THE APPLICANT PLAYBOOK
A GrantZap Field Guide for Founders

INTRODUCING
THE 72-HOUR GRANT SYSTEM

THE FUNDED FOUNDER

Escape the Pitch-Deck Trap, Unlock Zero-Equity Grant Cash, and Join the Grant-Funded Elite.

NO EQUITY GIVEN UP | NO INVESTORS NEEDED | NO PITCH DECK REQUIRED

$500B+
AWARDED IN GRANTS EVERY YEAR

1,000s
OF ACTIVE FUNDING PROGRAMS RIGHT NOW

$0
EQUITY, INTEREST, OR REPAYMENT OWED

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Co-Founders of GrantZap.com

GRANTZAP.COM
AI-Matched Grants for Small Business



Most founders chase VCs and give away equity for cash they didn't need to give away. There's another pool of capital sitting untouched. It doesn't want a board seat, and it doesn't want your cap table.

What's Inside

This guide walks through every stage of applying for a grant through Grants.gov, from setting up your accounts before you even touch an application, to tracking your submission after it's in. Follow it in order your first time through.

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WHY GRANTZAP BUILT THIS

Most applicants lose time to process, not paperwork. This guide lays out the exact order of operations so you register once, correctly, and move straight into writing a strong application.

START HERE

Find & Unlock Your Grants with GrantZap

Before you touch Grants.gov, start here. GrantZap's AI matches your business to live grant opportunities and helps you draft the application, so by the time you get to Section 02, you already know exactly which opportunity you're pursuing.

1. **Go to GrantZap.com and click "Ask GrantZap"**
   Instead of filling out a static intake form, have a conversation. Ask GrantZap asks a few questions about your business: industry, stage, location, and funding needs, then builds your profile from your answers.

2. **See how much you qualify for, free**
   Once your profile is complete, GrantZap shows you an estimated dollar amount you may qualify for, based on live grant data matched to your business. There's no cost to see the number.

3. **Pay to unlock your matched grants**
   Unlock the full list of specific opportunities behind your estimated match amount, complete with funding amounts and deadlines.

4. **Browse your matches and select your grants**
   Review each unlocked opportunity and decide which ones are worth pursuing for your business.

5. **Click "Ask About This Grant"**
   Get an AI-generated, plain-English breakdown of eligibility requirements, funding amount, and deadlines for any grant before you commit time to it.

6. **Click "Pursue This Grant"**
   Save the opportunity to your saved grants list, so it's staged and ready to work on whenever you're ready to start the application.

7. **Open the grant and use "Ask GrantZap" to draft your application**
   Inside your saved grant, use Ask GrantZap again. This time it writes directly into your working draft, using your profile and the grant's specific requirements as the starting point.

> **GRANTZAP TIP**
> Treat this as your intake step, not an afterthought. Walking into Grants.gov registration (Section 02) with a specific opportunity already selected and a drafted narrative already in progress turns the rest of this guide from research into execution.

GETTING READY

Before You Start

Two accounts have to exist before you can submit anything on Grants.gov. Neither is instant, so this is the section to knock out first, ideally weeks before a deadline, not days.

1. Register your organization with SAM.gov

SAM.gov (System for Award Management) issues your organization's **Unique Entity Identifier (UEI)**, a required field for every Grants.gov application. Registration requires a validated address and Tax ID, and can take up to **10 business days** to process once submitted. Start this immediately; it is almost always the longest pole in the tent.

2. Create a Login.gov account

Every individual who will download forms or work on them online needs their own **Login.gov** account. When you register with Grants.gov, you'll be prompted to link the two accounts together.

3. Use the same email address everywhere

Register your organization's electronic business point of contact at SAM.gov with the **same email address** you plan to use at Grants.gov. Doing so automatically designates you as a **superuser** for your organization inside Grants.gov, which saves you a manual role-assignment step later.

GRANTZAP TIP

Build a simple tracker with three columns: SAM.gov status, Login.gov status, and Grants.gov status. Don't touch the actual application forms until all three read "complete." Applicants who jump ahead almost always end up redoing work once their UEI or role permissions finally land.

ACCOUNT	WHAT IT PROVIDES	TYPICAL TIMELINE
SAM.gov	Unique Entity Identifier (UEI), required on every application	Up to 10 business days
Login.gov	Identity verification to access and edit forms	Same day
Grants.gov	User profile + Organization Applicant Profile	Same day (after the above)

ACCOUNT SETUP

Registering with Grants.gov

Every single person who touches an application, whether they fill out forms or just review them, needs their own Grants.gov profile. Here is the exact registration flow.

