

**FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

**DIVISION OF BLIND SERVICES**

**Grant Applications Guide**

**Projects Benefiting Blind and Visually-Impaired Floridians**

The Division of Blind Services (DBS) Grants Applications Guide is organized into three sections.

**Section I: Background and Summary**

This section provides an overview of the purpose of the Grants Application component of the Gifts and Donations Program, the target population(s), eligible applicants, application due dates, funding amounts, required supplemental materials and contact information.

**Section II: Grant Request Form Instructions and Application**

This section includes instructions on completing the grant request application form, which is comprised of background information, eligibility requirement and supplemental materials checklists, narrative components and scoring criteria.

**Section III: Project Requirements**

This section includes information on funding methods such as reimbursement and advance payment, distribution of funds, award conditions and fiscal requirements (including allowable and unallowable expenses). Also included are project accountability, reporting requirements, review methods, conditions of acceptance and technical/formatting submission requirements.

Carefully read the instructions. Submitted applications must be complete and contain all information necessary for evaluation by DBS. Applications failing to meet specified requirements or the application deadline will not be considered for grant awards. Additional information may be requested from the applicant in order to adequately evaluate the grant request.

**Section I: Background and Summary**

***About The Division of Blind Services Gifts and Donations Fund***

As an integral part of accomplishing its mission, the purpose of the Division of Blind Services’ (DBS) Gifts and Donations fund is to make possible and support projects and programs that benefit Floridians who are blind or visually impaired, as well as to fund projects related to system changes, research and development.

The Florida Legislature (Section 413.011(3)(v), F.S.), authorizes that DBS will:

“Receive moneys or properties by gift or bequest from any person, firm, corporation, or organization for any of the purposes herein set out, but without authority to bind the state to any expenditure or policy except such as may be specifically authorized by law. All such moneys or properties so received by gift or bequest as herein authorized may be disbursed and expended by the Division upon its own warrant for any of the purposes herein set forth, and such moneys or properties shall not constitute or be considered a part of any legislative appropriation made by the state for the purpose of carrying out the provisions of this law.”

***Mission***

To ensure blind and visually impaired Floridians have the tools, support and opportunity to achieve success.

***Grant Program Priorities and Target Populations***

The Division of Blind Services’ Gifts and Donations Grant Application program provides grant funds to Florida not-for-profit agencies for a wide variety of projects benefiting Floridians who are blind or visually impaired. Grant funding priorities may be established based on the outcomes of formal and informal needs assessments, strategic priorities and consumer needs.

***Who is Eligible to apply for a grant?***

Organizations currently qualified as tax exempt under Internal Revenue Code Section 501(c)(3) and who demonstrate a primary interest to serve Floridians who are blind or visually impaired are eligible to apply.

***How Much Money is Awarded Each Year?***

The Division may award an aggregate amount of up to $250,000. Actual awards are contingent upon fund availability. The amount of the awarded grant is relative to the scale, scope and complexity of the proposed project. Some organizations may receive a partial award. Individual organizational grant approvals will not typically exceed $50,000.

***What is NOT eligible for funding?***

The Gifts and Donations Review Committee will not consider for funding:

1. Any individual grant for a for-profit small business start-up or continuation.
2. Any grant to a specific individual.
3. Proposals from individuals for tuition and related costs.
4. Proposals that do not include other funders or plans to gain other funders for support.
5. Proposals which include requests for fellowships or scholarships.
6. Proposals that include a request for the purchase of real estate.
7. Proposals that do not address Florida individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

***Are Matching Funds Required?***

Matching funds are not required, but proposals must include details regarding the involvement of subgranters, partners, funders, donors, and/or specific plans to gain such support.

***How long is the Grant Period?***

Grants are awarded for one year. Grant recipients may apply in future years for funding but are not given priority or guaranteed additional funding.

***When are grants available and when are proposals due?***

Requests for submitting grant applications, along with grant application deadlines may be advertised:

* On the Division’s website at http://www.dbs.myflorida.com
* In the Division’s newsletter
* In publications from organizations of and for the blind
* In newspaper advertisements, as applicable

Proposals are due by 5:00 p.m., ET, on the day specified on the Division website.

**Who will review my proposal?**

A Gifts and Donations review committee (Committee) will review and make recommendations to the Director of Blind Services for final review and/or approval. The Committee will consist of a minimum of three representatives from the Division’s Senior Leadership Team, along with one representative each from the Direct Service Organization (DSO; Blind Services Foundation of Florida) and Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind).

