FIRST NATIONS DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE
GRANTSEEKER RESOURCE

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

First Nations has compiled answers for common questions that arise during the application process. If your question is not answered here, please contact our Grantmaking staff for further clarification. You may also refer to information provided within specific RFPs.

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Eligibility

1. What types of projects does First Nations support?

First Nations is committed to strengthening American Indian economies to support healthy native communities. As a funder, First Nations is interested in investing in institutions and models that strengthen asset control and support economic development for American Indian people and their communities.

Grant opportunities are focused within five key areas:
- Achieving Native Financial Empowerment
- Investing in Native Youth
- Strengthening Tribal & Community Institutions
- Advancing Household & Community Asset-Building Strategies
- Nourishing Native Foods & Health

Specific funding opportunities are offered within each of these areas. Please refer to First Nations' Grantmaking Page for information, including current open grant cycles, current deadlines, application guidelines, and more.

2. Does First Nations accept unsolicited proposals?

No. Applications are accepted only through First Nations' Requests for Proposals (RFP) process.

Any applications emailed/faxed/mailed to First Nations' outside of this process will not be reviewed. Please refer to [First Nations' Grantmaking Page](#) for more information regarding open funding cycles.

3. How important is it to match my project to First Nations' guidelines?

It is important to ensure your organization meets all criteria prior to completing an application. Proposals from applicants that do not meet established criteria will not be considered.

4. Who is eligible to apply for grant opportunities through First Nations?

Applicants must serve a rural- or reservation-based community unless otherwise specified in the RFP. Applicant eligibility may vary according to each funding opportunity. Please refer to the specific RFP for more information.

Eligible applicants include:
- Federal- and State-Recognized Tribal Governments (Tribal Government Programs, such as Tribal Arts Programs, Heritage Departments, Economic Development Entities, etc.)
- Native-controlled 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations
- Native 7871 Organizations
- Fiscally-sponsored Native community organizations

Native community organizations without a 501(c)(3) nonprofit status may submit an application through a sponsoring organization if the sponsor has IRS 501(c)(3) status and can provide written authorization confirming its willingness to act as the fiscal sponsor.

5. What types of organizations are not eligible for funding from First Nations?

First Nations does not currently provide funding for individuals, public schools or organizations serving American Indians that are not Native-controlled or tribally-operated. Furthermore, urban groups that serve only off-reservation tribal members are unlikely to be funded outside of specifically-targeted opportunities.

Organizations located and/or serving communities outside of the United States or U.S. Territories are not eligible to apply.

6. Does First Nations fund religious or faith-based organizations?

Yes, provided the organization meets our eligibility and grant program requirements.

7. **Are Native-controlled or tribally-operated schools eligible to apply for funding through First Nations?**

Yes. First Nations can fund schools that are Native-controlled 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations and schools that are tribally-operated such as tribal colleges and universities (TCUs). First Nations cannot fund any public or BIE (Bureau of Indian Education) schools.

8. **How does First Nations define "Native-controlled"?**

First Nations defines "Native-controlled" as an organization in which a majority of the Board of Directors and leadership team are Native American, Alaska Native, or Native Hawaiian.

Organizations that are not Native-controlled are not eligible to apply (with or without a fiscal sponsor).

9. **Does First Nations accept applications from community groups with a qualified fiscal sponsor?**

Yes. U.S.-based and Native-controlled community groups that do not have a 501(c)(3) status are eligible to apply in partnership with a qualified fiscal sponsor. Please see the next question for additional information related to qualifications for fiscal sponsorship agreements.

10. **What is a fiscal sponsor? Are there any specific requirements related to eligibility for fiscal sponsors?**

A fiscal sponsor is an organization with 501(c)(3) status that serves as the official recipient of charitable donations on behalf of a partner organization that does not have 501(c)(3) status.

A fiscal sponsor should share a similar purpose or mission with a sponsored organization, as the IRS considers the fiscal sponsor and sponsored organization to be the same. All of the 501(c)(3) organization's activities must align with its stated mission in order to retain tax-exempt status.

The fiscal sponsor will be required to sign a grant agreement with First Nations and submit a document outlining the terms, conditions, and fees (if any).

11. **We are a community organization without 501(c)(3) status and are considering using a fiscal sponsor to apply for this grant. What things should we know before entering into such an arrangement?**

Ensure the fiscal sponsor is an appropriate partner for your organization and is willing to provide confirmation of the partnership. The project must be structured as a functional partnership rather than a simple business transaction.

The fiscal sponsor will be considered as the applicant organization, meaning all required financial attachments and other recipient information should describe the 501(c)(3) with the exception of the board list or advisory group. This should be submitted by the community group and include tribal affiliation. The fiscal sponsor is legally responsible for the grant and will also be responsible for any agreements made with First Nations. The fiscal sponsor will also be responsible for disbursing the grant funds to the partner organization as identified in grant agreements.

