

Women for Women Program/Project Application Questions

Guidance for Program Applicants

The *Women for Women* (WFW) Grant Program wants to be an “investor” in your project rather than a “donor.” We want to know:

- what your project will achieve,
- the likelihood of success, and
- why your project is the best use of our funds.

You should provide a clear description of how an investment in your project will result in demonstrable achievements producing real social change. Each question is followed by some guidance for completing the question.

Organizational Profile

1. What is your **mission and vision**?

Guidance:

We see mission as what you do and vision as the end state you wish to achieve. The best mission and vision statements are short and clear. We are especially interested in how your mission gives you concentration and focus—discouraging you from simply taking on more projects because money is available. Finally, if you have points of approach (values, principles, whatever you might call them) that guide where you go or how you work, name them and be specific about how they shape your actions.

2. For the specific program area for which you seek our support **what strengths and expertise** do you have?

Guidance:

We have found that a group’s ability to understand what it does especially well is a good predictor of its success over time. Core know-how is often a matter of three elements that make you effective: 1) knowledge—your information and insight capital; 2) skills—what you know how to do based on what you know; and 3) persuasiveness—how to communicate what you know and do to others who need to change to reach success.

Be as specific as you can. General statements such as “We are really good at working with people” add little value to our understanding of how and why you think you are successful.

3. What have you **achieved in the past three years** for persons in your programs that are most like the project for which you seek our support?

Guidance:

Please know we are much more impressed with how many people have tangibly improved their lives than how much money you have attracted or what awards you may have received—unless the recognition is clearly based on participant outcomes. Also, we do not equate growth with achievement. Just focus on the tangible human gains you have created for those you serve.

4. What **predicts your sustainability** as an organization? Please speak to financial and program factors.

Guidance:

We want to make sure that an investment in an organization or its programs will not be lost due to the organization either failing or having to spend so much time staying afloat that it cannot focus sufficiently on programs. As you think about what evidence to give us, consider:

Finances—trends, events, other factors that influence your financial viability, including enough cash to operate. Contribution base and cost control are both important here.

Leadership—including past or anticipated losses of key people at board and staff levels and any current gaps in capacity.

Program achievement—the extent to which your achievements for participants will make you competitive for investment in an increasingly outcome-driven world.

Comparative positioning—recognition of you and your “brand” within the area where you seek funds and have known impacts. Growing recognition is often a key factor.

Participants

5. What **challenge** are you addressing and about approximately **how many individuals**, households or organizations are impacted within your geographic area?

Guidance:

Just state the problem in clear terms as it is experienced by people who have it. You need not justify its importance or speak to national impacts. We know and agree with that or we would not invest in this area! Focus on the set of people who have this problem (need, challenge, whatever you term the issue). We want to understand the problem in motion with people—not a

static condition of need. When it comes to a number, we don't want you to have to conduct original research. Just rely on existing data (much of it remarkably available on the internet) or even on estimates by those most in a position to know.

6. Who are **your participants and how many will you serve?**

Guidance:

Please know that we view it as a sign of strength that a program has defined the people who are most likely to benefit from a particular approach. Think of how Southwest Airlines wanted only those passengers who valued reliability and low cost over other amenities. In the nonprofit world, it is rare that one program is always the best. Some kids, for example, thrive on a permissive and open learning environment while others need tight structure. We want to know if you have thought through the best fit with your treatment, approach, intervention or program with specific people it will most help to achieve.

This section also gives you a place to tell us about relative degree of challenge and to relate cost to degree of barriers. We know, for example, that the difficulty and expense to get someone a job who is drug-addicted, has poor English or lacks a high school degree is very different than for people who have none of these core issues. We also encourage you to speak to the assets and strengths of your participants on which you can build.

Your Project

7. Please provide us with a **brief project/program summary.**

Guidance:

Before we get into details with the following questions, we'd like to get a clear grasp of just what your program is for which you seek support. Think of this as a summary description. No major details are needed.

8. What **approach** are you using to achieve stated results?

Guidance:

Most programs are not a random set of activities. They are a coherent strategy to achieve a result. Please do not offer us a detailed work plan. Rather, tell us a few core elements of your particular way of solving a problem and why you think it is the best way to engage participants and help them get to the success you have stated. If you could place this in the context of other approaches you might have used but didn't, that would add to our understanding.

9. Is your approach backed by **evidence of success?** If so, what is it?

Guidance:

In most cases, your approach will have been used before. In some cases it may even rise to the label of “research-based” or “evidence-based.” On that front, please know that the only kind of research and evidence that really impresses us is information that shows that the approach achieves results. If your approach has any kind of evidence in past success, tell us what it is.

10. How does your project meet one or more of the *Women for Women* grant objectives?

Guidance:

Read the grant guidelines and highlight the key objectives that are addressed by your project.

Key People and Groups

11. Please specify the names and qualifications of the key people who will be responsible for achieving the anticipated results. What special skills and/or experience does each of them bring to the project?

