FEDERAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

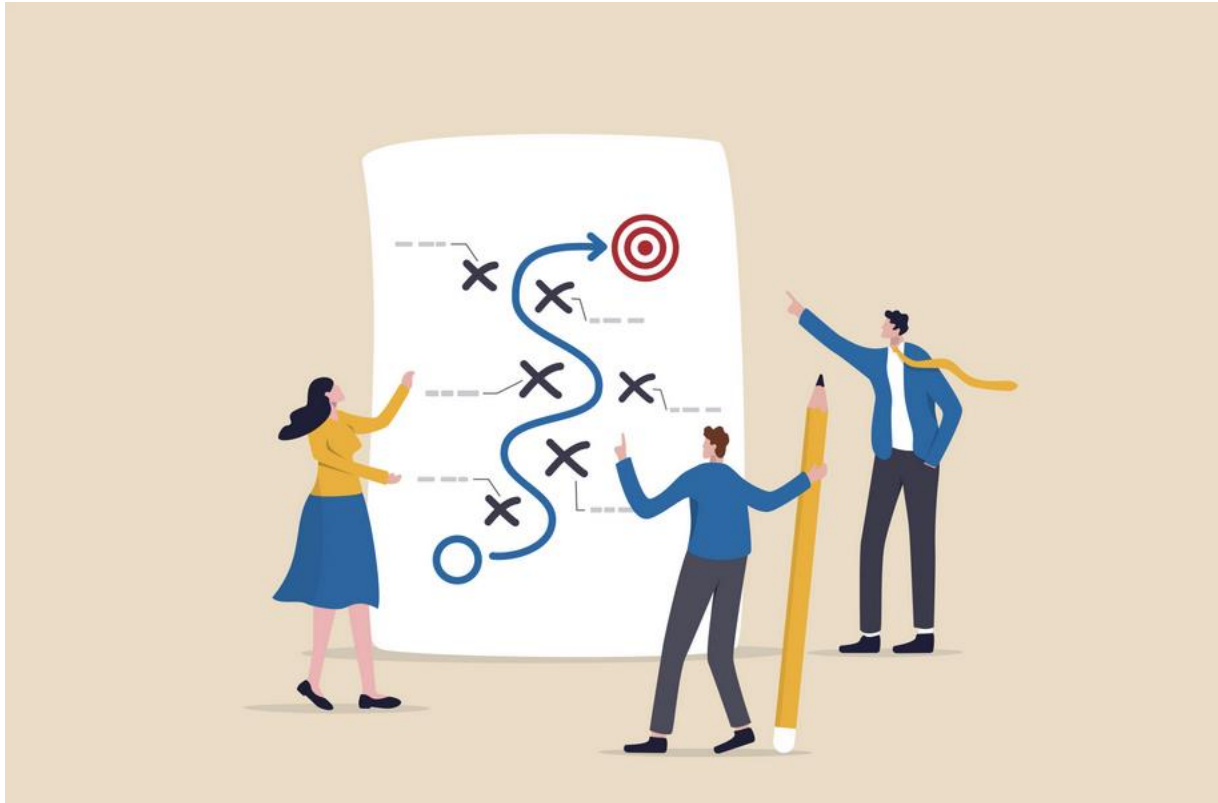## Demystifying & Streamlining Proposal Writing & Submission

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Topics

Starting Out

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Assessing Organizational Capacity

↓

Tools for Streamlining Your Process

↓

Avoiding Common Pitfalls

↓

Proposal Development Roadmap

↓

Siloing v. Synergy

↓

The Who and How of Budget Development

↓

Iterative Review and Submission

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Starting Out

- Your experience!

- Searching for opportunities

- Types of federal funding

- What's your need?

- Finding a potential funding match

- Eligibility

- What's a NOFO/A?

