

NONPROFIT MASTERMIND & GRANT WRITING

Free Deliverable Guide - Grants.gov Navigation Cheatsheet

FREE ACTIONABLE RESOURCE

Grants.gov Cheatsheet

A Quick Reference Guide to SAM.gov, UEI, NOFO Parsing, Workspace Submissions, and Error Prevention

1. The 4 Mandatory Registration Steps

Before submitting any application on Grants.gov, complete these prerequisite registrations:

Step	Platform / Requirement	Processing Time & Critical Action
Step 1	Obtain UEI (Unique Entity ID)	Assigned automatically via SAM.gov. Replaced DUNS numbers. Required for all federal grant applicants.
Step 2	SAM.gov Active Registration	Takes 7 to 14 business days. Requires annual renewal! Ensure entity status reads "Active" prior to applying.

Step	Platform / Requirement	Processing Time & Critical Action
Step 3	Grants.gov Account Creation	Create individual user account and link your organization's UEI to assign Workspace roles.
Step 4	E-Biz POC Authorization	Your organization's Electronic Business Point of Contact must approve your Authorized Organization Representative (AOR) role.

2. Understanding UEI & SAM.gov Rules

- **Unique Entity Identifier (UEI):** A 12-character alphanumeric code used across SAM.gov and federal systems.
- **Annual SAM Renewal:** SAM.gov registrations expire after 365 days. If expired on the day of submission, Grants.gov will reject your application instantly.
- **CAGE Code:** Foreign and domestic entities receive a Commercial and Government Entity code upon SAM.gov validation.

Proactive Check: Log into SAM.gov at least 30 days before any federal deadline to confirm active status and renew if needed.

3. Rapid NOFO (Notice of Funding Opportunity) Parsing

Federal NOFOs are often 60 to 100 pages long. Use this rapid search sequence to save time:

- **Section III (Eligibility Information):** Read first! Confirm if 501(c)(3) nonprofits are eligible and check match requirements.
- **Section I (Program Description):** Understand the funding agency's mandatory objectives and target populations.
- **Section IV (Application & Submission):** Note strict page limits, font requirements, margin rules, and mandatory attachments.
- **Section V (Application Review Criteria):** Review the scoring point breakdown to allocate word count to high-point sections.

4. Grants.gov Workspace & Submission Tips

Workspace allows multiple team members to complete individual form components simultaneously:

- **Form Locking:** When editing a form in Workspace, lock it to prevent overwrite conflicts by co-workers. Unlock when finished.
- **Mandatory vs Optional Forms:** Ensure all forms marked with a red star or "Mandatory" status are completed and validated.
- **Submit Early Buffer:** Submit at least 24 to 48 hours before the deadline. Technical traffic spikes cause portal slowdowns.

5. Common Submission Errors & Timezone Reminders

Common Portal Error	Cause of Error	How to Prevent / Fix
Invalid File Name Error	Using special characters (#, \$, %, &, /) or spaces in attachment filenames.	Use alphanumeric characters and underscores only (e.g., Project_Narrative_2026.pdf).
File Format Rejection	Submitting Word (.docx) documents when PDF is mandated.	Convert all attachments to flattened PDF format before uploading.
Timezone Trap Disqualification	Submitting at 11:59 PM local time when deadline is 11:59 PM Eastern Time (EST/EDT).	Always calculate and convert deadlines to Eastern Time (e.g., 11:59 PM Eastern is 9:59 PM Mountain Time).
AOR Role Disqualification	Submitting from an account without approved AOR status.	Verify E-Biz POC has granted AOR permissions under manage roles in Grants.gov.

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