***What are the requirements regarding proposal length?***

There are no specific requirements for proposal length; however, please keep in mind that elaborate applications are unnecessary. Supporting documents or materials that demonstrate the ability to administer the grant shall be included as an appendix to the proposal.

***How Does an Agency Apply?***

1. Please read this entire handbook before preparing the proposal or calling DBS with questions.
2. Prepare your proposal by completing the “DBS Grant Request Application Form” included in this guide.
3. Gather all the required Supplemental Materials.
4. Review the proposal; double check your budget items.
5. Submit your complete proposal package to The Division of Blind Services (see “Where do I Send my Proposal” below).

***Supplemental Materials Required***

Required Supplemental Materials must be submitted with the application prior to the issuance of a project award:

1. Copy of IRS 501(c)(3) Designation
2. Copy of most recent Financial Audit or Financial Statements
3. Copy of most recent Annual Report. If the Agency does not produce an official Agency Report, then a one-page summary of services provided in the previous year will suffice.
4. Copy of the most recent Internal Revenue Service 990 filing
5. Copy of state of Florida Charitable Solicitation Registration
6. Contact list of current Board of Directors Members, with postal and email addresses, and phone numbers
7. Two Letters of Support about the project under consideration
8. Two Competitive Cost Quotes for Budget items over $500

***When can we expect to hear a response to our grant proposal?***

* When a proposal is received it is reviewed for eligibility and then placed on the agenda for the next Grant Committee Meeting. A projects Program Timeline is provided with each solicitation of grants.
* The Grant Committee will submit recommendations for approval to the Director.
* You will receive an acknowledgement of receipt and a date of when you can expect a decision.
* A congratulatory letter notifying the grantee will be issued by the Director within thirty (30) business days of the Committee’s recommendation. The letter will state that the grant has been approved and the amount that has been approved (approvals may be for full or partial amounts of the request). The letter will specify a timeline for the development of a contractual agreement.
* A letter will also be sent to those whose grant requests have not been funded.

***Where Do I Send My Proposal and Who Do I Contact if I Have Questions?***

Please send your proposal to The Division of Blind Services so it may be reviewed for eligibility:

Division of Blind Services

Florida Department of Education

Attention: Elesha Brown,

Senior Management Analyst Supervisor

325 W. Gaines Street, Suite 1114

Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0400

Elesha.Brown@dbs.fldoe.org

850-245-9835

***Section II: Grant Request Application and Instructions***

**GIFTS AND DONATIONS PROGRAM**

**DIVISION OF BLIND SERVICES**

Grant Request Application

Instructions

Grant applicants must complete all sections below by providing comprehensive answers.

All responses should be submitted by entering information electronically on this “Grant Request Application” form. Please use the “Save As” feature in MS Word to rename this original file.

1. **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Organization Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Mailing Address Physical Location where Services Provided**

Street:

City:

State:

Zip Code:

Executive Director’s Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Phone Number(s): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Project Contact Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Phone Number(s): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Email Address:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Organization Website: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Total Amount of Grant Requested: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

PLACE A CHECK BY ALL OF THE FOLLOWING THAT APPLY:

**Eligibility Requirements**:

□ Not-for-Profit organization 501 (c)(3)

□ Proposed project benefits individuals who reside in Florida and are blind or visually impaired

**Required Supplemental Materials:**

□ Copy of IRS 501(c)(3) Designation

□ Copy of most recent Financial Audit or Financial Statements

□ Copy of most recent Annual Report (If no official Agency Report, then a one-page summary of services provided in the previous year)

□ Copy of the most recent Internal Revenue Service 990 filing

□ Copy of state of Florida Charitable Solicitation Registration

□ Contact list of current Board of Directors Members (Addresses & Phone Numbers)

□ Two Letters of Support about the project under consideration

□ Two Competitive Cost Quotes for Budget items over $500

**Describe how your organization complies with the American Disabilities Act (ADA).** (Include physical access to your organization’s facility, program accessibility, organizational staffing (board members, etc. with disabilities) and how you advertise available services and use of alternate formats of communication).

http://www.ada.gov/ Information and technical assistance on the Americans with Disabilities Act

**Enter your text here:**

**II. DIVISION OF BLIND SERVICES CHECKLIST FOR ELIGIBILITY FOR GRANTS**

Please use the following checklist to select all statements that apply to or describe the type of project or service for which you are applying for a grant.

At least one statement must be checked off to be eligible for consideration for funding under the Gifts and Donations program.