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Eligibility
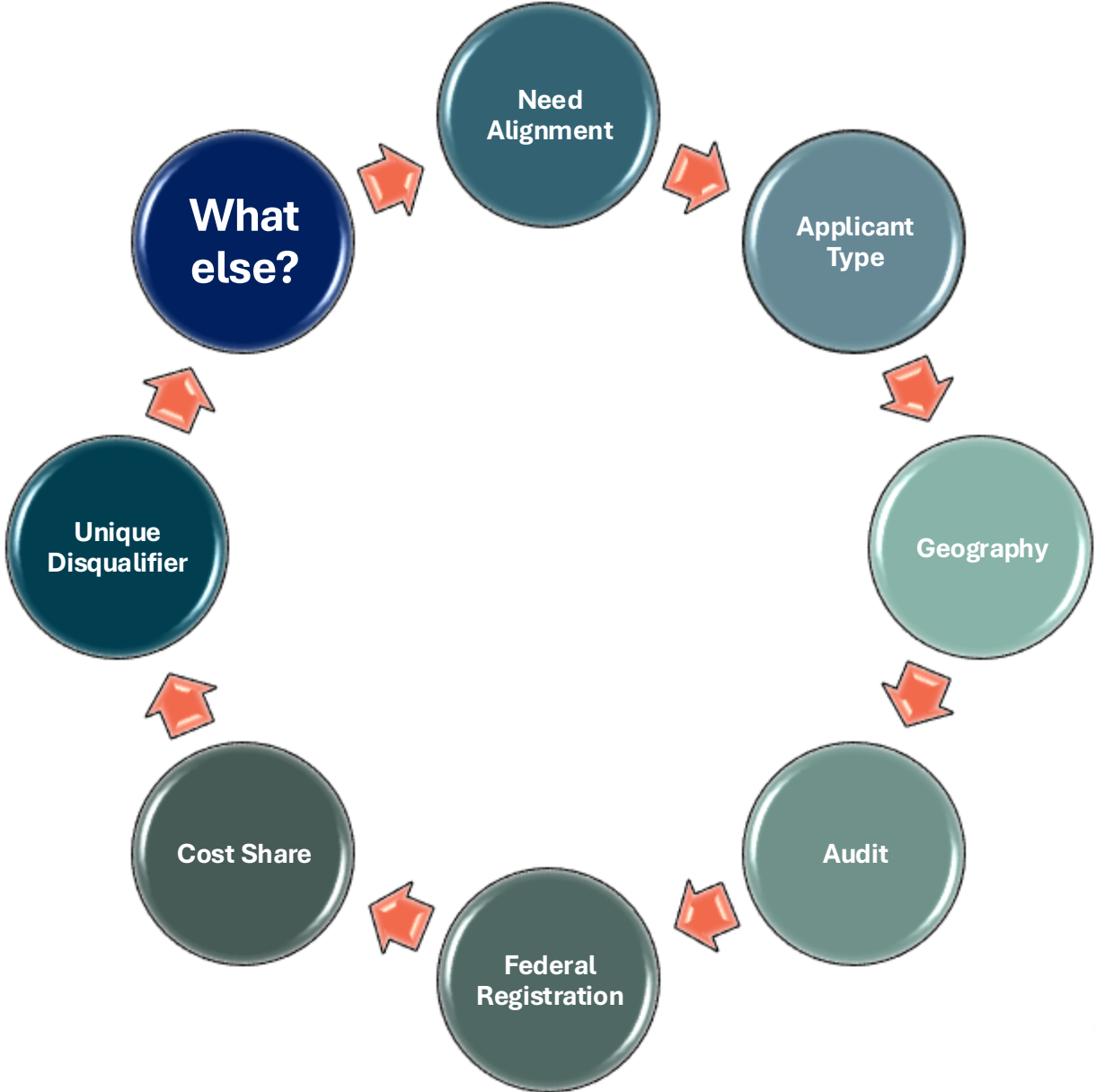
Examples of Funding Opportunities

Notice of Intent DE-FOA-0003423: Energy Improvements in Rural or Remote Areas FY24 Funding Opportunity Announcement DE-FOA-0003428 Department of Energy

https://grants.gov/search-results-detail/356272

USDA-FS-2025-LSR-WEST: Landscape Scale Restoration Grant Program 2025 West Department of Agriculture, Forest Service

https://grants.gov/search-results-detail/355887

N0001424SB003 National Oceanographic Partnership Program (NOPP) 2024 Department of Defense, Office of Naval Research

https://grants.gov/search-results-detail/356162

7200AA23APS00006 Biodiversity Annual Program Statement (Biodiversity APS), Agency for International Development

https://grants.gov/search-results-detail/348891

NOFO Treasure Hunt #1

- What agency or entity is managing this Opportunity?

- What is the deadline for submission?

- What kind of federal funding instrument is it?