1. **Go to Register on the Grants.gov home page**
   The Register page will load with background information about what you're about to do, worth a quick skim before continuing.

2. **Click "Get Registered Now"**
   This button sits at the bottom of the Register page and opens the actual registration form.

3. **Enter your information and click Continue**
   Fill in the requested fields: name, email, and basic profile details, then continue to the confirmation page.

4. **Click "Send Temporary Code"**
   Check the inbox for the email address you registered with. Grants.gov will send a temporary numeric code to verify it's really you.

5. **Enter the temporary code and click Continue**
   This finalizes your individual Grants.gov account. **Note:** an individual account alone isn't enough to apply on behalf of an organization; you still need Step 6.

6. **Select "Add Organizational Profile"**
   You'll be asked for three things: the **UEI** you obtained from SAM.gov, a **profile name** (your organization's name or any label you'll recognize later), and the **job title** of the person using the profile.

7. **Click "Save and Login"**
   You'll land on the Login page, ready to sign in with your new credentials and begin working.

DON'T SKIP THIS

If you can't complete Step 6 because you don't yet have a UEI, stop and go finish your SAM.gov registration first (Section 01). You can create the individual account without it, but you cannot attach an organization profile, and without that, no one can build a workspace or submit on your organization's behalf.

ACCOUNT SETUP

Everyone Needs a Profile

A quick but important rule: anyone who will use Grants.gov, whether they're downloading forms to work on offline or filling them out directly inside your grant application's workspace, must have their own profile. There's no shared-login shortcut here.

Individual applicants

Applying for something open to individuals, like a fellowship, rather than an organization? Grants.gov has separate instructions for registering as an individual applicant instead of setting up an organization profile.

Organization applicants

Most grant seekers register on behalf of an organization, which requires the UEI from SAM.gov and results in an Organization Applicant Profile as described on the previous page.

GRANTZAP TIP

If more than one person at your organization will ever touch a Grants.gov application (a grant writer, a finance lead, an executive director who signs off), get all of their individual profiles created now, even before you have a specific opportunity picked out. It removes a bottleneck later when you're racing a deadline.

About Roles & Privileges

Grants.gov uses a role-based permission system so organizations can control who sees sensitive content, like budget figures, and who is actually allowed to hit submit. The term to know first is the **AOR**, short for **Authorized Organization Representative**: the person your organization authorizes to officially submit applications on its behalf. Grants.gov breaks that role into a few variations:

- **Expanded AOR:** automatically assigned if your Grants.gov email matches your SAM.gov electronic business point of contact. Can assign roles to other users and submit applications.
- **Standard AOR:** can submit applications on behalf of the organization, once someone with expanded AOR or admin rights assigns the role.
- **Workspace Manager:** can create and manage workspaces for grant applications.
- **Custom roles:** your organization can define narrower roles, including specific "Submit Applications" privileges, for people who need limited access.

MAKE SURE THIS IS COVERED

At least one person in your organization needs a role that can create a workspace: expanded AOR, standard AOR, or workspace manager. Confirm this before you're up against a deadline. For details on assigning roles, see "Manage Roles for Applicant" in the Grants.gov Online Help center.

WORKSPACES

Understanding Workspaces

A workspace is where your organization actually builds a grant application: filling out forms, uploading attachments, and controlling who can see and edit what. Anyone with expanded AOR, standard AOR, or workspace manager privileges can create one. There are three approaches, depending on how your organization is structured.

BASIC

Fill out forms online or offline, then upload

Complete forms directly in the browser, or download them as PDFs to work on offline and email to others as needed. Once finished, upload completed forms back into the workspace. This is the simplest starting point, and you can graduate to intermediate or advanced later if your needs grow.

INTERMEDIATE

A workspace owner controls access

Best when the person leading the grant-writing effort isn't the same person who will click Sign and Submit. The workspace owner controls access to the workspace itself and to individual forms, online or offline.

ADVANCED

Extend access without requiring a UEI

The workspace owner can bring in team members who don't have your organization's UEI (which is otherwise required to create an org profile). Useful for limiting access to sensitive budget forms, creating subforms, and reusing forms completed in previous applications.

GRANTZAP TIP

Start Basic unless you already know you need more. Most solo operators and small teams never outgrow it, and every approach uses the same underlying forms, so nothing you do in Basic is wasted if you upgrade later.

ONE WORKSPACE PER APPLICATION

You must create a separate, new workspace for every individual grant application. Workspaces are not reused across different funding opportunities.

WORKSPACES

Creating a Workspace

Once you've found the right opportunity, here's exactly how to spin up a workspace for it.

1. **Select the grant opportunity**
   Click Search Grants and enter your search criteria, or enter the opportunity number directly from a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) if you already have one. Grants.gov will return a list of matching results.

