

Best Practices for Planning a Competitive Project

The Office of Grants and Local Services (OGALS) competitive grant programs have specific goals and priorities. Application Guides are crafted for applicants to reach these goals and priorities. Each Application Guide includes Project Selection Criteria and Technical Assistance sections to help guide applicants through project planning.

Since 1964, OGALS has been working with applicants on competitive grant programs. From these experiences, here are some essential points to consider:

- 1) **The Application Guide simplifies grant writing.** To ensure a fair process, the Project Selection Criteria responses require chart formats. The chart formats lead applicants to list brief facts (actual project deliverables) instead of narratives.
- 2) **Project planning is the key.** Competitive applicants use the guidelines to plan a competitive project. They review the Application Guide as early as possible, ask questions, attend Application Workshops, and are open to new ideas.
 - a. Some applicants decide to create a new project concept to fit the grant program, using the Project Selection Criteria while planning.
 - b. If they have a predetermined project, they still consider new concept and design improvements to score more Project Selection Criteria points.
 - c. On the other hand, some applicants with predetermined projects do not make any adjustments. A predetermined project with no adjustments based on the Project Selection Criteria may miss some program goals and priorities, and is usually less competitive.
- 3) **Use the Project Selection Criteria as a concept-level guide.** Start as early as possible following the Project Selection Criteria to plan a competitive project. This may mean making minor or even major changes to a predetermined project. After understanding the grant program, some applicants realize they need to pursue a different community, project site, and scope to be as competitive as possible.

Key Steps to Help Applicants Plan a Competitive Project

1. **Be open to using the Application Guide to plan a competitive project.** Technical assistance is built into the Application Guide. The application requirements lead applicants to plan successful projects. Additionally, consider the below:
 - a. Become familiar with the Application Guide months ahead of, instead of a few weeks before, the application deadline.
 - b. Ask the Competitive Team questions early and attend Application Workshops.
 - c. Use the Competitive Chart found on the program website as a tool to plan the competitive project.
2. **Site Assessment:** Select a project site that meets the goals of the competitive grant program. The [Community Factfinder Tool](#) will be used for additional competitive project considerations. For more information, see the Community Factfinder Handbook on the program website for tips and guidance.
3. **Design Input:** After selecting a project site, have design meetings to get input for Project Selection Criterion 4. Use the rest of the Project Selection Criteria to shape the project concept.

Recognizing that California is an enormous and diverse state, the State is not prioritizing one type of recreation facility over another. Building a successful, sustainable park is like a work of art where the park becomes an expression and source of pride for the residents. Nearby residents have expertise about what will work in their community. The Project Selection Criteria encourage projects that reflect each community's unique needs and creativity.

4. **Project Timeline:** Getting projects ready for construction often requires layers of local reviews, permits, and other steps. The Project Timeline in the Application Guide encourages applicants to start the pre-construction plan before grant awards.
5. **Application Checklist:** Use the Application Checklist in the Guide to organize the application. Except for the Project Selection Criteria responses, draft documents may be sent to the Competitive Team for review before the application deadline.

The Competitive Team looks forward to providing technical assistance. Please see the program website for contacts and technical assistance updates.

We look forward to our continued partnership to improve the quality of life for communities throughout California.