* This request is for services to help correct blindness or visual impairment.
* This request proposes special services to provide non-visual access to information for individuals who are blind or visually impaired.
* This request relates to the provision of eyeglasses and other visual aids.
* This request relates to the provision of services and equipment to assist an individual who is blind or visually impaired to become more mobile and more self-sufficient.
* This request relates to the testing of technology that could be used by individuals who are blind or visually impaired.
* This request relates to special services and benefits for individuals who are blind or visually impaired to develop their social life through community activities and recreational facilities.
* This request relates to services that promise to contribute substantially to the rehabilitation of a group of individuals who are blind or visually impaired but are not related directly to the plan for any one individual.
* This request establishes, develops or improves a public or other nonprofit community rehabilitation program that is used to provide vocational or other rehabilitation services to individuals who are blind or visually impaired that promotes full community integration.
* This proposal is likely to increase public awareness of the abilities and competence of individuals who are blind or visually impaired.
* This request is related to the establishment of a new program serving individuals who are blind or visually impaired.
* This request is related to an **innovation/expansion** of services that will benefit individuals who are blind or visually impaired.
* This request is related to providing training for staff who work directly with consumers who are blind or visually impaired.
* This request is related to performing research which will benefit individuals who are blind and visually impaired.
* This request is related to the development of bold innovative technology to assist individuals who are blind and visually impaired.
* This proposal is related to the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology to expand employment options, mobility and/or accessibility for individuals who are blind and visually impaired.
* This proposal is related to innovative AI assistance with everyday tasks such as cooking, cleaning and reading labels to enhance independence for individuals who are blind and visually impaired.