12. **Does First Nations have any geographic restrictions?**

First Nations works primarily with rural and reservation-based communities. Geographic restrictions vary according to each grant opportunity and may be restricted by donor-specified guidelines. Please refer to application guidelines within the Requests for Proposals to which you are applying.

13. **Why do you only fund specific geographic areas? Do you make exceptions to restrictions for important projects?**

No. First Nations' geographic restrictions are tied to agreements made with donors who support each program. If donors restrict the programs to certain states or regions, it is often because those states or regions fit within their own mandated service areas or identified areas of need.

If you are a Native-controlled or tribally-operated organization that does not fit within our current funding guidelines, please review our resource list of Tribal Funding Opportunities offered by organizations other than First Nations.

Budget & Financials

14. **How much funding should I request?**

Specific request amounts vary according to each open funding cycle. Please refer to the RFP to which you applying for current information. Requests for Proposals issued by First Nations generally always note a planned "maximum limit" for grants that will be

awarded under the program (e.g. "First Nations will award up to 20 grants of up to $20,000 each for…").

Within the specified guidelines, your organization should ensure the requested amount is appropriate and sufficient to ensure a successful project.

15. **What is the average size of a grant award?**

The size of grant awards varies according to each open funding cycle. Be sure to follow the application guidelines within each RFP when developing your budget.

Information regarding past grant awards for previous funding opportunities, when available, can be found within the RFP or at http://firstnations.org/programs.

16. **Does First Nations allow funding to be used for administrative costs (also known as overhead or indirect costs)?**

Yes, however costs should be reasonable and not comprise the majority of funds being requested.

17. **Our organization will incur expenses related to the proposed project prior to the start of the grant period. Can we include these costs in the budget?**

No. All costs must be incurred between the stated grant period's start and end dates.

18. **Our organization will incur expenses related to the proposed project following the start of the grant period, but prior to the first payment. Can we include these costs in the budget?**

Yes. Expenses may be applied retroactively to payment so long as they were incurred anytime between the stated grant period's start and end dates.

19. **How do I gather and prepare the required financial documents?**

Please work with your organization's accountant or bookkeeper to compile the required financial documents. Ensure that all documents are clear, consistent, and accurate. Proposals without complete financial documents will not be considered.

First Nations also provides examples of required budget templates for your reference within the Online Application for each RFP. You may also conduct a web search to find other samples.

Application Directions

20. What are your application deadlines?

First Nations' Grantmaking Program is dependent upon the generosity of our partners. Application cycles vary each year. Please refer to the Grants Calendar page for information regarding open application cycles and a history of organizational funding opportunities.

First Nations widely publicizes its various grant opportunities through press announcements, email blasts, our website, and various social-media channels, including Facebook, Twitter, Google+, and LinkedIn. If you are interested in keeping abreast of such opportunities, please follow First Nations on social media, visit the website often or, best, sign up to receive ongoing emails from us at this link.

21. Can you provide assistance in developing our organization's grant application?

First Nations is committed to meeting the needs of Native communities and organizations with varying organizational capacity. While First Nations cannot directly assist in the development of applications, several free resources have been developed to assist potential applicants with the grant development process.

See our other documents under **Grantseeker Resources** for tips on what constitutes a good proposal, guidelines for developing evaluation measures, common proposal attachments, grant coaching webinars, and more.

In addition, First Nations offers technical assistance conference calls in coordination with each open funding cycle. Dates and times for these calls are announced within Requests for Proposals.

On a limited basis, First Nations' Grantmaking Department is also available via phone call or email to answer specific questions (e.g. eligibility for a specific grant). However, as noted, First Nations cannot directly assist in the development of your application.

22. Is there a specific format for grant applications?

Yes. First Nations utilizes an online application process for all funding cycles. Links to the application portal can be found within Requests for Proposals.

23. Do I really need to use the online system? Can I just mail or deliver it to you?

Due to the volume of applications First Nations receives, we request that all applicants utilize the online system. The online system allows application information to go directly into our database and facilitates the review and timely processing of applications.

Any applications submitted outside of the online system require additional processing time, which may delay review and/or notification. If your organization cannot submit an application online due to unreliable Internet access, please refer to the process for requesting an exemption from the system described below.

24. What if our organization has limited or unreliable access to the Internet?

The organization recognizes that some of our most rural and remote applicants may have limited access to high-speed Internet. Any exceptions to use of the online system must be made at least two weeks in advance of the application deadline by submitting an email request to grantmaking@firstnations.org. Please include your name, organization, contact information, and the name of the RFP for which you are applying. If you do not have access to email you can call our office at (303) 774-7836 and ask to speak with a member of the Grantmaking Department.