2. **Click the opportunity number**
   This opens the View Grant Opportunity page, where you can review eligibility, funding details, and deadlines before committing.

3. **Click the Apply button**
   This takes you to the Apply Now Using Workspace page, where the actual workspace gets created.

4. **Name your grant application**
   If your account has more than one profile, you'll need to select which one this application belongs to. If you don't personally have workspace ownership privileges, you'll also need to select a workspace owner from the list.

5. **Click "Create Workspace"**
   You'll land on the Manage Workspace page. This is mission control for the application from here forward, and where you'll add participants next.

Adding Participants

Bring collaborators into the workspace so multiple people can work on the application together.

1. **Open the Participants tab**
   From Manage Workspace, click Participants. From here you have two ways to add people:
   • **Add from Workspace Organization:** for users who already have an Organization Applicant Profile with you. Just click each name.
   • **Add by Username:** for registered users without an org profile. Search by name or email.

2. **Click Save**
   Participants are added to the workspace and can begin working on assigned forms right away.

FILLING OUT THE APPLICATION

Completing Forms Online

There are three ways to complete your forms: online in the browser, offline on your computer, or by reusing forms from a previous application. Start with the online method.

1 **Open the form's Webform link**

On the Forms tab, click the Webform link for the form you want to work on. Use the Sections menu in the side panel to navigate between parts of the form. **Asterisks mark required fields.** The system autosaves every five minutes, but click Save periodically yourself so nothing is lost.

2 **Click "Check for Errors"**

If issues turn up, a list will display. Resolve every listed error, then click Check for Errors again to confirm it's clean.

3 **Click Close**

You'll be asked whether to lock the form. A locked form can't be accessed by anyone else, useful once you consider a section finished and don't want a collaborator to accidentally overwrite it.

> **GRANTZAP TIP**
>
> Don't rely on autosave alone. Get in the habit of hitting Save every time you finish a section. The five-minute autosave window is exactly long enough to lose meaningful work if your session times out or your browser crashes.

METHOD	BEST FOR	KEY REQUIREMENT
Complete online	Teams working simultaneously, iterative edits	Stable internet, active session
Complete offline	Working without reliable internet, careful review	Free Adobe Reader installed
Reuse previous forms	Repeat applicants, similar past submissions	A prior workspace with saved forms

FILLING OUT THE APPLICATION

Completing Forms Offline

Prefer to work without a live connection, or need to route a form to someone for review? Download it, edit it locally, then upload it back. You'll need the free Adobe Reader application installed to open and edit the downloaded PDFs.

1. **Click the form's Download link**
   Found on the Forms tab, next to each form.

2. **Choose Yes to lock the form**
   Locking prevents anyone else from editing the online version while you work offline, avoiding version conflicts.

3. **Save the form to your computer**
   Store it anywhere you'll remember. Many applicants create a dedicated folder per application to keep versions straight.

4. **Complete the downloaded form**
   Fill in every field marked with an asterisk. These are required, and the application won't pass validation without them.

5. **Click "Check for Errors"**
   Any problems appear in a pop-up list and get highlighted in red directly on the form. Fix them, save, and re-check until it's clean.

6. **Upload it back into your workspace**
   Use the Upload link inside your grant application workspace, locate the file on your computer, and upload it. You'll then be asked whether to unlock the form. Choose Yes if you want others to be able to edit it again.

DON'T FORGET TO UNLOCK

If you leave a form locked after uploading, no one else on your team can touch it, including you, from a different session. Unlock it once you're confident it's ready for the next set of eyes.

FILE MANAGEMENT

Naming & Reusing Files

NAMING FILES FOR UPLOAD

Before you name anything, check the NOFO. The awarding agency may have its own file-naming rules or restrictions. If it doesn't specify, follow these baseline requirements:

- [ ] Keep every file name to **50 characters or fewer**.
- [ ] Give each document a **unique name**, with no duplicates within the application.
- [ ] Stick to upper- and lowercase letters, numbers, and the underscore, hyphen, space, and period characters.
- [ ] Be as descriptive as possible when the agency hasn't specified a format: think "Budget_Narrative_2026.pdf," not "doc1.pdf."

GRANTZAP TIP

Special characters beyond the approved list can silently break a submission on some grantor systems. If you need specifics, Grants.gov publishes a dedicated reference on special characters in submissions, worth a quick check before you upload anything unusual.

REUSING PREVIOUSLY COMPLETED FORMS

Applied before? You can pull forms forward from any earlier workspace instead of starting from scratch.