**III. NARRATIVE COMPONENTS AND SCORING CRITERIA**

**Criteria are based on a 100 point scale, with a minimum score of 70 points required for an application to be considered eligible for funding.**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1. **Support for Strategic Plan:** Describe how the proposed project will address one or more of the Division of Blind Services’ Strategic Goals/Objectives:   Goal 1: Create an environment that provides job opportunities for visually-impaired and blind Floridians.  Goal 2: Create a service delivery system that provides comprehensive services to visually-impaired and blind Floridians.  Goal 3: Create an environment that fosters an exemplary division workforce.  Goal 4: Create a well-managed and accountable organization that ensures high quality.  URL: https://dbs.fldoe.org/Leadership/Strategic-Plan/index.html  ***Criteria***   * *The applicant has included effective methods for addressing one or more of the Goals and/or Objectives from the Division of Blind Services’ Strategic Plan.* | **FIXED REQUIREMENT** |
| **Enter your text here:** | |
| 1. **Project Summary:** Provide a brief summary of the proposed project including:  * General purpose * Specific goals * Brief program design * Significance (how this project contributes to improving services to Florida’s blind or visually-impaired population).   ***Criteria***   * *The proposed project is described in a brief summary, including general purpose, specific goals, brief program design and significance (contribution and rationale).* * *It is clear that the proposed project aligns with the intended Funding Purpose/Priorities.* | **FIXED REQUIREMENT** |
| **Enter your text here:** | |
| 1. **Project Need:** Describe the need for the proposed project:  * Provide supporting data as evidence. * Expected outcomes should directly address identified need. * Specify the blind or visually-impaired population(s) you propose to serve (include geographic area or county served). * Indicate any past successes of positive performance outcomes for similar populations or similar programs conducted by the applicant.   ***Criteria***   * *The magnitude or severity of the problem is evident, compelling, and clearly linked to the outcome(s) of the proposed project.* * *The magnitude of the need for the services to be provided or the activities to be carried out is apparent.* * *The proposed project focuses on service or otherwise addresses the identified needs of the population(s) to be served.* * *It is evident that the proposed project is focused on those with greatest needs.* * *The need for the proposed project is strongly justified through supportive data. Note: Innovative projects may substitute data with a business case, research or other material that supports the proposal.* * *The service area(s) and justification for choosing it/them are identified.* * *Other similar programs conducted by the applicant are identified.* * *Evidence is provided that the proposed project addresses the unmet regional needs of varying communities (underrepresented populations).* | **Available Points**  **20** |
| **Enter your text here:** | |
| 1. **Project Design and Implementation:** Describe the measurable objectives, activities and timeline for the proposed project:  * Proposals must present a detailed “Project Plan and Description” for how the project or program will benefit individuals who are blind or visually impaired. * Ensure that the timeline clearly shows the beginning and ending dates for activities. * Provide the number of blind or visually-impaired Floridians that are expected to participate in an activity or benefit from this project. * Explain how the project employs innovative approaches. * Based on stated goals, identify measurable objectives to be met by project methods/activities.   + Match outcomes with corresponding activities and objectives. List the activities to be used to reach the proposed project objectives.   + If applicable, list any other institutions cooperating in the project and describe the plans for collaboration.   ***Criteria***   * *The goals, objectives and outcomes are clearly specified and measurable.* * *The design of the proposed project aligns with, and will successfully address, the needs of the target population or other identified needs.* * *The objectives are measurable, qualitative, challenging, yet achievable and address all expected outcomes of the proposed project.* * *It is evident that activities/methods are comprehensive, likely to be effective and result in achievement of the objectives.* * *The proposed project employs innovative approaches.* * *The timelines are specific, realistic and consistent with measurable objectives and outcomes.* * *Adequate detail is provided to show that resources involved in project development and implementation are contributed by institutions and/or the local community.* | **Available Points**  **20** |
| **Enter your text here:** | |
| 1. **Evaluation:** Describe the instruments and method(s) for evaluating the proposed project**:**  * Explain how the project will collect, maintain, retrieve and analyze project data to measure accomplishments and evaluate the effectiveness or achievement of program goals and objectives. Please attach copies of proposed evaluation instruments.   ***Criteria***   * *The methods are thorough, feasible and appropriate to the goals, objectives and outcomes of the proposed project.* * *The evaluation process is comprehensive, likely to result in a successful project and includes an effective approach for using evaluation results to guide necessary adjustments to the proposed project.* * *The evaluation instruments are designed to effectively measure program progress and success.* | **Available Points**  **20** |
| **Enter your text here:** | |
| 1. **Dissemination Plan:**  Describe the methods/strategies that will be used to disseminate and share information about the proposed project to appropriate populations.   ***Criteria***   * *The applicant’s dissemination plan will use effective and realistic means to reach the appropriate audiences, including potential customer population(s), the local community and other organized entities, if/when indicated.* * *The dissemination plan reflects a thorough grasp of the proposed project and the positive impact on potential project beneficiaries.* | **Available Points**  **20** |
| **Enter your text here:** | |
| 1. **Budget:** Present a budget that reflects objectives and proposed costs of the project:  * Proposals must present a line-item budget to implement the program goals under consideration. * Administration cost is limited to 10% of the total program costs demonstrated on the line-item budget. * Proposals with multiple sources of financial support are encouraged. * Proposals must present a thoughtful “Plan for Future Funding” that addresses the sustainability of the proposed program and project objectives when the grant year is complete.   Competitive cost quotes are required for:   * Purchases under $2,499 require one quote. * Purchases ranging from $2,500 - $14,999 require two quotes. * Purchases ranging from $15,000 - $24,999 require three written quotes.   **Exception:** If the item or service is of such a specialized or unique nature for serving the blind or visually impaired community, and is manufactured or provided by a sole source, the bid quote requirements will be waived. However, there must still be a quote from the vendor providing the services or equipment. **Please include the statement on the quote that this is the sole source for these services/equipment.**  ***Criteria***   * *Procurement requirements shall be consistent with Chapter 287.057, Florida Statutes* * *A line-item budget to implement the program goals is presented.* * *Administration costs are limited to 10% of the total program costs.* * *Multiple sources of funding for the project are included.* * *The budget is thorough, specific and supports the proposed project.* * *The proposed project budget presents expenses that are allowable, realistic, accurate and clearly relate to and reflect project activities, objectives, and outcomes.* * *The costs are reasonable in relation to the objectives, design and potential significance of the proposed project.* * *The costs are reasonable in relation to the number of persons to be served and to the anticipated results and benefits.* * *The required personnel, professional and technical services and/or travel for the proposed project are clearly and adequately explained.* * *The justifications for expenditures are reasonable and clearly explained.* * *The sustainability of the proposed program is addressed.* | **Available Points**  **20** |
| **Enter your text here:** | |
| **Total Available Points** | **100** |

**Signature Executive Director Date*Section III Project Requirements***

**Funding Method(s)**

**Reimbursement with Performance**

Payment will be processed monthly, upon submission of an invoice with receipts for documented allowable disbursements, plus documentation of completion of specified performance objectives.

**Distribution of funds:**

1. Grant awards may be paid in full or partial amounts, as decided by the Division at its sole discretion.
2. The Grant Award Contract must indicate the method and amount(s) of disbursements.
   1. Grants in excess of $10,000 must be in at least two payments, the second payment being dependent upon completion of all project deliverables as evidenced by billing and the submission and approval of the Project’s Initial and/or Interim Progress Reports.
   2. Any funds needed for start-up of a project shall be made as a reimbursement.

