft compelling messages, showcase your school's successes, and inspire continued investment in your work.



National Materials

- [The Power of Community Schools](#)
- [Tell Your Story](#)

Coalition Comms materials

- [One pager with talking points](#)
- [Brochure](#)
- [Posters](#)
- [Policy Engagement Playbook](#)

In Building communication

- [ICCS PowerPoint - Shared mission](#)
- Reflection Activity
 - [Instructions](#)
 - [Reflection Activity Graphic](#)

[Site visit guidance](#)



Business Partnership Guide

Building strong partnerships with businesses and organizations is essential for sustaining community schools. Follow these steps to identify, engage, and secure funding from local supporters.

1. Research a Business/Organization

- Identify local businesses, corporations, and organizations that align with your school's mission.
- Look into their community engagement, corporate social responsibility initiatives, and past philanthropic giving.
- Who values education, workforce development, or community advancement?
- Find potential connections within your school's network—parents, staff, or board members who may have ties to the business.

2. Understand the Giving Landscape

- Determine which businesses and organizations are already giving to your school and in what ways.
- Talk with school administrators, PTA members, and other stakeholders to get a full picture of existing support.
- Identify gaps and opportunities for new partnerships.



3. Determine Your Ask

- Define what your school needs most and how a business or organization can help.
- Utilize your assets and needs assessment here.
- Consider various forms of support: financial donations, in-kind gifts, volunteer hours, or event sponsorships.
- Be specific: How much funding do you need? What resources are most impactful? What is the timeline for support?

Business Partnership Guide *(CONT'D.)*

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4. Refine Your Talking Points and Stories

- Develop a compelling narrative that connects your ask to the donor's values and interests.
- Use real stories and data to illustrate the impact of community schools.
- You may pull data from your assets and needs assessment, then add a story of a student that has received support. Ensure you're following FERPA guidelines and not providing identifying information about a student or family.
- Tailor your message to different audiences—business leaders, foundation representatives, or local philanthropists.




5. Define Recognition and Stewardship

- Plan how you will acknowledge donors (e.g., social media shoutouts, event recognition, plaques, or newsletters).
- Offer meaningful engagement opportunities, such as site visits or student thank-you notes.
- Ensure ongoing communication so supporters feel valued and see the impact of their contributions.

6. Communicate the Impact

- Provide regular updates on how donations are making a difference.
- Tie this back to the data- instead of saying “50 kids attended this after school program!”, You might say “We shared that our school had about 65 families looking for free after school opportunities. Thanks to your support, we were able to add 50 spots, serving 76% of those families with quality expanded learning, allowing students to receive after school tutoring and enrichment. As a result, we saw a X% growth in these students test scores!”
- Share success stories, photos, and testimonials from students, teachers, and families.
- Maintain a long-term relationship with donors by keeping them informed and engaged in your school's mission.

LINKS & RESOURCES

-  [Ethical Storytelling](#)
-  [Example of a visual representation of impact
- BOISE SCHOOL DISTRICT](#)
-  [Example donation letter templates](#)

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ICCS is always seeking to provide useful resources to all of Idaho's community schools. If you have feedback, ideas for improvement, or questions about this document, please reach out to iccs@unitedwaytv.org

IdahoCoalitionForCommunitySchools.org



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COMMUNITY SCHOOLS