



Advancement Guide

Funding Your Sustainability Journey

PURPOSE:

This guide is designed to help YMCAs navigate the grant funding process, from understanding grant types and building a funding strategy to developing competitive proposals that support sustainability initiatives in their communities.

Whether your YMCA is exploring sustainability for the first time or expanding existing efforts, this guide provides practical tools to help turn ideas into funded projects.

UNDERSTANDING THE GRANT JOURNEY



Assessment

Use the *YMCA Sustainability Action Planning Toolkit* to understand where your YMCA is today and identify opportunities that matter most to your community.

Planning

Gather partners, collect information, determine feasibility, estimate costs, and create a roadmap before launching a major initiative.

Funding

Identify grants and other funding sources that match your project stage and organizational readiness.

Implementation

Carry out the project while tracking progress, finances, and outcomes.

Evaluation

Measure results, document lessons learned, and use those insights to strengthen future projects and funding opportunities.

Building a Competitive Proposal

Every strong proposal should clearly answer:

- ✓ What problem are you trying to solve?
- ✓ Why is it important now?
- ✓ Who will benefit?
- ✓ What will you accomplish?
- ✓ Why is your YMCA well positioned?
- ✓ How will you know it was successful?
- ✓ What happens after grant funding ends?

Common Proposal Sections

- Executive Summary
- Organization Background
- Statement of Need
- Project Description
- Goals & Objectives
- Activities
- Timeline
- Evaluation
- Budget
- Sustainability Plan

PLANNING GRANTS VS PROJECT GRANTS

Planning Grants

Planning grants support the work required before implementation. Used often as a strong option for YMCAs that are still defining priorities or building internal capacity.

Project Grants

Project grants support the work completed during implementation. Used often by YMCAs that have already identified priorities and are ready to deliver projects and measure results.

Supports preparation

Funds research and planning

Develops partnerships

Creates plans and designs

Answers: "What should we do?"

- Energy audit
- Community needs assessment
- Sustainability strategic plan
- Engineering study
- Feasibility study
- Community engagement sessions
- Partnership development
- Pilot testing

Supports implementation

Funds activities and construction

Delivers Services

Executes the plan

Answers: "What should we do?"

- Solar installation
- Community garden
- Water conservation upgrades
- Youth environmental education
- Green workforce training
- EV charging stations
- Recycling infrastructure
- Tree planting initiative

FOUNDATION VS GOVERNMENT

Foundations often invest in ideas, innovation, partnerships, and community impact. They may be willing to support pilot projects, planning efforts, or creative approaches that demonstrate strong community benefit.

Clear mission alignment

Community need

Strong Partnerships

Innovation

Storytelling

Long-term impact

"Why does this matter?"

Government funding is often tied to specific laws, public priorities, or programs. These opportunities usually have more detailed requirements, larger budgets, stricter reporting, and clearly defined eligibility.

Demonstrated need

Evidence-based approach

Measurable Outcomes

Compliance

Detailed Budgets

Reporting Capacity

"Can you prove this will work?"

SUSTAINABILITY TRANSLATION GUIDE

Many YMCAs are already doing sustainability work, even if they don't call it that.

Existing YMCA Program	Sustainability Connection
Youth Employment	Economic Sustainability
Camps	Environmental Stewardship
Community Gardens	Food Security
Mental Health	Healthy Communities
Workforce Programs	Green Workforce development
Disaster Response	Community Resilience
Afterschool STEM	Environmental Education

Before You Apply Checklist

- ☐ Have we clearly identified the community need?
- ☐ Are we applying for the right grant type?
- ☐ Do we have leadership support?
- ☐ Have we developed a realistic budget?
- ☐ Do we know how success will be measured?
- ☐ Can we sustain the project after the grant ends?

Proposal Writing Tips

- Tell a clear story from need to solution.
- Support your request with local data whenever possible.
- Focus on outcomes, not just activities.
- Use clear, concise language that uses the funder's terminology
- Align your proposal with the funder's priorities
- Review your proposal before submitting.
- Save successful language to adapt for future proposals.

Common Grant Terms

Applicant – The organization applying for funding.

Funder – The organization providing grant funding.

Goal – The broad change you hope to achieve.

Objective – A measurable step toward your goal.

Outcome – The change resulting from your project.

Deliverable – A product or activity completed during the project.

Evaluation – How you measure success.

Moving Forward Together

Every YMCA has the potential to contribute to a more sustainable future. Whether you're taking your first steps or expanding existing efforts, meaningful change begins with a shared vision, practical action, and the willingness to learn from one another.

The *YMCA Green Network* was created to support this journey. As a global community, we have a unique opportunity to share ideas, resources, funding strategies, and successful practices that help advance the Sustainable Planet Pillar of YMCA Vision 2030. Together, we can build stronger, more resilient communities while creating lasting impact for future generations.

Funding is more than a financial resource, it is a catalyst that helps transform ideas into action. By working together across our worldwide YMCA movement, we can turn local priorities into global progress and make the future we envision for our YMCAs and communities a reality.