- What is the funding ceiling per applicant?

- Is your current organization eligible? Why/Why not?

- Is there a pre-application information session for this NOFO?

- Who is the contact for the NOFO?

- Is additional information available to learn more details about this Opportunity?

- What federal forms have to be submitted as part of the submission package?

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Internal Capacity Questions to Consider:
Proposal

Organizational Capacity
Program Feasibility
Funding Opportunity
**Return on Investment**
Risk Assessment

EXAMPLES
- How many people and how much of their time is available to invest effort in proposal writing?
- Given the due date, is there adequate time to submit?
- What is a realistic ask based on your organization, your need, your project and the priorities stated in the NOFO?
- When would the money be received? Does that timeline fit your need? If there is staggering of grant payments, would that coincide with and support your needs?
- Do you have a demonstrable track record of success/ efficacy with the project type/scope?

Refer to TOOLS A & B

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Internal Capacity Questions to Consider:

Implementation

Organizational Capacity
Financial Resources
Project Scope and Complexity
Sustainability
Compliance and Reporting
Collaboration and Partnerships
Risk Tolerance

Refer to TOOLS A & B
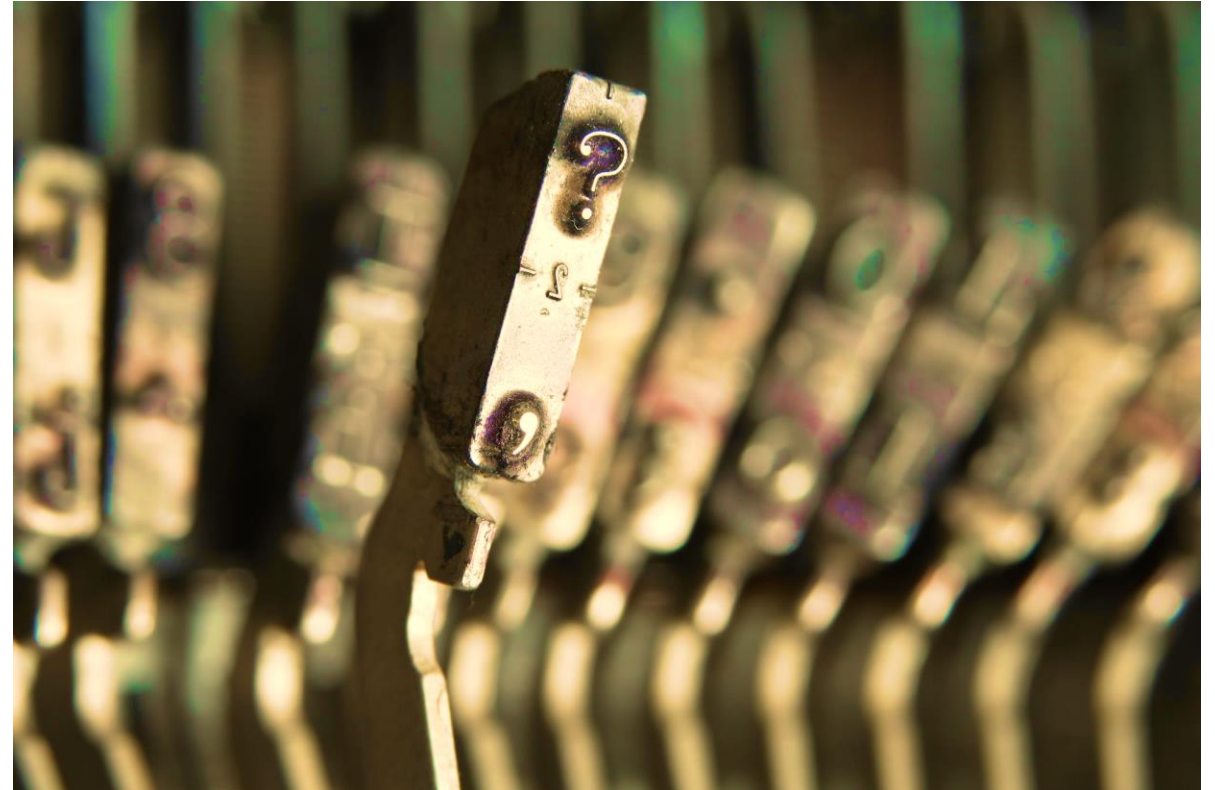
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Tools for Streamlining Your Proposal Development