25. How do I get a login for First Nations' online application portal?

Please go to the applicant/grantee login page and select the "New Applicant?" link. You can also access the link here.

26. I already registered with First Nations. What is my login?

Your login information is the email address used to register for your account and the password of your choosing.

27. I forgot the password for my account with First Nations. What should I do?

You can have a temporary password emailed to the email address used to register your account. Please go to the applicant/grantee login page and select "Forgot Password." You can also access the link here.

28. I am having trouble logging into my account within First Nations' application portal. Who do I contact?

Please call our office at (303) 774-7836 and ask to speak with a member of our Grantmaking team. You can send an email to grantmaking@firstnations.org.

29. **Why can't I upload my files?**

    First, check what types of files you are trying to upload. Most documents should be uploaded in PDF format. If you do not have a PDF writer, many free options are available. Suggestions of PDF writers include Cute PDF Writer and BullZip. You may also conduct a web search to find a program that fits your needs.

    If your file still will not upload, it may be too large for our system. Try saving the document as an Optimized PDF.

30. **Is it okay to wait until the last day to submit my organization's online application?**

    Please allow yourself enough time to submit a complete application before the deadline using the online system. The system shuts down automatically at 5 p.m. Mountain Time on the date listed within the related RFP.

    Unfortunately, First Nations cannot make any emergency exceptions to use of the online system. Partial applications, incomplete applications due to user error, or faxed/emailed/mailed applications without prior approval will not be reviewed.

Funding Facts

31. **How frequently can I apply for funding from First Nations?**

    First Nations offers a diversity of funding opportunities that may be a fit for your organization. Eligible organizations are allowed to apply to multiple opportunities, provided you meet all requirements. Organizations awarded more than $50,000 in funding from First Nations within one year may be required to submit audited financials. There is no limit to the number of grants an organization can receive at one time.

32. **I am a previous grantee. Can you just renew my funding?**

    First Nations does not automatically fund or renew grants. All applicants must participate in Phase One of the application process and, if invited, complete Phase Two in order to receive funding. Previous funding is not a guarantee of future funding.

    Furthermore, First Nations cannot guarantee that current grant opportunities will be offered or funded in subsequent years. Please refer to First Nations' Grantmaking Page for updated information.

33. **Does First Nations require reporting as part of a grant award?**

Yes, all funding opportunities will require applicants to conduct evaluation and submit reports. Evaluation and reporting guidelines vary according to each funding opportunity. Please refer to the specific Request for Proposal for current information.

34. **What happens if I have not heard back about my grant submission? When should I contact First Nations about my submission?**

First Nations notifies the project contact listed on the application via email approximately 4-6 weeks after the application deadline. Please refer to your RFP for approximate notification dates. Emails come from mail@grantapplication.com. You should also check your junk email if you have not received notification. Please contact grantmaking@firstnations.org if you are unable to find your notification.

35. **Why was my application declined?**

First Nations considers a number of factors when awarding applicants with grant funding. Grant selection criteria include, but are not limited to:

- Solid matches between project purpose and funder priorities
- Innovative and comprehensive activities
- Clear focus on building healthier Native communities
- Demonstrated ability and/or experience necessary for a successful project
- Clear plan of action, including specific goals and objectives
- Feasible, cost-effective, and sustainable budget
- Partnerships that engage broad community participation and support
- Potential for application and replication in other Native communities

The organization typically receives far more applications than each grant program is able to support. A well-written application will improve your chances of being funded, but may not guarantee an award. Please check out our **Grantseeker Resources** to access free resources regarding how to create successful applications, including an extended list of Common Reasons for Rejections.

36. **If I did not receive a grant, can I apply again?**

An applicant who did not receive a grant is eligible to apply for future funding.

However, funding guidelines and priorities may change from year to year. First Nations encourages you to read updated guidelines and funding priorities to ensure your organization's alignment.

37. How will the grant payments be disbursed?

The grant payment schedules are based on submission and approval of requirements according to the specific grants.

38. What types of costs are non-allowable?

Capital improvement, real estate purchases, and endowment funds. Other non-allowable costs are based upon the individual grant opportunities. Please refer to the RFP specific to your chosen opportunity.

39. How can I get feedback on a proposal submitted that was not funded?

Submit an e-mail request with your organization name and RFP title to either grantmaking@firstnations.org or the program officer overseeing the grant opportunity (listed within your specific RFP).

If this page did not answer your question, please contact our Grantmaking team at grantmaking@firstnations.org for further clarification. You can also refer to information provided within specific RFPs.