1. **Click the form's Reuse link**
   A warning will pop up: reusing a form overwrites any version currently uploaded in this workspace, along with related subforms. Confirm only if that's what you want.
2. **Search on the Reuse Workspace Form page**
   Enter your search criteria and click Search to pull up candidate forms from past workspaces.
3. **Preview before you commit**
   Click Preview in the Actions column and confirm the form actually contains what you want to carry into the new application.
4. **Click Select**
   You'll return to the Forms tab in Manage Workspace with a success message, and the reused form now lives in your current workspace.

THE FINAL STRETCH

Submitting Your Application

Before submitting, confirm every required form is complete. Submit well ahead of the deadline. If something goes wrong, you'll want time left to fix it rather than a countdown clock.

1 **Click "Check Application"**
Found on the Forms tab. Any issues across the entire application (not just one form) will be listed. Resolve everything, then run the check again until it comes back clean.

2 **Click "Complete and Notify AOR" (if shown)**
This button only appears if you don't hold an AOR role yourself. Clicking it emails everyone in your organization with an AOR role, or a custom role with submission privileges, letting them know the application is ready to go.

3 **Click "Sign and Submit" (if shown)**
Available only if you hold a standard or expanded AOR role, or a custom role with submission privileges, and only once all three conditions below are met.

REQUIREMENT	WHAT TO CHECK
Forms passed validation	Every form selected for submission cleared the Check Application process
SAM.gov is active	Your registration's expiration date is visible on the Manage Workspace page header
Deadline hasn't passed	The opportunity's application window is still open

4 **If you're resubmitting**
If you've already submitted to this same opportunity, you'll be asked whether the new submission should replace the old one. Select Yes. Submitting from the same workspace preserves your original grant tracking number. A confirmation window will follow with tracking details.

SUBMIT EARLY, NOT ON THE DEADLINE
Federal systems slow down under load right before major deadlines. Submitting a day or two early gives you a buffer to catch and fix any last-minute submission error without racing the clock.

AFTER YOU SUBMIT

Tracking Your Application & Getting Help

Tracking your application

Use the Check Application Status feature on Grants.gov to confirm the awarding agency has received your submission. Beyond that, the agency will reach out directly once they've completed their own internal review process. Grants.gov itself won't tell you whether you were funded.

Grants.gov support (24/7)

Call **1-800-518-4726** or email **support@grants.gov**. You'll be assigned a ticket number, so save it, since it's how support will locate your issue on any follow-up contact.

SAM.gov support

Call **866-606-8220**, or chat with the Federal Service Desk online for registration issues, UEI questions, or account access problems.

Training resources

Grants.gov maintains a library of training materials and videos for applicants, covering everything from first-time registration to advanced workspace management.

GRANTZAP TIP

Save both support numbers and the ticket number from any support interaction somewhere your whole team can find it, not just in one person's inbox. If your AOR is unavailable during a deadline crunch, whoever steps in shouldn't be starting from zero.

GRANTS.GOV SUPPORT (24/7)

1-800-518-4726

support@grants.gov

SAM.GOV SUPPORT

866-606-8220

Federal Service Desk

BEFORE YOU HIT SUBMIT

GrantZap Pre-Submission Checklist

A last gut-check, pulled from every section of this guide. Run through it once before you click Sign and Submit.

- [ ] SAM.gov registration is active, with a validated UEI and Tax ID on file
- [ ] Every applicant on the team has their own Login.gov and Grants.gov profile
- [ ] Your organization's SAM.gov point-of-contact email matches your Grants.gov login email
- [ ] At least one person holds a role that can create workspaces and submit (expanded AOR, standard AOR, or workspace manager)
- [ ] You created a fresh workspace specifically for this opportunity
- [ ] All required participants have been added to the workspace
- [ ] Every form shows no errors after running Check for Errors
- [ ] All uploaded file names are 50 characters or fewer and use only approved characters
- [ ] Check Application returns a clean result with no outstanding issues
- [ ] SAM.gov registration is confirmed active as of today's date
- [ ] The application deadline has not passed, and you're submitting with buffer time to spare

WANT A HEAD START ON FINDING THE RIGHT OPPORTUNITY?

GrantZap uses AI to match your business against active grant opportunities, so you spend your time writing a strong application instead of hunting for the right one. See the back cover to check your eligibility, free.

Ready to Find Your Next Grant?

GrantZap uses AI to match your small business against active grant opportunities, then helps you build a stronger application, faster.

See how much you qualify for, free

GrantZap.com

This guide summarizes the official Grants.gov Quick Start Guide for Applicants. Always confirm current requirements and deadlines directly on Grants.gov and SAM.gov before submitting. GrantZap is not affiliated with or endorsed by Grants.gov or the U.S. federal government.