THE BASICS

TOOL A **Preparation checklist: Organizational capacity to develop proposal**

TOOL B **Preparation checklist: Organizational capacity for implementing the proposed project**

TOOL C Common pitfalls to look out for

TOOL D Punchlist of documents and information to collect and format

TOOL D Checklist of required and optional materials in the submission package

TOOL E Sample timeline (Gantt) for proposal development

TOOL F Narrative content guide (merit rating)
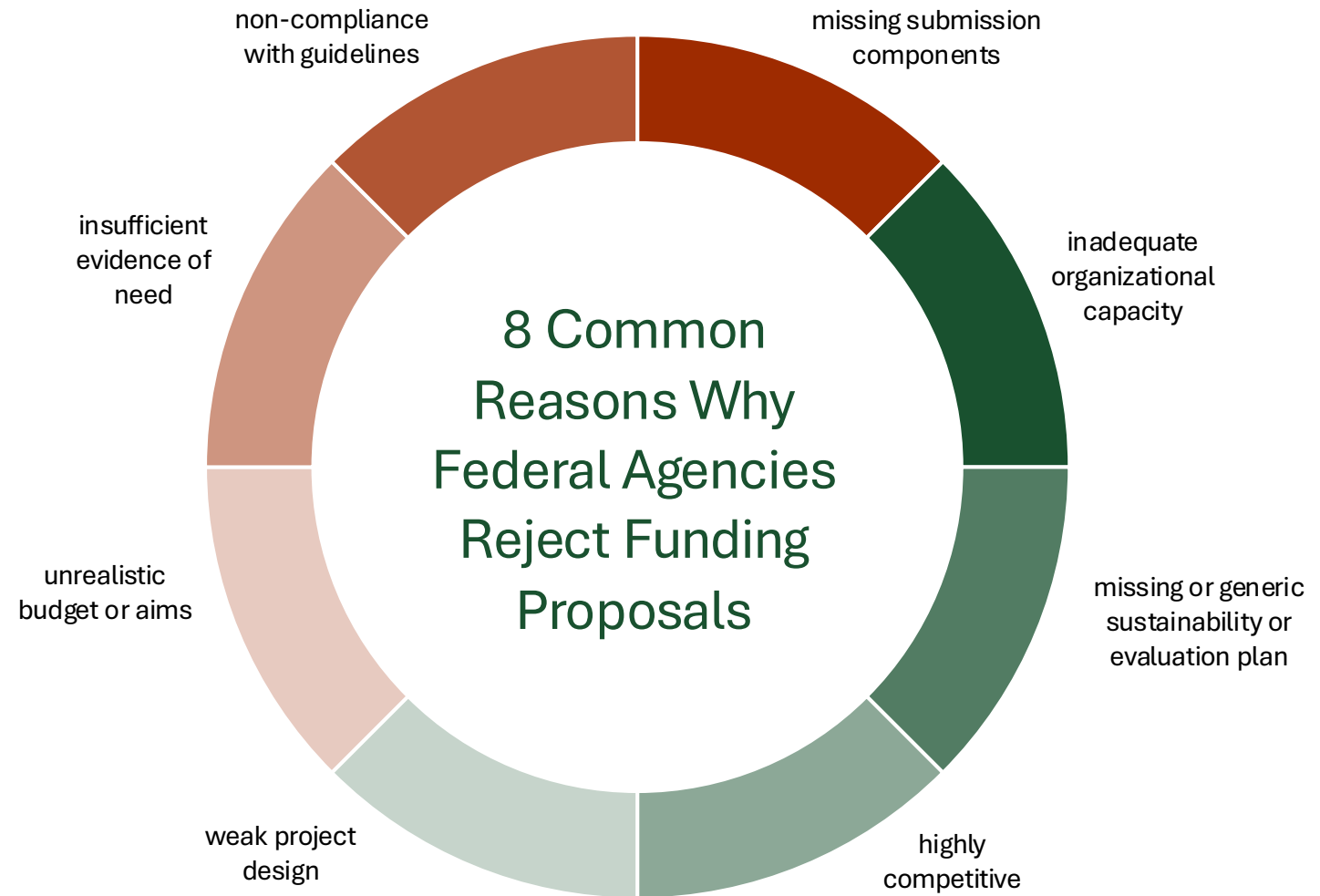
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NOFO Treasure Hunt #2

- What typeface and font size should you use for the narrative?