**Conditions of Award**:

1. In the event it is determined by the Division that the Provider cannot comply with the terms

and conditions of the Project Award, the Provider shall offer to return all unused Funds disbursed from the award to the Division, along with any property purchased with the Funds.

1. The Division may, within its reasonable discretion,choose to accept or reject such offer, adjust the monetary value of the award, terminate further payment on the award or demand immediate refund of any or all monies already delivered under the Contract.
2. Upon acceptance of such offer, the Provider shall immediately deliver such funds and personal property to the Division as the Division requires.

**Fiscal Requirements**

Supporting documentation for expenditures is required. Examples of such documentation include but are not limited to: payroll records, contracts, invoices with check numbers verifying payment, and/or bank statements; all or any of which must be available upon request.

**Allowable Expenses**: Project funds must be used for activities that directly support the accomplishment of the project purpose, priorities and expected outcomes. Procurement requirements shall be consistent with Chapter 287.057, Florida Statutes. All invoices shall be in accordance with Section 215.422, F.S., and rules set forth in Rule 3A-24, F.A.C

All proposed budget expenditures should be reasonable and any purchased item over $500 must be supported by at least two (2) competitive cost quotes. If awarded the grant, the budget outline must be strictly followed unless adjustments are approved in writing by the Division of Blind Services prior to incurring the expense. Documentation such as receipts and invoices will be required of all grant expenditures at regularly scheduled progress reports.

**Unallowable Expenses and Exclusions**:

Gifts and Donations grants may not be considered for funding:

1. Any individual grant for a for-profit small business start-up or continuation.
2. Proposals from individuals for tuition and related costs.
3. Proposals that do not demonstrate other funders or plans to gain other funders for support.
4. Proposals which include requests for fellowships or scholarships.
5. Proposals that include a request for the purchase of real estate.
6. Proposals that do not address individuals in Florida who are blind or visually impaired.

**Project Performance Accountability and Reporting Requirements**

The Division will track each project’s performance, based on the information provided and the stated criteria for successful performance, and verify the receipt of required deliverables/services prior to payment, as detailed in the notification of the grant award. Managers will verify that the project’s expenditures are allowable and that performance objectives are progressing in a satisfactory manner, consistent with the Project Narrative and Performance Expectations.

1. All grant recipients shall complete at least two progress reports during the grant year by the due dates specified in the grant. Recipients may elect to receive their reporting materials either by postal mail or electronically.
2. Compliance audits may be conducted on any grant-funded project that the Director deems necessary.

**Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

Frequently Asked Questions may be posted on the Division of Blind Services’ website.

**Method of Review**

A Gifts and Donations Review Committee (Committee) consisting of a minimum of three representatives from the Division’s Senior Leadership Team, along with one representative each from the DSO and the Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind, will evaluate project proposals.  
Project proposals that meet all grant requirements are evaluated and scored according to the following process:

1. Division of Blind Services staff will review recommended proposals for compliance with the programmatic and fiscal policies of the project.
2. The Committee ranks the proposals in order from highest to lowest score.
3. The Division Director will make the final determination on all proposed awards.
4. Awards are subject to the availability of funds.
5. Proposals with a final score of less than 70 are not eligible for funding consideration.

**The Division of Blind Services reserves the right to negotiate with all responsive applicants, serially or concurrently, to determine the best-suited solution. The ranking of the proposals indicates the perceived overall benefits of the application, but the Division retains the discretion to negotiate with other qualified applicants, as deemed appropriate.**

**Conditions for Acceptance**

The requirements listed below **must** be met for applications to be considered and thus eligible for review:

* Application is received within DBS no later than the close of business on the due date.
* Application includes all required forms and documents.

**Other Requirements**

In the interest of transparency, a grant applicant should disclose any known relationship, donation of funds and/or volunteer hours with the Director of Blind Services and the staff/co-workers of the Director at their place of business and/or staff of Blind Services and/or their immediate family.

**Technical/Formatting and Other Application Submission Requirements**

Please submit your application in electronic format (flash drive or email) along with an original signed copy. Submit your full proposal (including supplemental materials) to Elesha.Brown@dbs.fldoe.org at the Division of Blind Services. You will receive a return email acknowledging our receipt of your proposal.

Electronic text documents must be in MS Word format and financial or statistical spreadsheets must be in MS Excel format. Electronic documents must not be protected, locked or require a password to be viewed by Division of Blind Services.