Guidance:

This is a critical element in predicting project success. People are more powerful than great plans, a big committee or even a lot of money in achieving results. While you may first consider resume details - e.g., degrees and years of experience—do recognize that in many areas, there is no strong correlation between these factors and ability create research that is effectively used by others. Help us understand why these are the right people to achieve the results you propose.

12. Please list any partners, intermediaries or advisors important to your success and describe the role they will play and the evidence you have of their commitment. Please tell us if you have successfully collaborated with any of the listed people or groups in the past or if you are presently working with them on other projects.

Guidance:

An intermediary is a group or person (often a gatekeeper) whose behavior you do not control and who must do something (or allow you to do something) in order for you to succeed. Examples include but are not limited to: school districts, regulatory bodies, health care agencies, etc.

A partner is a group whose skills or talents augment or counterbalance your own as a part of program delivery.

An advisory board is a formal entity with expertise in your focal area of research or systems reform that provides guidance to help ensure the success of the project.

Results and Verification

13. **What results are you committed to achieving** and for how many persons?

Guidance:

The fact that people have completed a program, read your materials or sat through counseling or a workshop is not a result. The result is what they get from what you offer. This distinction is critical. Please—focus on changes in behaviors and conditions for people—not on their activities in your programs or their level of satisfaction. Please put the number who achieve in the context of the number you serve.

In most cases, you succeed because people change their behavior—whether to quit smoking, exercise, wear a seat belt or something else. We urge you to focus on behaviors rather than attitudes because they are critical to success and much more readily verified. We do not know the value of increased self-esteem or creating more positive attitudes toward something until you tell us as your result what people can achieve with higher self-esteem or more positive attitudes than they could achieve without them.

In a few situations, you are focusing on a condition more than a behavior. For example, the quality of a body of water or of a community's level of social capital. In either case, the more specific you are the better.

We urge you to suggest a clear result as you develop your program but then revisit it when you have covered all elements in our format and thought it through as carefully as possible. The best targets are shaped by a complete understanding of your program.

14. What **broader gains and benefits** will be achieved if you are successful that we should include in our assessment of “return on investment”?

Guidance:

You may have benefits to add such as:

- The “life cycle” cost savings from solving a problem.
- The value of model-building or testing with implications for many programs.
- A test of ways to reduce costs, again with long term financial implications.

Please be specific. We are less interested in broad contributions to values than in specific benefits for people and the organizations that support them.

15. What do you most want to **learn** from this project?

Guidance:

High performing organizations make learning intentional in everything they do. Many do this by focusing on their assumptions. In most projects, you are making one or more key assumptions in the general form of if-then. If we offer this kind of program, then that kind of person will attend. It is your expectation that an activity prompts a certain consequence but it may well be far from a certainty. In that case your learning might be to test an assumption.

Learnings are important as one guide to designing a project. If, for example, you want to grow, you might well build in a test of whatever achievement you need to make growth possible—whether it's hiring great people for the money you can pay them, attracting new kinds of participants or something else.

Tracking to Success: Critical steps and Milestones, Data to Keep Track and Correct Course

16. How will you know when your results have been achieved? What information or evidence will you use to **verify success**?

Guidance:

Foundations often ask you for an evaluation plan. We are much more concerned with you looking at assessment as an integral part of what you do to track to and verify success. Think of it this way: forget us—how will you know when to celebrate success?

Verification (yes or no—did you achieve stated results?) is easier and less costly than evaluation (to answer the questions about what happened) but it is not easy to approach.

You may well be able to use existing data bases or rely on existing measuring instruments. Or you may be able to use observations and reports by others, or in some cases self-reported behaviors.

17. Name the critical steps you will take, the milestone (participant achievements) you anticipate from each step, and a timeline.

Guidance: We do not need a list of every activity you will undertake, but are looking for 3-5 critical steps. Our intent is to get a sense of your work and the specific participant milestones and timing to get to your results. Be sure to clearly define success for those you serve at each stage of your program

(milestone). The assumption is that unless participants or projects reach each milestone, the chances of them achieving the result diminishes.

Example:

1) Provide marketing and outreach and enroll 450 participants in the program.

Milestone: 380 graduate from the workshop component within 10 weeks (Month 1-4)

2) Provide three follow-up one-on-one counseling sessions for program graduates over a 90 day period.

Milestone: 250 of the 380 will do two or more of the following within 90 days of program completion; a) open a new checking and/or savings accounts, b) make at least one change to increase their credit score, c) use a budget to manage money for at least 2 consecutive months (Month 4-7)

3) Provide ongoing counseling and support in person and by phone to program graduates.

Milestone: 175 will achieve most or all of their financial goals outlined in their original plan (Month 7-12)

18. What are some potential factors (both external and internal) that might **accelerate or inhibit** your project?

For Two-Year Grant Requests

19. Provide a breakdown the total amount requested on your cover sheet into your requested amount for Year One and your requested amount for Year Two.

20. Explain why two-year funding is necessary and important to the success of this project.

21. Submit a separate budget for Year One and Year Two.