- List the attachments that should be included in your final submission package

- What pages of the NOFO describe the merit rating criteria?

- Is there a page limit for the budget narrative?

- Does the NOFO give preference to or require involvement of specific populations?

- When will the decision be announced of which proposals have been awarded funding?

- Does the NOFO ask for a literature review, inclusion of subject matter experts (SME), an external evaluator, evidence-based methods, and/or evidence-informed approaches?

- What is the maximum length of the attachments?

Avoiding Common Pitfalls

What pitfalls, challenges, obstacles or just plain mistakes have you made or have you been made aware of when working on a federal funding proposal?

Avoiding Common Pitfalls

What pitfalls, challenges, obstacles or just plain mistakes have you made or have you been made aware of when working on a federal funding proposal?

non-compliance with guidelines

missing submission components

insufficient evidence of need

inadequate organizational capacity

8 Common Reasons Why Federal Agencies Reject Funding Proposals

unrealistic budget or aims

missing or generic sustainability or evaluation plan

weak project design

highly competitive

Common Pitfalls

- Failure to register or complete system requirements

- Failure to review eligibility requirements

- Inadequate attention to deadlines

- Failure to follow application and submission guidelines

- Misalignment with stated grant priorities

- Inadequate planning and preparation

- Passive grant-writing style

- Weak or unclear project narrative

- Incomplete or incorrect budget

- Failure to address compliance and regulatory requirements

- Unrealistic timelines or objectives

- Inadequate stakeholder/community involvement

- Overlooking evaluation and sustainability plans
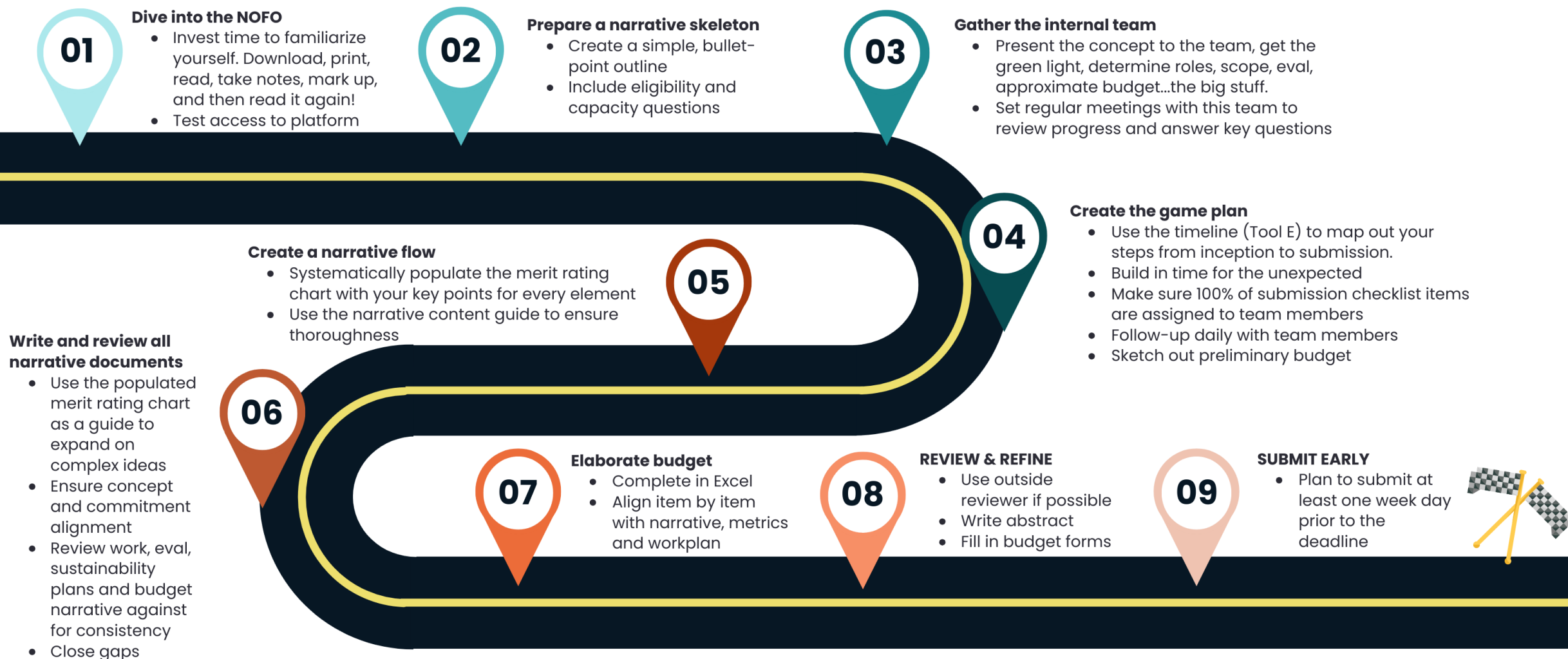
- Lack of internal review and refinement

TOOL C

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Funding Proposal Development Roadmap

01

Dive into the NOFO
- Invest time to familiarize yourself. Download, print, read, take notes, mark up, and then read it again!
- Test access to platform

02

Prepare a narrative skeleton
- Create a simple, bullet-point outline
- Include eligibility and capacity questions

03

Gather the internal team
- Present the concept to the team, get the green light, determine roles, scope, eval, approximate budget...the big stuff.
- Set regular meetings with this team to review progress and answer key questions

04

Create the game plan
- Use the timeline (Tool E) to map out your steps from inception to submission.
- Build in time for the unexpected
- Make sure 100% of submission checklist items are assigned to team members
- Follow-up daily with team members
- Sketch out preliminary budget

05

Create a narrative flow
- Systematically populate the merit rating chart with your key points for every element
- Use the narrative content guide to ensure thoroughness

06

Write and review all narrative documents
- Use the populated merit rating chart as a guide to expand on complex ideas
- Ensure concept and commitment alignment
- Review work, eval, sustainability plans and budget narrative against for consistency
- Close gaps

07

Elaborate budget
- Complete in Excel
- Align item by item with narrative, metrics and workplan

08

REVIEW & REFINE
- Use outside reviewer if possible
- Write abstract
- Fill in budget forms

09

SUBMIT EARLY
- Plan to submit at least one week day prior to the deadline

Conceptualization *sidetrack*

WHO can write your proposal?

This is a different question than WHO is the architect of your proposal

We assume the writing will be done by employees:
- Project Manager
- Executive Director
- Chief Development Officer/Associate

Numerous organizations leverage other resources, individuals and expertise to undertake the writing:
- Volunteers
- Board Members and Trustees
- Long-time members of the organization
- Freelance grant writers providing a contract-based service
- Grant writing consultants who provide organizations with ongoing help through retainer contracts

Something to keep in mind!

Now...back to your regularly scheduled programming!

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Competitive Conceptualization

❑ **Compelling Need Statement**: Write a persuasive narrative that clearly conveys the urgency and importance of addressing the problem. Use data, statistics, and anecdotes to emphasize the significance of the issue.

❑ **Clear Objectives and Goals**: Define measurable, time-bound objectives that align with the goals of the grant. These should be specific, realistic, and achievable within the timeframe of the funding.

❑ **Clarity and Conciseness**: The proposal should be well-organized, clearly written, and free from jargon. Reviewers often have limited time, so proposals that are concise, focused, and easy to read stand out.

❑ **Innovation and Creativity**: Funders are often drawn to projects that present innovative solutions to persistent problems. Showcase how your project introduces new methods, models, or technologies that can create transformative change.

❑ **Scalability & Sustainability**: Demonstrate how the project can be scaled or replicated in other areas or by other organizations if successful, as well as how the benefits of the project will be sustained beyond the grant period. Funders prefer to invest in initiatives that will have a broader, lasting impact

❑ **Evidence-Based Approach**: Use evidence-based practices and demonstrate how the proposed project builds on proven methodologies. Include research or case studies that show similar initiatives have succeeded.

❑ **Specific, Measurable Outcomes**: Clearly outline what success will look like. Use quantitative and qualitative metrics to show how the project will be evaluated. Metrics should align with the funder's priorities and be clearly measurable.

❑ **Attention to Detail**: Ensure the proposal is free of errors and adheres to all formatting and submission guidelines. Attention to detail reflects the professionalism and care of your organization. Lack of it, the opposite.

❑ **Organizational Capacity**: Demonstrate that your organization has the experience, qualified personnel, technical and grants management expertise, and infrastructure to successfully execute the project. Highlight previous successful projects, especially those funded by federal sources, to demonstrate credibility.

❑ **Evaluation Plan**: Include a robust evaluation plan that shows how you will assess the project's success and impact. This should include pre-defined performance measures, data collection methods, and tools for continuous monitoring and evaluation.

❑ **Community Involvement**: Demonstrate how the project is rooted in community needs and has involved key stakeholders in its design and how it will do so in its implementation. Show that there is strong support from those who will benefit from or be impacted by the project.

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An Age-Old Dilemma
Siloing v. Synergy

TOOL E

NOFO
Organization Name

Proposal Development & Submission TIMELINE

Task	Responsible Party	Supporting Parties	Wed 6/26	Th 6/27	Fr 6/28	Sa 6/29	Su 6/30	Mo 7/1	Tu 7/2	We 7/3	Th 7/4	Fr 7/5	Sa 7/6	Su 7/7	Mo 7/8
Preparation & Launch															
Pre-Application call															
Review NOFO															
Draft proposal Gantt (timeline)															
Write narrative content/rating table															
Write punchlist (org docs) and submission checklist															
Provide access to grants.gov, login.gov, SAM															
FU with CMS re: narrative, abstract, budget, etc. Forms															
Meet as team to agree upon aims/scope/timeline/POCs															
Sketch out basic project timeline, metric targets, and parallel broad-strokes budget															
Set meeting schedule with POCs, key personnel and leads															
Communicate 'assignments' to all identified leads															
Secure org documents															
Complete all Federal Forms															
Pull and upload to Share drive background documents for Contractor															
Writing & Reviewing															
Write narrative using narrative content/rating table															
Write Workplan															
Write Navigator Training and Certification Plan															
Write COI attestation & plan															
Write recruitment and hiring schedule															
Write project abstract															
Collect key personnel resumes															
Write job descriptions for described/budgeted positions															
Draft 5 years budgets/totals using Federal Budget Form															
Draft narrative budget justification															
Conduct & write business assessment															
Review and correct narrative, budget, justification, attachments and forms															
Finalize narrative, budget, justification, attachments and forms															
CEO review (or designee)															
Submission Uploads															
Narrative, abstract, budget justification															
Budget sheets															
All attachments (7)															
All Federal Forms (4)															
Final review of aggregate online application															
FINAL submission															

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NOFO Treasure Hunt #3

- What is the maximum number of years you can propose for funding?

- List the sections that must be included in your project narrative.

- Does the NOFO provide a sample workplan? Project timeline?

- Is a business assessment (financial stability eval) required for submission?

- What is the maximum length allowable for the abstract?

- What, if anything, does the NOFO advise about PII?

- What is the maximum number of points possible in the merit rating?

- Is matching funding required, and if so, what are the requirements for the match?

- What is the day of the week that the deadline for submission falls on?

- What number do you call or email do you write to if you experience technical issues during the submission process?

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Budget Preparation

Budget Preparation

- **Begin the process of budget development EARLY. Familiarize yourself with allowable costs.**
- Ensure that the person assigned to develop the budget has the right skills and the time necessary to attend regular team meetings – they need to understand the proposed project and help detect hidden costs
- **Build and refine iteratively against the narrative components to ensure alignment and accuracy – do not wait until the narrative is complete**
- Use Excel or Sheets to retain budget details not required in the federal form – populate forms a day or two before submission
- **Make sure the top financial officer in your organization reviews and approves the budget before submission**
- Make sure you are aware of any organizational negotiated IDC with the US government
- **Write the justification systematically parallel to the final budget to be submitted**

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Review & Submission

- Practice accessing the portal at your first meeting and again 4-5 days and then at least 1 day out from your intended submission.
- **Internal team and external, 3ʳᵈ party reviewer, systematically and comprehensively review the entire package**
- Internal review should be completed by someone familiar with the terms of the NOFO
- **Use ALL tools available to you to review each element of the proposal for thoroughness and clarity.**
- Ensure that the top financial officer reviews both the budget and the accompanying budget narrative
- **Ensure that the chief executive is aware of the submission date and continues to concur with the organization's capacity to carry out the project once awarded**

FEDERAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION

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